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Thackeray as a critic of fiction

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CHAPTER IV

Thackeray as a Critic of Fiction

The largest and most consistent body in Thackeray's critical legacy is his criticism of fiction. At the same time it represents that part of his criticism which, in my opinion, has preserved much of its original freshness down to the present day and contains many critical judgments which have been fully confirmed by posterity. This is of course not very surprising, since criticism of fiction was undoubtedly the sphere for which Thackeray as critic was best endowed, cultivating as he did the art of fiction himself, and with remarkable success, and being excellently prepared for his critical task by his uncommonly extensive reading in this particular sphere of literature, a fact shown, *inter alia,* by the great number of fiction writers in the list presented in my first chapter. What may seem surprising, however, is the fact that by far the greatest part of his criticism of fiction is concerned with the productions of writers who represent a creative approach either greatly differing from or even opposite to his own, and that fiction of the type he himself cultivated does not stand in the foreground of his critical interest. This fact ceases to surprise us, however, when we consider on the first hand the situation in English literature in the first half of the 1830s, when Thackeray started working as literary critic, and on the other his own position in that literature when he began to publish his own imaginative works,

At the beginning of the 1830s, as is generally accepted, English literature found itself in a stage of temporary interregnum, when no great authors appeared to assume the place of the giants of the Romantic period and to satisfy the demands of the substantially increased reading public, nursed upon Scott's novels and Byron's poetry, and craving for more literary nourishment of this kind. The situation did not escape the notice of enterprising publishers, who began to publish any new novel or poem offered to them, regardless of its artistic quality. The outcome was the flooding of the book market by literary trash, both fiction and poetry. As far as fiction is concerned, most of the authors of this sort of "literature" were imitators of Scott, some of them being his successors in a direct line (the historical novelists), while others were not so immediately indebted to him, imbibing rather the whole spirit of the Romantic movement and seeking for inspiration in an exclusive milieu of exotic lands, the criminal underworld, the idealized world of the highest social classes, adventures of various kinds, and so forth. It was in a way a relapse into Romanticism on a large scale, but a degenerate Romanticism, inferior from the point of view of art and purely escapist in character. Besides the main products of this pseudo-Romantic revival — historical romance, the so-called Newgate and Silver-Fork novel and the novel of adventure — two new modes appeared in this and especially in the following decade, when the popularity of the older varieties was on the wane, the novel *à la thèse* and the Christmas story, which were certainly written with a more serious purpose, but were predominantly cultivated by inferior writers, some of whom had excelled in the previous literary fashion and simply adopted the new one as the former lost its popularity.

By the time Thackeray started to work as a professional literary critic, he was already a connoisseur of romantic fiction and a highly critical one at that. As the records of his reading show, he definitely overcame his youthful predilection for fiction of this type during his study at Cambridge, and from the time he left the University up to the last few years of his life (when his early enthusiasm for romances to a certain extent revived) he never read this type of fiction with uncritical eyes. And when he began to cultivate the art of fiction himself (though at first in minor forms), his critical opinion of fiction based on a creative approach greatly differing from or opposite to his own became even more clearly and sharply defined. Here he was indeed on firm ground, as is more than amply proved by the unambiguous and consistent attitude he assumed, as a professional critic, in his sharp critical campaign not only against the products of the pseudo-Romantic revival, but also against the other two literary fashions just referred to which he encountered in the course of his critical career.

Not long after the beginning of the new outburst of Romanticism, however, another great writer, Charles Dickens, appeared on the English literary scene alongside Thackeray and began to lay the foundations of the nineteenth-century realistic novel, which we may indeed see as a revival and adaptation to new conditions of an already existing form. Similar developments, against a similar literary background, may be observed in the immediately preceding period in Germany, where Goethe was producing his great novels and in Thackeray's time in France, where Balzac and Stendhal were beginning to write. Especially in the 1830s but also in the first half of the following decade this revived literary form was still in its infancy and the writers cultivating it were not regarded by their contemporaries as representing a literary movement in any way remarkably different from the preceding firmly established Romantic School.

Thackeray, though one of the founders himself, certainly shared this attitude of his contemporaries, especially as a critical reader, but also as a critic. He came to the literary and critical scene with an uncommonly good knowledge of the realistic fiction produced especially in England and France in the preceding periods and of course perfected and extended it during the whole of his literary and critical career, yet he was obviously not able to orientate himself unerringly among the intermingling literary movements of his own time, particularly those of Germany and France. He began to study German literature at a period which marked a transition, in the sphere of fiction, from the novel of the romantic type to that of the realistic, but which was at the same time strongly influenced by the reverberating echoes of the preceding periods of the *Sturm und Drang* and Classicism and must have therefore seemed very perplexing to the young student not yet experienced in evaluating literature. He was of course not so confused as to be unable to discern most of the retrogressive and some of the progressive phenomena in the German literature of his time, as I have shown in my study on his aesthetics, yet he failed to do full justice to Goethe's fiction, as we have seen in the second chapter, and persisted in this attitude throughout his whole critical career.[1] He was apparently even more

[1] Besides *Wilhelm Meister*, he found also *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* objectionable predominantly on moral grounds (see *Works* XI, 857). As far as *Werther* is concerned, he

at a loss when following the complicated literary situation in France, though again not to such an extent as to be unable to assess correctly some of the more eccentric productions of *L'École romantique*, as we shall see later. His revolt against romantic excesses in literature led him too far, however, and he not only condemned the whole Romantic movement in France and almost all the contemporary output of French fiction (as I have shown in more detail in my study on his criticism of French literature), but also erroneously classified Balzac as a representative of the Romantic movement, as we have seen, entirely failing to recognize in him a great genius in the form which he himself cultivated. As far as Dickens is concerned, Thackeray undoubtedly realized that a new quality had appeared in English fiction with this novelist's arrival on the literary scene, yet even the creative approach of this great contemporary of his did not entirely correspond to the demands he himself laid upon fiction, as we have already partly seen. Further, as I shall point out later, Thackeray considered Dickens to be tainted by one of the literary fashions of his time, and to have been the initiator of another.

It is clear that Thackeray's relationship to the new realistic novel was by no means so well-defined as his attitude to the fiction of the romantic type. One of the reasons why he devoted relatively so little attention to realistic fiction may have been this very fact, though this must remain mere guesswork, for Thackeray never stated his reasons himself. He might not even have realized, as we from our historical perspective are enabled to do, that his attitude to the new realistic novel in any way differed from that to be expected from one of the acknowledged founders of the revived form, for most of his critical judgments sound very categorical. Whatever his reasons might have been, however, the fact remains that while he reviewed, burlesqued and parodied a fairly great number of the products of the current literary fashions, yet of the realistic novelists of his time he chose for criticism only Dickens (and that only a very small part of his work) and besides Dickens, only two minor French novelists. Of the realists representing the preceding epoch in the development of the novel in England, he paid critical attention to Fielding's works and, in the 1850s, enlarged the scope of this part of his criticism by including most of the other English 18th-century novelists.

There is yet another very important matter which must be pointed out before I start analysing his criticism. Although throughout this introduction I have several times used the terms "romantic" and "realistic", Thackeray did not classify the novelists he assessed in any such definite categories. He was certainly much concerned with the question of whether they depicted life as it really was, or presented their own conceptions and ideals as to how it ought to be, but he did not denote any representative of the current literary fashions as

commented mainly on its moods of despondency, pessimism and unmanly sentimentality and on its laying too much stress upon *Sehnsucht nach der Liebe*, making it a favourite book of the sentimental young lady Matilda from the *Memoirs of Mr. Charles J. Yellowplush* and of the executioner Gregoire, Schneider's famulus in *The Story of Mary Ancel* (see *Works* I, 259 and II, 147), parodying its despondency in Pen's first novel *Walter Lorraine*, and later writing a satirical poem ("Sorrows of Werther", published in November 1853 in the *Southern Literary Messenger*), in which he ridiculed the romantic love of this famous hero and presented the vigorous Charlotte as the only wholesome element in the story. For his other comments on the novel see *Letters* I, 312, *Works* VI, 561, XII, 517, Gulliver, op. cit., p. 204, etc.; for Frisa's analysis of his relationship to it see op. cit., pp. 10—13.

a "romanticist" (though he did occasionally use the terms "romantic" and especially "romance") or as a "realist", and he did not apply the latter term, either, to the representatives of the realistic novel, adhering throughout his criticism to a terminology predominantly derived from the Neoclassicist legacy in this field. The term "realistic" or "realism" was in fact never used by him at all. He could not of course adopt it in the period of his professional criticism when it was little known in England or any other European country, but he did not use it even in the 1850s, when it gradually gained wide currency, either for characterizing his own creative approach, or that of the writers he criticized in this later period. In order not to impute to him terms he never used, I have therefore decided to classify the fiction criticized by him from his own point of view and not from mine. The various literary fashions are in any case represented in his criticism by writers who could not all be accurately pigeonholed as "romanticists" or "realists". As his criticism suggests, he was well aware that their approach to reality combined both romantic and realistic elements — either the former (and that in the majority of cases) or the latter predominating — but he was more interested in those aspects of creative method which made these writers in his eyes the representatives of the various fashionable modes. His criticism of them will therefore be discussed in several separate sub-chapters according to the various types of fashionable fiction, while the first part of this whole chapter is reserved for his attitude to the inadvertent progenitor of the pseudo-Romantic revival, Sir Walter Scott.

One exception to this procedure will be made, however, in considering his criticism of the realistic novelists, though only in terminology, for in the heading of this particular sub-chapter I do use the term "realistic", even if Thackeray himself does not. I have presumed to adopt this term in his name because I wanted to make a clear distinction between the writers discussed under this heading and those considered in the earlier sub-chapters, since the creative approach of the latter — including Dickens — does essentially differ from that of the cultivators of various fashionable modes and is in my opinion basically realistic. The main criterion for classification remains, however, the same, as Thackeray himself treated these particular authors differently from the fashionable novelists. Although in assessing the contemporary realistic novelists he takes notice of the "fashionable" traits in their fiction (in the novels of Bernard and Reybaud, and in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*), such traits do not stand in the foreground of his interest (apart from the single exception of Dickens's novel) and he is more concerned with these writers' general creative approach. In his evaluation of the 18th-century English novel Thackeray's critical interest is of course concentrated exclusively upon the latter aspect.

1. Thackeray as a Critic of Sir Walter Scott

Thackeray did not pay detailed critical attention to Scott until the second half of the 1840s, when he wrote his two burlesque continuations of *Ivanhoe*, but almost since his first acquaintance with the books of this early favourite of his until the end of his life he referred to Scott's creative approach and works in numerous marginal remarks. These of course show much more clearly than his burlesques that even if he did not accept Scott uncritically, there was much

he could genuinely admire in his novels. As we have seen in the second chapter, he highly appreciated Scott's contribution to the liberation of English and European literature and art from the fetters of dogmatic Classicism. He rightly saw in Scott the founder of the historical novel and regarded the appearance of his Waverley novels as a great advance upon "that feeble entertainment of which the Miss Porters, the Anne of Swanseas, and worthy Mrs. Radcliffe herself, with her dreary castles and exploded old ghosts, had had pretty much the monopoly".[1] In one such remark he included Scott among the greatest writers of world literature whose best characteristic was their love for mankind, in another he highly appreciated the fact that Scott belonged to those great writers (naming beside him Fielding and Cervantes) who did not thrust forward their own persons in their novels (in this he is very near to Hazlitt).[2] Till the end of his life he had some special favourites among Scott's novels (preferring those which did not end with death and confessing that he had never dared read Scott's "lugubrious" novels *The Pirate, The Bride of Lammermoor* or *Kenilworth*[3]), and also favourites among Scott's characters. He greatly admired some of Scott's heroes,[4] though he of course perfectly realized that the male characters he created for his own historical novels were of a different pattern. His Barry Lyndon, for instance, was created as a deliberate opposite to the Scott hero, as the following comment shows:

"Had it [i.e. Barry's autobiography — *LP*] been that of a mere hero of romance — one of those heroic youths who figure in the novels of Scott and James, — there would have been no call to introduce the reader to a personage already so often and so charmingly depicted. Mr. Barry Lyndon is not, we repeat, a hero of the common pattern" (*Works* VI, 245n.).

Although he found most of the female characters of Scott (as of Shakespeare and other writers) "pretty much the same" and drawn "from one model" — that of "an exquisite slave" such as most men want — "a humble, flattering, smiling, child-loving, tea-making, pianoforte-playing being, who laughs at our jokes however old they may be, coaxes and wheedles us in our humours, and fondly lies to us through life",[5] he selected one special favourite from among them, Rebecca in *Ivanhoe,* whose unfortunate destiny moved his boyish heart and later became one of the impulses inspiring him to his burlesque continuations of this novel, one of the purposes of which was to redress the wrong committed against this enchanting heroine by her creator.[6] In his lifelong faithful love for

[1] *Works* XIII, 548.

[2] See *Works* VI, 607 and Gulliver, op. cit., p. 203; for Hazlitt's views see *Comic Writers,* p. 174.

[3] See *Works* XVII, 431; see also VI, 322. But he did read them after all, for he refers to *Kenilworth* in *Works* VII, 383 and to the characters of Amy Robsart and Leicester in *Works* XII, 597. Florac refers to the characters from *The Bride of Lammermoor* (see *Works* XIV, 353).

[4] As he later confessed (see *Works* XVII, 602), his special favourites were the Baron of Bradwardine (whose name he used for his satirical portrait of Scott in the *Book of Snobs*) and Fergus Mac-Ivor from *Waverley,* Sir Brian de Bois-Guilbert from *Ivanhoe,* Quentin Durward and his uncle, Saladin and the Scottish knight from the *Talisman,* Claverhouse from *Old Mortality* and Major Dalgetty from *A Legend of Montrose* — mostly secondary characters who are really vivid and lifelike.

[5] *Works* VIII, 324.

[6] For his declaration of love for Rebecca see especially *Works* XVII, 608. For some other references to this character outside his burlesques see *Works* IV, 278, VIII, 110, XVII, 151—152, XII, 30, XIV, 159, 696.

Rebecca, Thackeray approaches the standpoint of Hazlitt, Belinski and even the Chartist reviewer Frost, who appreciated this "beautiful and high-souled" heroine as, "perhaps, the finest conception of a female character which ever emanated from the pen of Walter Scott".[7] In other marginal comments Thackeray generously praised Scott's ability to create lifelike personages (in this being near especially to Jeffrey and Hazlitt and differing from Carlyle[8]), and his splendid narrative art.[9] With the exception of one remark, in which he critically referred to Scott's financial transactions which in his opinion proved the novelist "to be a rogue",[10] and one comment and one episodic character (Baron of Bradwardine in the *Book of Snobs*) in which he criticized Scott's servile attitude to the King,[11] Thackeray also highly appreciated the novelist's personal character.[12] How greatly he estimated Scott in spite of all his criticism was perhaps best revealed by the following remark of his, pronounced in private conversation and recorded by Merivale:

"A popular novelist, in the presence of a loved friend of Thackeray, one day justified something he had said, or done, or written, by remarking, 'Sir Walter Scott said, or did, or wrote, so-and-so'. 'I do not think', answered Thackeray, 'that it becomes either you or me to speak of Sir Walter Scott as if we were his equals. Such men as you or I should take off our hats at the very mention of his name'."[13]

There was one essential point, however, in which Thackeray, certainly since the early 1830s, but especially from the second half of the decade, could not find himself in agreement with his favourite, and that was Scott's approach to the depiction of history. It is true that he perfectly realized that Scott's history was a resurrected past, filled with living people (in this he was near to the evaluation of Carlyle and Hazlitt[14]) and that it thus fulfilled not only Scott's own purpose of exhibiting before the eyes of his readers their "fathers as they lived",[15] but also what both Scott and Thackeray expected from history as a science and what Thackeray characterized as "the expression of the life of the time; of the manners, of the movement, the dress, the pleasures, the laughter,

[7] For the quotation from Frost see *An Anthology of Chartist Literature,* Izdatel'stvo literaturi na inostrannikh jazikakh, Moskva 1956, p. 320. For Hazlitt's views see *The Spirit of the Age,* p. 101; for Belinski's see *Spisy (Works)* II, *Stati a recense (1840—1842),* SNKLHU, Praha, 1959, p. 414.

[8] For Jeffrey's views see *Jeffrey's Literary Criticism,* ed. with Introduction by D. Nichol Smith, Henry Frowde, London, 1910, pp. 92—95, 101; for Hazlitt's see *Comic Writers,* pp. 174—175, *The Spirit of the Age,* pp. 109—110; for Carlyle's see *Essays* IV, 74, 75. Hazlitt had, however, also some reservations regarding Scott's method of creating characters (see especially *Comic Writers,* p. 174 and *The Spirit of the Age,* pp. 99—100).

[9] See e.g. *Works* VII, 302, VI, 393 (on characters), III, 389, XIII, 790, XVII, 597—598 (on narrative art).

[10] *Letters* I, 460 (this remark refers to the exchange of pamphlets between Lockhart and A. Ballantyne in 1838 and 1839 concerning Scott's financial transactions; see *Letters* I, 460n.).

[11] See *Works* XIII, 787 and IX, 271.

[12] See *Works* XIII, 805, *Letters* III, 634. Thackeray knew much about Scott's life from Lockhart's biography, as well as from Ticknor's recollections, to which he listened in the United States (see James Grant Wilson, op. cit., I, 93). For his references to some events in Scott's life see *Works* I, 317, VIII, 36, XVII, 359.

[13] Op. cit., p. 235.

[14] For Carlyle's views see *Essays* III, 81—83, etc. and his essay on Scott. For Hazlitt's see *English Poets,* p. 206 and *The Spirit of the Age,* p. 107.

[15] Preface to Lodge's *Illustrious Personages,* quoted by Margaret Ball in *Sir Walter Scott as a Critic of Literature,* The Columbia University Press, New York, 1907, p. 132.

the ridicules of society".[16] This kinship between the two writers' ideas as to what a serious historical work should be like was pointed out by Margaret Ball:

"He wished, as Thackeray did later when he proposed to write a history of the Age of Queen Anne, to use in an avowedly serious book the material with which he had stored his imagination; and he believed he could present it with a vivacity that was not characteristic of professional historians."[17]

Thackeray positively appreciated, too, Scott's endeavour to make history not only living, but also familiar — if not in the novelist's above-mentioned fictitious "heroic youths", then at least in his portraiture of the historical royal personages, as Thackeray points out in the following comment, strongly reminding us of a similar statement of Belinski:

"The royal personages who figure in the Scott romances are among the most charming, if not real, of the characters which the delightful novelist has introduced to us. He was, if we mistake not, the first romantic author who dealt with kings and princes familiarly. Charles and Louis are made to laugh before us as unconcernedly as schoolboys; Richard takes his share of canary out of the cup of Friar Tuck; and the last words we hear from James are, that the cocky-leeky is growing cold. What is it that pleases us in the contemplation of these royal people so employed? Why are we more amused with the notion of a king on the broad grin, than with the hilariousness of a commoner? That mingling of grandeur and simplicity, that ticklish conjunction of awe and frivolity, are wonderfully agreeable to the reader; and we are all charmed to know how heroes appear in the eyes of their *valets de chambre*" (*Works* V, 459).

Thackeray realized, too, that Scott strongly felt the value and significance for his own time of past manners, opinions and ideals, presenting his depiction of the past as a lesson for his own contemporaries, and the younger writer also learned from his predecessor so far as to pronounce in his own historical novels a judgment upon the period in which he himself lived. But he did not regard the lesson offered by Scott as profitable and wholesome for Scott's time or for his own, differing thus substantially from Carlyle, who, on the one hand, rebuked Scott for having "no message whatever to deliver to the world", but, on the other hand, praised him for carrying his readers back "to rough strong times, wherein those maladies of ours had not yet arisen". Thackeray did not see in feudal monarchy, as Carlyle did, an ideal social institution in which society was sound at heart, all men animated by one great idea and everything permeated by religion in which, "as in the life-centre of all, lay the true health and oneness".[18] His attitude to the Middle Ages and its depiction by Scott was much nearer to that of Hazlitt, who characterized Scott as a *laudator temporis acti* and dissociated himself from the novelist's opinion that it was a fine thing to return in imagination to the good old times, " 'when in Auvergne alone there were three hundred nobles whose most ordinary actions were robbery, rape and murder', when the castle of each Norman baron was a stronghold from which the lordly proprietor issued to oppress and plunder the neighbouring districts, and when the Saxon peasantry were treated by their gay and gallant tyrants as a herd of loathsome swine", begging for his own part to be excused and insisting that he "had rather live in the same age with the author of *Wav-*

[16] *Works* XIII, 543; see also II, 92–93, 98, 182, 194–195, III, 397–398, VI, 340–341, XIII, 14, *Contributions*, 78, 101.

[17] Op. cit., p. 123.

[18] For the quotations see *Essays* IV, 54, 56, III, 15; see also III, 30, IV, 165.

erley and *Blackwood's Magazine*".[19] Thackeray's own attitude to the Middle Ages found expression, besides his burlesque continuations of *Ivanhoe*, especially in his unfinished historical novel *The Knights of Borsellen*, in which he presented an unembellished and harshly realistic picture of the practices of the plundering barons mentioned by Hazlitt, in his *Miss Tickletoby's Lectures on English History*, in *A Legend of the Rhine*, *Barbazure* and in numerous marginal comments which are in several cases addressed directly to Scott. Of these the following is perhaps the most convincing:

"As far as I can get at the authentic story, Saladin is a pearl of refinement compared to the brutal beef-eating Richard — about whom Sir Walter Scott has led all the world astray. When shall we have a real account of those times and heroes — no good-humoured pageant, like those of the Scott romances — but a real authentic story to instruct and frighten honest people of the present day, and make them thankful that the grocer governs the world now in place of the baron?" (*Works* IX, 166).

One of such remarks shows that even though he recognized Scott's merit in founding the historical novel, he did not regard his general influence upon the further development of literature, art, history and religion as entirely beneficial. He evaluates an exhibition at St. James's Street as containing only imitations of no originality and honesty of thought, and proceeds:

"The twelfth-century revival in Mr. Crockford's bazaar, forsooth! with examples of every century except our own. It would be worth while for some one to write an essay, showing how astonishingly Sir Walter Scott has influenced the world; how he changed the character of novelists, then of historians, whom he brought from their philosophy to the study of pageantry and costume; how the artists then began to fall back into the middle ages and the architects to follow; until now behold we have Mr. Newman and his congregation of Littlemore marching out with taper and crosier, and falling down to worship St. Willibald, and St. Winnibald, and St. Walberga the Saxon virgin" (*Works* II, 621—622).

To the name of Scott in this quotation he adds the following footnote:

"Or more properly Goethe. *Götz von Berlichingen* was the father of the Scottish romances, and Scott remained constant to that mode, while the greater artist tried a thousand others" (*Works* II, 622n.).

As we have seen in the second chapter, Thackeray's own conception of history found its best expression in his novel *Esmond*, in which he created a historical novel of a new type having no precedent in the works of any other historical novelist of his time or of the immediate past, including Scott. The relationship between his conception and that of the founder of the historical novel was very convincingly summed up by Loofbourow:

"For Thackeray, the 'glorious Scott cycle of romances' was fabulous legend; they provided *Esmond* with poetic inspiration rather than historical method. In *Esmond*, history is substance, not accident — romance and mock-epic are modes of perception that qualify but do not efface ordinary human event — the past is relevant fact, as well as an artistic image."[20]

There were some other aspects of Scott's creative method which Thackeray criticized in his marginal comments, notably the tendency to display historical lore in the detailed descriptions of the historical milieu, battles and tournaments,

[19] For the quotations see *The Spirit of the Age*, p. 32; see also ibid., pp. 99, 111, 114.
[20] Op. cit., p. 106; see also ibid., pp. 35—36.

as well as the cavalier treatment of some historical facts and personages.[21] In his critical attitude to Scott's antiquarianism Thackeray is very near to Jeffrey, who was troubled by this aspect of Scott's creative approach, and especially to Carlyle, who pointed out that romance-heroes could not continue to interest the reader by their slashed breeches, buff-belts or antiquated speech, for "all manner of jerkins and costumes are transitory", but "simply and solely, in the long-run, by being men", for "man alone is perennial".[22]

All these critical reservations of Thackeray as to Scott's creative approach, as well as his attitude to chivalric romance in general, found their expression first in his earlier satirical continuation of *Ivanhoe, Proposals for a Continuation of "Ivanhoe"*, published between August and September 1846 in *Fraser's Magazine,* and then in his enlarged version of the *Proposals,* published in 1850 in book form under the title *Rebecca and Rowena.* In these burlesques the main shafts of Thackeray's satire are aimed against Scott's idealized depictions of the Middle Ages, though the significance of these works is by no means exhausted by those aspects in which this purpose of Thackeray finds its fulfilment. Avowedly polemizing with Scott on the unsatisfactory conclusion of the novel and the poetic "injustice" inflicted upon his beloved heroine Rebecca, he juxtaposes to Scott's embellished pictures of the illusorily resurrected "Gothic" past his own unadorned and often revolting depictions of the arrogance, despotism and cruelty of the savage Christian warriors (including the "ideal monarch", King Richard the Lion-hearted, whom he presents as "the royal butcher"[23]), of horrible massacres and frightful reprisals perpetrated by the crusaders upon the "infidels", and of the hard life of the serfs at Ivanhoe's castle. He desists, however, from presenting a depiction elaborated down to the smallest detail, for he is obviously aware that it would tend to be naturalistic, and makes use of suggestion instead, in the art of which he was by that time a great master. For this purpose he uses his authorial comments, as for instance the following, concerning his depiction of the battle at Chalus:

"I just throw this off by way of description, and to show what *might* be done if I chose to indulge in this style of composition, but as in the battles which are described by the kindly chronicler of one of whose works this present masterpiece is professedly a continuation, everything passes off agreeably; the people are slain, but without any unpleasant sensation to the reader; nay, some of the most savage and bloodstained characters of history, such is the indomitable good humour of the great novelist, become amiable, jovial companions, for whom one has a hearty sympathy — so, if you please, we will have this fighting business at Chalus, and the garrison and honest Bertrand of Gourdon, disposed of, the former according to the usage of the good old times, having been hung up, or murdered to a man, and the latter killed in the manner described by the late Dr. Goldsmith in his History" (*Works* X, 531).[24]

Thackeray's satire in his continuations of *Ivanhoe* has, however, a much wider range. Besides satirizing chivalrous ethics in presenting the crusade as a scene of butchery, he aims his satirical weapons at all the other conventional romance motifs exploited by Scott in his novel and summed up by Loof-

[21] See e.g. *Letters* I, 178, *Works* III, 355n., XVI, 114, 430.

[22] For Jeffrey's views see op. cit., p. xix; for the quotations from Carlyle see *Essays* IV, 77.

[23] *Works* X. 531.

[24] See also *Works* X, 488, 513, 528.

bourow — "the blond heroine and her dark anti-type, the courageous hero, the humble squire, the knightly combat ethic, the mystique of chivalric love", and makes his parody double-edged by satirizing at the same time "the stylized Victorian versions of these ideal roles".[25] The quoted scholar evaluates *Rebecca and Rowena* as "a decisive departure from Thackeray's earlier chivalric burlesques", having in mind *A Legend of the Rhine*, in which Thackeray "does not alter conventional romance patterns: the heroine and the hero are blond, the villain dark, the hero warlike, the conventional code of knightly combat shapes the action; the story parallels the conventions it mocks rather than developing divergent structures":

> "*Rebecca and Rowena*, on the other hand, purposefully inverts the formal romance relationships and creates a nascent pattern of its own."[26]

As my purpose is different from that of Loofbourow, I shall pay more detailed attention to this pattern, which he only briefly summarizes. As this scholar has rightly emphasized, in Thackeray's burlesques dark Rebecca is the heroine, while the blond Rowena is a character in whom Thackeray satirizes "the 'civilized' brutality beneath the mask of feminine etiquette" and thus "deftly caricatures the irreproachable Victorian lady". In contradistinction to Scott's idealizing conception, Thackeray depicts Rowena as a hateful, prim and cold-hearted woman, who henpecks her husband, while the latter, as the quoted scholar has it, is "a mutation of the romance hero, pacific and introverted instead of aggressive and conformist".[27] King Richard is in Thackeray's depiction a butcher, as we have seen, and at the same time a buffoon, as Loofbourow points out, and Robin Hood is a stout elderly protector of the private property of the rich, which had formerly been the object of his robberies. A further target for satire is the tendency of Scott and his imitators to abuse their privilege of placing their characters among real historical personages by bringing them on the spot when anything important is going on and making them play in all such events a decisive role. In his burlesques Thackeray makes Ivanhoe the main initiator of Magna Charta and the instrument of the abduction of Prince Arthur, explicitly pointing out in one of his comments that "it is the custom and duty of all gentlemen of that profession [i.e. heroes of romance — *LP*] to be present on all occasions of historic interest, to be engaged in all conspiracies, royal interviews, and remarkable occurrences", and adding that even his Ivanhoe "would certainly have rescued the young Prince, had he been anywhere in the neighbourhood of Rouen, where the foul tragedy occurred".[28] Thackeray of course himself made use of the above-mentioned privilege in his own historical novels, placing historical characters among his fictitious ones and making the latter take part in real historical events (Barry Lyndon in the Seven Years' War, Esmond in the Marlborough campaigns, George Warrington in General Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne and both brothers in the American War of Independence), but he never abused this privilege by forcing his heroes to perform feats violating all the laws of probability and

[25] Op. cit., p. 39.
[26] Ibid., p. 41.
[27] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 39, 41.
[28] *Works* X, 545.

making them instruments of decisive turns in history or of any momentous decisions of his historical personages.

Another aspect of Scott's creative approach which Thackeray satirizes is the tendency (typical of many romance writers) to exaggerate the physical prowess and the suffering of the heroes. His method is a further exaggeration which exceeds all bounds of probability and verges upon the grotesque — Ivanhoe kills over two thousand men in the battle, King Richard flings away the culverin to the distance of three hundred yards, "as though it had been a reed",[29] Ivanhoe lies in a delirium for six years. Thackeray does not miss any opportunity, either, to inveigh against the conventional scheme on which the plot of *Ivanhoe* and of the romance in general is based, consisting of surprising events, dark intrigues, interferences of chance and fortune, hair-breadth escapes and striking contrasts. He compares historical romances to Christmas pantomimes, for, in both, the characters miraculously overcome adverse circumstances, persons seemingly dead revive, heroes solve difficult situations by hiding or appearing in disguise and everything concludes with a general happy-end. This conventional scheme is deliberately used by him in the burlesques with the purpose of demonstrating its absurdity and his method is again that of exaggeration: in the third chapter he depicts Ivanhoe's death, but in the next his hero is still alive and lies in fever for six years so that Rowena can marry again in the meantime; Ivanhoe visits his castle disguised as a monk and is not recognized even by his wife, etc. The conventional happy-end of romance is satirized by Thackeray in the following comment upon Ivanhoe's second marriage to Rebecca:

"Married I am sure they were, and adopted little Cedric, whose father had drunk away all his fortune; but I don't think they had any other children, or were subsequently very boisterously happy. Of some sorts of happiness melancholy is a characteristic, and I think these were a solemn pair, and died rather early" (*Works* X, 493).

One of the targets of his satire is also the decorative descriptive element in Scott's novels, the detailed presentations of the historical milieu, costumes, armour and the like, as well as of battles, tournaments and sieges. He again uses suggestion, pointing out that he has no space for such minute details and referring his readers to the original source:

"Single combats, or combats of companies, scaladoes, ambuscadoes, rapid acts of horsemanship, destriers, catapults, mangonels, and other properties of the chivalric drama, are at the use of the commonest writer; and I am sure, my dear sir, you have too good an opinion of me to require that these weapons should be dragged out, piece by piece, from the armory, and that you will take my account for granted" (*Works* X, 479).[30]

The last object of Thackeray's satire is Scott's cavalier treatment of historical facts and especially the anachronisms which he and his imitators committed — Thackeray's heroes, for instance, smoke cigars.

As follows from our analysis, Thackeray in his two satirical continuations of *Ivanhoe* attacks all the more vulnerable aspects of Scott's creative approach, as well as the faults of the authors of historical romances in general. His criticism is entirely just, for he attacks only those qualities of Scott's style and method which are this novelist's undoubtedly weak points. This has also

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[29] *Works* X, 513.

[30] See also *Works* X, 471, 478, 524—527, 559, 566.

been appreciated by Clapp, who evaluates these burlesques (together with *Barbazure*) as deserving "to be reckoned among the good little things of criticism",[31] even though he believes that Thackeray relies in them rather upon his feelings than his reason. I do not think, however, that this rebuke is entirely justified, for if Thackeray was to grasp accurately the above-discussed qualities of Scott's creative approach, his critical attacks had to be carefully thought out — mere feeling would not have made his critical shafts hit their target with such a precision. What should be especially emphasized is also the fact that the criteria upon which Thackeray's criticism is based are in this case of an almost purely aesthetic character and in perfect harmony with his whole aesthetic creed. And what should be praised in addition is the form and style in which the burlesques are written, which splendidly suit and fulfil Thackeray's purpose — to be uncompromising in his criticism, and yet to preserve the note of good humour which is so telling a testimony that Thackeray never lost the fond recollection of Scott as one of the greatest benefactors of his childhood.

2. Thackeray's Criticism of the Historical Romance after Scott and Other Fashionable Literary Modes

As I have suggested in the preceding sub-chapter, Thackeray's satirical continuations of *Ivanhoe* had a wider range than that suggested by their titles. Although they were in the first place directed against the creative approach of the father of the historical romance, Sir Walter Scott, they at the same time attacked all the characteristic aspects of this *genre* in general, and thus indirectly, too, the numerous imitators of Scott who cultivated it in Thackeray's time and, mostly lacking Scott's genius, produced historical romances degraded to the lowest artistic level or lacking any artistic value whatever. Thackeray was indeed perfectly aware that out of Scott "a bad tradition came",[1] as Dr. Leavis expressed it in our own time, and that this tradition spoiled not only many second-rate writers of fiction, but also some who had, as the same scholar has pointed out, the makings of distinguished novelists, such as for instance Cooper. As the records of his reading show, Thackeray began to adopt a critical attitude towards Scott's imitators, as well as towards the producers of fashionable romances of all the other types (criminal romances, novels of adventure, and the so-called Silver-Fork novels) as early as the end of the 1820s and the beginning of the following decade, most probably influenced in this by Maginn's critical attacks and Carlyle's harsh judgments upon these literary modes (though it was not until 1838, in his essay on Scott, that Carlyle definitely showed, as Kathleen Tillotson has it, "that imitation of Scott was a dead end"[2]). As the critical comments on Bulwer, Disraeli and Cooper pronounced by Thackeray in this early period of his life show, he must have been in sympathy, too, with the following statement of Hazlitt:

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[31] "Critic on Horseback", p. 297.

[1] *The Great Tradition. George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad,* New edition, Chatto & Windus, London, 1962, p. 6n.

[2] Carlyle's essay "Sir Walter Scott" was first published in the *London and Westminster Review* in 1838 and then reprinted in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays,* where Thackeray read it in December 1839. For the quotation from Kathleen Tillotson see op. cit., p. 154.

"The Author of Waverley wears the palm of legendary lore alone. Sir Walter may, indeed, surfeit us: his imitators make us sick!"[3]

How sick, indeed, Thackeray eventually became of Scott's imitators, as well as of those other romance writers who were not Scott's direct followers, but found additional or exclusive sources of inspiration mainly in Godwin and Byron, and of the earlier or later second-rate producers of the novel *à la thèse* and "Christmas" literature, is more than obvious from the great quantity of critical contributions, reviews, notices, parodies and burlesques he devoted to the evaluation of their works, and, of course, from the sharp critical tone and merciless critical methods he in most cases employed.

I. THE HISTORICAL NOVEL AND ROMANCE

It follows from Thackeray's critical attitude to Scott and is confirmed by the records of his reading and his other critical contributions, that he thought very little of the historical novels and romances produced in his own country in the first half of the century, and at the same time felt that much could have been done in this specific *genre.* This is obvious, *inter alia,* from his introduction to the *Proposals for a Continuation of "Ivanhoe"*, written in the form of an open letter to Alexandre Dumas-père, in which Thackeray proclaims himself to be a devoted admirer of the French novelist, complains of the "woful dearth" of historical novels in England, and expresses his wish that Dumas, who depicts the fortunes of his heroes in continuation in twenty volumes, might take up other people's heroes and "give a continuation of *their* lives", when he has brought his own "to an age when it is best that the old gentlemen should retire".[4] His complaint about the scarcity of historical novels in England, in which he rebukes the formerly so popular producers of this *genre,* Bulwer Lytton, G.P.R. James and Ainsworth, for not publishing any new works, clearly shows that he was perfectly aware that the historical romance was on the wane in his own country and that there was nobody to whom he could address his proposal but Dumas, though his attitude to the French novelist was in this period (1846) not yet altogether uncritical. It is worth noticing, however, that in the preceding decade and at the end of the 1820s he did find a few English historical novels, besides those of Scott, which he assessed positively or at least did not wholly condemn. Thus he obviously found something to admire in Ainsworth's romance *Crichton* (1837), for he promised to draw illustrations for its first edition, though the arrangement eventually fell through, and used the name of Ainsworth's hero (or perhaps of his historical prototype) as a common generic name for some of his own characters of a similar type (Brandon, George Osborne, Pendennis, etc.). Upon the whole it seems that his attitude to Ainsworth's historical novels was much more positive than his view of the same writer's criminal romances, for he even found some words of praise for the former[5] and never chose any of them as the targets of his satire. He did not wholly condemn,

[3] *The Spirit of the Age,* pp. 105—106.

[4] For the quotations see *Works* X, 463, 465.

[5] For his usage of the name of Ainsworth's hero see *Works* III, 326, VIII, 373, XI, 143, XII, 220, 228; for his positive comments on some other historical novels by Ainsworth see *Works* II, 723, X, 464.

either, Bulwer's novel *Devereux* when he read it in 1829, for he chose from it a motto for his article on Shelley (quoted in the second chapter), and wrote about it as follows:

"I do not admire Devereux as a ⟨whole⟩ so much as either of the other two novels of Mr Bulwer's,[6] ⟨I⟩ think he has taken more pains about it than either, it is full ⟨of⟩ thoughts strong and deep, but he has strung his pearls on a poor & fragile thread, the story is I think the most misera(ble) composition, I could write as good a one myself" (*Letters* I, 98).

This early comment of Thackeray is very interesting, as it concerns a work in which Bulwer did propose something which went beyond Scott's influence and which he formulated in his dedication (quoted by Loofbourow):

"In 'Devereux', I wished to portray a man flourishing in the last century, with the train of mind and sentiment peculiar to the present... the historical characters introduced are not closely woven with the main plot, like those in the fictions of Sir Walter Scott — but... give a greater air of truth and actuality to the supposed memoir."[7]

As Loofbourow points out, "Thackeray, reading his rival's clever, shallow novel, would have realized [and, as we have seen, did realize on the first reading — *LP*] how much better it could be done. Perhaps *Devereux* was the irritant that initiated *Esmond*, perhaps it was only an incidental stimulus, but its protean author was expressing an idea implicit in contemporary thought. Whatever Bulwer meant, it was more than a formula for reading the present into the past." Loofbourow also emphasizes that it was Thackeray himself who in "his concept of a narrator with a dramatic alter ego" in *Esmond* "exquisitely realized Bulwer's idea of 'a man flourishing in the last century, with the train of mind and sentiment peculiar to the present' ":

"The heroic actor, experiencing the novel's political events as they occur, responds as a perceptive contemporary; the distant narrator analyzes the historical sequence in detachment and *Esmond's* commentary supplies a quizzical modern perspective."[8]

Whether because of Thackeray's having realized Bulwer's good intentions of doing something new in the *genre* of the historical novel or because of the shift of Bulwer's interest to other *genres* in the period of Thackeray's professional critical work, the fact is that Thackeray did not choose any historical novel by this writer as the object of detailed criticism. He did not let them pass unnoticed, however, and *Devereux* in particular became the target of his critical comments in the following aside in *Catherine* (though we know from another remark of his[9] that he thought quite highly of the character of Bolingbroke, to whom he refers here):

"Had we been writing novels instead of authentic histories, we might have carried them anywhere else we chose; and we had a great mind to make Hayes philosophizing with Bolingbroke, like a certain Devereux; and Mrs. Catherine *maîtresse en titre* to Mr. Alexander Pope, Doctor Sacheverel, Sir John Reade the oculist, Dean Swift, or Marshal Tallard, as the very commonest romancer would under such circumstances" (*Works* III, 78—79).

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[6] I.e. *The Disowned* (see *Letters* I, 95) and either *Pelham* or *Falkland* (see Ray's note, *Letters* I, 98n.).

[7] Quoted by Loofbourow, op. cit., p. 161, from Lord Lytton, *Devereux*, The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., London and New York, 1852, "Dedication", p. vii.

[8] Op. cit., p. 163; for the above quotations see ibid., pp. 161, 163.

[9] See his review of *Ernest Maltravers*, Gulliver, op. cit., pp. 201—202.

As Colby has pointed out, in this comment Thackeray satirizes Bulwer's "well-known capacity for historical name-dropping and over-colouring of the past", poking fun not only at *Devereux* but at popular historical novels in general, "in order to contrast the romantic and realistic ways of dealing with records".[10] He did not leave *Devereux* alone, either, in his parody of Bulwer's *Eugene Aram, George de Barnwell,* delightfully mocking, in its second section, as Hollingsworth has it, Bulwer's historical inconsistencies in this novel.[11] More positive seems to have been Thackeray's opinion of *The Last Days of Pompeii,* which he later characterized, through the mouth of Clive Newcome, as a "delightful story", admiring "the wonderful ingenuity with which the English writer had illustrated the place by his text, as if the houses were so many pictures to which he had appended a story", though he somewhat detracted from his praise by adding that "Clive, the wag, who was always indulging his vein for caricature, was proposing that they should take the same place, names, people, and make a burlesque story".[12]

The dearth of historical novels in the years when Thackeray worked as critic is also obviously the main reason why he paid formal critical attention only to two writers cultivating this *genre,* G. P. R. James and Mrs. Marsh, sharply criticizing and parodying the former and very positively evaluating the latter. His review of Mrs. Marsh's novel *Mount Sorel; or the Heiress of the de Veres* (published in the *Examiner* on 29 March 1845, not identified as Thackeray's until Ray did so in his edition of Thackeray's *Letters*,[13] and not yet reprinted) is worth special notice, as it is an almost pure eulogy of a book which has long since fallen into oblivion and which certainly is no work of genius. Yet it does possess some merits, which were also discerned by the reviewer and which enable us to understand his attitude. The principal merit is the creative approach of the authoress, which is more realistic than romantic: she does not indulge in any romantic excesses, and tells her story, which is situated in the period of the French Revolution, in a very simple and straightforward manner. As the first paragraph of the review shows, Thackeray did not find in this novel any traces of that degraded variety of romanticism which he criticized in the works of G.P.R. James:

> "None of this writer's efforts, since her first, has affected us in any degree like *Mount Sorel.* We have found in it a less exciting story, but higher art, than in the *Admiral's Daughter.* Out of the simplest materials, we have, as it seems to us, a very rare and pleasing effect. A story of ordinary life, without commonplace; a love story, without mawkishness; in short, a book of very wholesome sentiment, of healthy sensibilities, and a just train of thought, and in which the power of the writing is not weakened by its refinement and delicacy."[14]

Thackeray evaluates the plot as very simple, but possessing interest from the very first, rightly contributing the former quality to the authoress's desisting from any straining after effect, to her introducing her characters without effort, and not obtruding upon the reader any commentaries on them, but leaving "all concern about the colouring of the sentiment, or the conduct and issues

[10] Op. cit., p. 385.
[11] See op. cit., p. 216.
[12] *Works* XIV, 521.
[13] See *Letters* II, 190—191n.
[14] *The Examiner,* March 29, 1845, p. 196.

of the plot" to her personages themselves. He also rightly sees the main cause of the interest of the story in the authoress's having been herself interested in and engrossed with her matter, and very positively evaluates the sincerity of her narrative. Some of these scenes depicted by Mrs. Marsh seem to Thackeray exquisite, some he praises as delightful and thoroughly true, and others as very effective and moving. His highest praise is, however, reserved for Mrs. Marsh's art of creating characters, her capacity of filling her story "with delicate strokes of character, shaded by the finest touches, and presented with a most vivid reality". He praises especially the character of the imaginary narrator, who is at the same time the chief actor, Mr. Edmund Lovel, whom the novelist presents as an unconscious and unhappy "Marplot", and yet succeeds in delineating him in such a way that the reader cannot refuse him sympathy, especially in the conclusion of the story, when in "the midst of the gloom and sorrow ... unexpected virtues shine forth; and the blundering Edmund wins all hearts by his active kindness and self-denial":

"It is proof of the skilful workmanship, the superior art of the writer, that he retains it in spite of all."[15]

A further "beautifully drawn" character is, according to Thackeray, the "proud, shy, reserved De Vere, with a world of generous and manly thoughts overclouded by the prejudice of descent, and the struggle to restore lost family honours", whose cold, silent, inward suffering at the loss of Mount Sorel is, in Thackeray's too generous assessment, a "tragedy of a high order". Another character which is in the reviewer's opinion "sketched with lively truth and purpose" is that of the new owner of Mount Sorel, Mr. Higgins; a character "nicely touched" is also that of Lovel's father, "the moderator of all the wayward passions in the book, cool, sensible, sagacious and kind". As Thackeray points out, the story has a happy end, though "not till a lesson has been taught on all sides, pregnant with *home* truth". He finds only one defect in the work, which he sums up in the following comment:

"Often the narrative halts and labours with reflection, when it should be moving lightly and quickly forward. So excellent a writer should be warned against this fault. It is adopted from the Godwin and Mackenzie school, and a novelist of originality and genius can well dispense with it. As it drops off, by sheer necessity, toward the close of the tale, how manifest the improvement!"

The review is closed with the following final praise:

"We have but to add that if we have failed to indicate some of the leading points in a tale of singular beauty, the fault is ours; and we counsel the reader to correct it by turning to the book itself."[16]

What I feel should be added to Thackeray's whole evaluation is that he certainly indicated some of the leading points in the novel reviewed, but at the same time overestimated it very uncritically, too strongly influenced, perhaps, by his having found in the mass of the second-rate historical romances one work which differed from the rest by its simplicity and sincerity. But while his review is not first-rate criticism, and Thackeray even violates in it one

[15] Ibid.
[16] For the quotations see ibid., and p. 197.

tenet of his own critical creed — that which rejects excessive praise — it is not wholly without interest. What deserves notice in the first place is that the criteria upon which Thackeray's judgments are based, are again, as in the case of Scott, predominantly aesthetic, most of them assessing the various qualities and the aspects of the authoress's art from the point of view of artistic workmanship. And what is perhaps even more interesting is the range of Thackeray's critical interest, which in this case includes even such issues which are not often discussed by him in his reviews, as for instance the subtler problems of the creation of character, authorial commentary, and the author's involvement with his material.

If Mrs. Marsh scored only praise from Thackeray, George Payne Rainsford James, the most fertile and in his time most popular writer of historical romances, was not so lucky, for he became a regular target for Thackeray's criticism, satire and parody. Thackeray took notice of some individual aspects of James's creative method in several occasional remarks scattered throughout his early and mature works — rebuking him for his quick and careless way of writing, the shallowness of his ideas, his idealized depictions of the past used as a conventional framework for the stories of his heroic youths, and his style filled with literary clichés.[17] The culminating stage of Thackeray's criticism of James is represented by the parody *Barbazure*, published under the transparent pseudonym of G. P. R. Jeames in *Novels by Eminent Hands* (*Punch*, July 10—24, 1847). In contradistinction to his above-mentioned marginal comments, in his parody Thackeray attacked James's style and literary mannerisms and the stereotyped atmosphere of the second-rate historical romance in general. By using again mainly exaggeration, he convincingly reveals the hidden wheels of the whole machinery of James's creative approach, from the initial cliché of the two solitary horsemen and the trite scheme of the plot, filled with improbable incidents and surprise effects, to the conventional happy-end. By parodying James's primitive depictions of nature, his detailed descriptions of medieval accessories and his characters with their artificially antiquated speech and bombastic way of expression, Thackeray brilliantly demonstrates that history in James's conception and depiction is a mere external matter of historical decoration and costumes: the past is depicted untruthfully and idealized almost out of recognition, and the characters involved in this past are schematic lay figures. The edge of Thackeray's satire is also aimed against James's predilection for piling horror upon horror after the model of the Gothic novel, which he parodies in the scene depicting the preparations for the execution of Fatima. He does not use, however, only the method of negation, i.e. that of satirizing and parodying the material bountifully provided by James's novels. To James's idealized depiction of the Middle Ages he juxtaposes his own unembellished pictures of barbarous feudal relationships, especially in the character of the Baron de Barbazure, who of course shares many characteristic traits with his prototype, Perrault's Barbe Bleu, but who is at the same time a typical representative of the medieval barons who gained their wealth by plunder and murders and yet were respected by the whole country as ornaments of the court and the Church.

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[17] See *Works* VI, 245n., 510, VIII, 39, 58—59, 71, 240, IX, 330, and a small parody *The Read-Up, or Jamesonian* (*The Comic Almanack*, 1846), attributed to him by Gulliver (see op. cit., p. 128).

The parody *Barbazure* represents one of the important phases of Thackeray's sharp and uncompromising struggle against second-rate chivalric romance. It was also effective: after its publication James stopped using his cliché of the two solitary horsemen and in 1851 he publicly apologized for it.[18] He never forgave Thackeray, however, as Lionel Stevenson has pointed out, "but went no further than to mutter, in later years, the mild sneer, 'Thackeray rhymes with quackery' ".[19] James was so mild in his anger probably because in this later period Thackeray's attitude to his works had already been substantially modified. As early as May 1848 Thackeray characterized this novelist, in his speech at the Royal Literary Fund Dinner, as "one of the great novelists of England"[20] and, with the exception of a few sporadic critical remarks inveighing against James's clichés, his bombastic depictions of human feelings and his too detailed descriptions of the appearance and dress of his personages,[21] he never repeated the wholesale attack he had made in *Barbazure*. It is true that one shaft of his satire in his later burlesque fairy tale, *The Rose and the Ring*, is aimed at the chivalric romances of the Jamesian type, but the burlesque is very good-humoured and its main purpose was not literary criticism: it was originally written as a Christmas entertainment for the daughter of his English friends at Rome (Edith Story) in her tedious convalescence, and published as a "fireside pantomime" both for children and adults.

This development of Thackeray's attitude to James can be partly explained by his having become the novelist's friend when James was British consul at Richmond, Virginia,[22] and partly by the decline in the popularity of the historical romance in England discussed above, but its main cause is the whole development of Thackeray's philosophy of life in the second half of the 1840s and the following decade and his general retreat from literary criticism.

As far as foreign historical novelists are concerned, Thackeray quite positively assessed *Notre-Dame de Paris*,[23] paid some attention to Hugo's style in his review of *Étude sur Mirabeau* and to the whole creative approach of the French writer in his review of *Le Rhin, lettres à un ami*, as I have shown in detail in "Thackeray as a Reader and Critic of French Literature". As I have pointed out, his critical shafts are aimed at Hugo's ornate style, which he aptly characterizes as "a mixture of sublimity and absurdity, affectation and nature",[24] at his occasional vulgarity and bad taste and especially at his predilection for sharp contrasts, in which Thackeray rightly sees the most characteristic trait of Hugo's fiction. He is not so unjust, however, as not to recognize the great talent of this writer, of whom he writes as of a great genius, quoting and highly appreciating some of his splendidly written descriptions, containing, as he emphasizes, many rich poetic images. As I have also shown, after 1842 Thackeray paid attention to Hugo only in marginal remarks, none of which refer to Hugo's greatest works.

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[18] See S. M. Ellis, *The Solitary Horseman, The Life and Adventures of G. P. R. James*, London, 1927; quoted by Malcolm Elwin, op. cit., p. 178. See also *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 393.
[19] Op. cit., p. 167.
[20] Melville, op. cit., II, 65.
[21] See *Works* X, 317, 416, XIV, 297, XVII, 356.
[22] See Wilson, op. cit., I, 256.
[23] See *Letters* I, 228.
[24] *Works* I, 51.

though some of these were published in Thackeray's lifetime, and all of which show that his attitude to Hugo did not undergo any such substantial modification as did that to Dumas-père. One of the reasons for this might be that he simply did not read Hugo's later works, another, and perhaps the most probable, that Hugo could not offer him the escape he gained, as we know from his own comments, from Dumas's novels, being a disquieting author, arousing the reader to thought and action. As I have concluded in the study quoted, Thackeray's criticism of Hugo was not entirely unfair, and even though it was to a certain extent marked by his prejudices against the French national character, his critical interest was not concentrated, like that of most of the English critics of his time, exclusively upon "the 'French' traits which [Hugo] supposedly embodied", as Hooker formulates it in his evaluation of English criticism of this novelist.[25] In my opinion, Thackeray assessed Hugo's works primarily as the works of a romanticist from the point of view of a realist. As I have pointed out, he could not accept those aspects of Hugo's creative approach in which the latter was a typical representative of *L'École romantique* — his Utopian visions and his innate tendency towards picturesque contrast, especially as these were revealed in Hugo's prose.

As I have shown in the same study, Thackeray as critical reader paid much attention to Dumas-père, but as actual critic evaluated only his non-fiction and drama. He paid, however, some attention to several aspects of Dumas's creative approach in his review of the latter's travel-book *Excursions sur les bords du Rhin* ("Dumas on the Rhine", *The Foreign Quarterly Review,* October 1842), complaining of the novelist's extreme productivity as considerably detracting from the value of his works, and characterizing his method as a union of the approach of the minute historian and of that of the pure dramatic "romancist". His main critical shafts are aimed at Dumas's inaccuracy in historical facts and inability to present truthful depictions of common life, both being the result of the dramatic turn of Dumas's mind, his "furious" imagination and predilection for the "horrors and indecencies" of history. He does not utterly reject Dumas's "dramatic turn", however, and admits that it has its advantages — it renders the narrative lively, picturesque and amusing, and the characters vivid, and makes itself felt, too, in some of the episodes which are built up with a remarkable sense for dramatic construction. In concluding his review Thackeray appreciates, too, the fact that Dumas has grown more moral and decent and adds a few words which proved to be quite prophetic, that when "time shall have further softened an emphatic bullying manner" and Dumas "shall cease to set down as armed castles all the peaceful windmills of everyday life", "it is probable that we shall he indebted to him for much amusing reading", for "he has both humour and eloquence, and in spite of his hectoring manner his heart is both manly and kind".[26]

When Dumas began to fulfil this prophecy and published his famous novels, Thackeray's attitude to him started to change: as I have pointed out in the above-quoted study, Dumas's romances became his favourite books and he

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[25] K. W. Hooker, *The Fortunes of Victor Hugo in England,* Morningside Heights, Columbia University Press, New York, 1938, p. viii.

[26] For the quotations see *Works* V, 439.

began to write about the French novelist with good nature rather than sharp criticism. In the decade of the Forties, however, he had not yet closed his eyes to the limitations of Dumas's approach, as he did in the last thirteen years of his life when his earlier attitude was definitely replaced by uncritical enthusiasm. As I have shown in detail in the same study, this change of attitude in Thackeray is manifested for the first time in his burlesque version of a forgotten tale by Dumas, *Othon l'archer,* which he published under the title *A Legend of the Rhine* in *George Cruikshank's Table-Book* between June and December 1845. His main purpose in writing this charming burlesque was not, however, to parody the story or the style of its author. His critical shafts have a much wider range and are levelled, as in his *Proposals, Rebecca and Rowena* and *Barbazure,* at chivalric romances in general, as well as at sentimental novels and Gothic fiction. They are not so sharp, however, as we are used to in Thackeray — his parody is written in a good-natured and jocose tone which cannot offend even the greatest lovers of this sort of literature and which very much resembles that used in the burlesques of Scott I have analysed above. Even his critical approach is essentially the same: it is that rather of the humorist than of the satirist, but whenever he touches upon any idealization of the reality depicted by Dumas, i.e. that of the Middle Ages, his humour sharpens into satire, for his main purpose is to reveal the real nature of the heroic knights and beautiful ladies, which is hidden behind the conventional patterns of chivalric romances and thus idealized out of recognition. The weapons of his satire are turned mainly against romantic conceptions of knightly valour, and the substance of his humorous caricature is, as in the burlesques discussed above, comic exaggeration. Thus he burlesques Dumas's predilection for resolving plots by the intervention of fortune and chance, and makes the latter collaborate remarkably well with the hero of the burlesque — sending in his way opportunities to prove his heroic qualities, which, like those of the heroes of his other burlesques so far dealt with, he exaggerates into caricature. He also ridicules the stereotype black-and-white figures of Dumas's tale and of romances in general by exaggerating all the positive traits of his hero and heroine and the negative ones of his villains. As in *Barbazure,* but to a greater extent, he makes full use of the opportunity provided by Dumas's tale for satirizing the mannerisms of the Gothic novel and makes fun, too, as he did in his burlesques of Scott, of Dumas's unconscious anachronisms.

Thackeray as critic paid also some attention to the greatest disciple of the Scott school in Germany, Georg Wilhelm Heinrich Häring, who wrote under the name of Willibald Alexis; he devoted a short critical notice to the English translation of Alexis's novel *The Burgomaster of Berlin* in his summary review "A Box of Novels" (*Fraser's Magazine,* February 1844). He evaluates the three-volumed novel very briefly but positively, finding in it none of the romantic excesses typical of the school and assessing it as a work of great instructive value, exhibiting "a most curious and careful picture of German life in the fifteenth century".[27] His only critical reservations concern the too close type in which the book is printed and which makes the reading difficult, and the rather confused and dilatory action depicted in the novel. He was particularly attracted by one episode describing "the feast in the forest", the feasting of the birds and

[27] *Works* VI, 411.

animals of prey upon the dead body of a horse, which he quotes in full. His general assessment of the novel is summed up in the following paragraph:

"The whole of that strange, wild, forgotten German life of the middle ages is here resuscitated for him [i.e. the reader — *LP*] with true German industry, and no small share of humour. There are proverbs enough in the book to stock a dozen High-Dutch Sanchos with wisdom; and you feel, after reading through the volumes, glad to have perused them, and not a little glad that the work is done. It is like a heavy book of travels; but it carries the reader into quite a new country and familiarizes him with new images, personages, ideas" (*Works* VI, 411).

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The analysis of Thackeray's criticism of the productions of Scott's direct imitators, both historical romancers and novelists, has led us to the conclusion that here he figures as a judge dispensing true justice in the main. Almost all his critical judgments, including to some extent his later enthusiasm for Dumas-père and his critical attitude to Hugo's style and method (but excepting the eulogies he bestowed upon the historical novel of Mrs. Marsh) have been confirmed by posterity. In his criticism Thackeray consistently applies the basic principles of his aesthetic creed — positively appreciating only such historical novels as are devoid of romantic excesses and criticizing and parodying those which present idealized depictions of the past based upon a romantic conception of chivalry. Even in such cases where he applies predominantly extra-aesthetic criteria (in his evaluation of Dumas and Hugo), the aesthetic judgment, though relegated to the background by other considerations, is not wanting: he does not assess these writers exclusively as Frenchmen and their works as falling short of his moral standard, but also as romanticists, from the point of view of a realist. In his criticism of historical novelists, Thackeray has much to say even on the subtler issues of the art of fiction, either directly in his reviews or informal judgments, in which he touches upon the problems of composition, on the novelist's relationship to his material, on the creation of literary character, on the conduct of the narrative and the construction of the plot, or indirectly in his burlesques, in which he parodies the stereotype motifs, patterns, characters, clichés and mannerisms typical of the creative approach of the authors who are the targets for his mockery.

Before taking final leave of the chivalric romance, I feel in duty bound to take at least brief notice of the relationship between Thackeray's criticism of this type of fiction and his own imaginative work, for it is a relationship uncommonly close and fruitful and yet has not been, until the publication of Loofbourow's study, sufficiently explored. Thackeray not only paid formal critical attention to the production of the historical novelists, especially in his own country, parodied it directly in his burlesques, and even created, especially in *Esmond,* a model for the parodied writers to follow, but he also exploited, as the quoted scholar has shown, the literary mode of chivalric romance in his mature prose. Loofbourow indicates the successive stages in which Thackeray assimilated romance in the years before *Vanity Fair,* demonstrates how "his attitude toward the idealizations of romance altered and his irony became more complex as his work matured", and presents a detailed analysis of the subtle methods used by the novelist in reinterpreting and reorganizing chivalric materials in his first great novel, methods much defter, subtler and more complex

than those in *Rebecca and Rowena.* As this scholar has shown, romance in *Vanity Fair* "has a wide satiric range extending from sustained attacks on the chivalric glorification of war that culminates in Waterloo to the exposure of the morbid love-idealisms that mislead the deluded actors", but it also plays a very important functional role, together with the fashionable mode (which will be considered in more detail in one of the next sub-chapters), in Thackeray's complex concept of character and in the whole composition of his novel. Worthy of special notice is Loofbourow's analysis of Thackeray's characters in their romance context and fashionable mutation, in which he demonstrates that romance motifs "also define the actors' persistent, fundamental emotional impulses of which these false idealisms are the conventional distortions" and are associated with emotional survival, while fashionable textures, as we shall see later, are associated with psychological ambiguity, both modes being mutually indispensable — "romance tradition is a permanent reference point for fashionable parody, fashionable textures are a refracting medium for romance".[28]

II. i. THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH ROMANCE OF CRIME

The most typical products of degraded Romanticism in England and France at the time when Thackeray started his critical work were not, however, historical and chivalric romances, but romances of crime — in England represented by the so-called Newgate School of fiction and in France by some products of the so-called Satanic School, of *La Jeune France* and of some representatives of the popular *roman-feuilleton,* notably Soulié and Sue.

As I have pointed out in "Thackeray as a Reader and Critic of French Literature", Thackeray paid much attention, both as reader and critic, to the French variety of this literary fashion. As a reader he condemned (and justly) Hugo's early Satanic romances *Han d'Islande, Bug Jargal* and *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné* as infinitely surpassing "all the horrors we have in England" and Soulié's novel *Les Mémoires du diable* as an "astonishingly corrupt book", "a book worthy of its hero for its hideous licentiousness".[1] In one of his marginal comments he criticized Janin's *L'Âne mort et la femme guillotinée,* though for its immorality and not for the horrors and repulsive details it contains (obviously at least to a certain extent realizing that the work was partly meant as parody). As a critic he uncommonly sharply (and not quite justly) attacked Joseph-Pétrus Borel, the main representative of another eccentric variety of French Romanticism, *La Jeune France.* As I have shown in the quoted study in detail, in his early critical notice on Borel's *Champavert, contes immoraux*[2], Thackeray voiced serious objections to the moral content of these stories and recoiled in extreme disgust from the crimes, murders and atrocities depicted in them with much naturalistic detail, taking this work quite seriously and failing to see that its author piled horror upon horror with a definite purpose — to shock the reader and thus give expression to his vehement rebellion against respectable society and art.

More detailed critical attention was paid by Thackeray to Eugène Sue's criminal romance *Les Mystères de Paris,* in a review "Thieves' Literature of

[28] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 36, 46, 47; see also 41.
[1] For the quotations see *Letters* I, 133, 143, Garnett, op. cit., p. 152.
[2] "Foreign Correspondence, No. 1", *The National Standard,* June 29, 1833.

France" (*The Foreign Quarterly Review,* April 1843) which I investigated in detail in an earlier study,[3] summing up the results of this research in the quoted study on Thackeray's criticism of French literature. As I have shown, Thackeray sharply and justly condemns Sue's novel as "a gross, detestable, raw-head-and-bloody-bones caricature, fit to frighten children with, unworthy of an artist" and his characters as absurdly caricatured and unreal figures, rigidly schematic portraits in black-and-white, finding nothing to praise in the novel except its clever construction and undeniable interest. In the earlier study I have also pointed out that Thackeray especially resents those criminal characters whom Sue, finding in them at least some traces of humanity, depicts as victims of inevitable circumstances, i.e. the characters recruited from the criminal underworld and reformed by Prince Rodolph (Fleur de Marie and Chourineur). Although one of the main criteria Thackeray uses in the assessment of these figures is the question of their probability, of their truthfulness to life, he evaluates them at the same time from the moral point of view, applying to them his postulate of "unmixed" criminal literary character (which we shall investigate in detail when discussing his criticism of the Newgate School), measuring them by the standard of Fielding's art of creating characters of the same type, and rejecting them as figures which might exercise harmful influence upon the morals of the reader by exciting his interest and sympathy and thus indirectly leading him to sympathize with their vices and even crimes. In this aspect Thackeray's evaluation of Sue's novel is very near to his criticism of the English variety of crime fiction, the Newgate School, which he also mentions as a literary fashion already on the wane in his own country. He admits, however, that in depicting criminality and vice the French novelist has one advantage over his English brothers of the pen, who are restricted by the prejudices of squeamish Victorian society: he "is allowed to speak more freely". And in consequence of this, as Thackeray emphasizes, Sue's best achievement is his "vigorous terrible description" of the monstrous villain — an "unmixed" villain, we should add — Jacques Ferrand, who does not leave the reader in any doubt about his criminality and does not lead him "to a guilty sympathy for villany".[4] Thackeray's evaluation of this character in some points agrees with that of Belinski, but the English critic pays greater attention to the effect of Ferrand upon the morals of the reading public. As I have pointed out in both quoted studies, in its strong moralistic colouring Thackeray's assessment of Sue's characters markedly differs from that of Marx and Belinski who do not evaluate these figures from the moral point of view, but from the philosophical, social, historical and aesthetic aspects, paying, in contradistinction to Thackeray, detailed attention to their real human substance, conditioned by the social reality in which they lived, and disregarding their possible influence, harmful or beneficial, upon the morals of the reader.

As I have concluded in my study on Thackeray's criticism of French literature, in evaluating this particular variety of French Romanticism Thackeray proved to be a considerably perspicacious critic (in spite of the fact that from time to time he succumbed to his national prejudices), for almost all his critical

[3] "V. G. Belinski, Karl Marx and W. M. Thackeray on Eugène Sue's 'Les Mystères de Paris' ", see note 19, Introduction.

[4] For the quotations in this paragraph see *Works* V, 470, 471.

judgments, excepting those on Borel, have been confirmed by posterity. But it is to his criticism of the English variety of the same literary fashion that we must go for the most convincing evidence of his capacity for judging this type of fiction, for it was the fruit of his youthful energy, critical élan and principled approach: perhaps no English critic of his time attacked this literary fashion so sharply and consistently, and certainly none could boast of such success. This is fully acknowledged, however, only by very few scholars, especially by V. V. Ivasheva, and recently by Keith Hollingsworth, who in his study of this literary school, quoted in the Introduction to this work,[5] rightly pointed out that the most active opposition to the Newgate novel, which occurred in the years 1839—1840, "could not have come about without the presence of Thackeray":

"It was he who led the van, trying to arouse a not very articulate public sentiment against the prevailing enthusiasm."[6]

ii. Thackeray's Criticism of the Newgate Novelists

As I have pointed in one of my previous studies in this series, "The 'Newgate School' of Romance and its Place in the English Literature of the Eighteen-Thirties",[7] the Newgate novelists represent a literary school, generally called "the Newgate School" or "Bulwer's School", after its source of inspiration (the *Newgate Calendar*) or its acknowledged literary leader, who also provided it with a theoretical programme, summed up in his essay "On Art in Fiction" (*The Monthly Chronicle,* 1838),[8] in the chapter dealing with the creation of characters, and developed in the prefaces to his criminal romances, which are of a later date and are first and foremost defences against the sharp critical attacks of the editorial staff of *Fraser's Magazine,* especially of Thackeray.[9] Bulwer initiated the tradition with his *Paul Clifford* in 1830 (though according to Hollingworth even *The Disowned,* 1828, the villain of which is drawn from a historical criminal,[10] and *Pelham,* 1828, the chief interest of which is "hung upon the consequences of a murder" and which is "one of the earliest real tales of detection in English literature",[11] should be regarded as products of the school), and continued in *Eugene Aram* (1832), *Night and Morning* (1841) and *Lucretia; or Children of the Night* (1846). His most popular disciple was William Harrison Ainsworth with his *Rookwood* (1834), depicting the life and adventures

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[5] See note 18, Introduction.
[6] Op. cit., pp. 148—149.
[7] See note 19, Introduction.
[8] For a detailed evaluation of Bulwer's theory of fiction see H. H. Watts, "Lytton's Theories of Prose Fiction", *PMLA,* L, 1935; Michael Lloyd, "Bulwer-Lytton and the Idealising Principle", *English Miscellany,* ed. Mario Praz, 1956, vol. 7, pp. 25—39; Stang, op. cit., pp. 153—155. For the assessment of the whole Newgate school see also V. V. Ivasheva, op. cit., pp. 67—71.
[9] See his prefaces to *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram,* the after-piece "A Word to the Public", included in *Lucretia,* and a series of articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1862 and 1863.
[10] The prototype of Crauford was the banker and forger Fauntleroy.
[11] Op. cit., p. 39; Bulwer partly used here the story of the notorious murderer John Thurtell, who served him as a prototype for his murderer Thornton.

of the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin, and *Jack Sheppard* (1839), having for its hero a historical criminal — a common thief notorious for his escapes from prison. In the footsteps of these two most prominent representatives of the school there followed some not so popular writers, as for instance Charles Whitehead with several works,[12] Mrs. Frances Sheridan with her *Carwell, or Crime and Sorrow* (1830), Horace Smith with *Gale Middleton, A Story of the Present Day* (1833), etc.

The manifesto of this school provided by Bulwer is based upon a romantic conception of literature, though its originator criticizes some aspects of the creative approach of Walter Scott and of the Gothic novelists. Literature should not, he insists, imitate nature, but "exalt" it, should not depict actual reality but seek "the universal truth behind the phenomenal reality", as Lloyd[13] expressed it, should realize "the Ideal", which ought to embody "what we can imagine".[14] In harmony with this romantic conception of the aims and tasks of literature Bulwer pays great attention to the delineation of evil and criminal characters. Here, in his opinion, lies the widest scope for the novelist. His conception of the portraiture of criminal characters as a whole — with the stress laid upon the necessity of evoking the reader's sympathy for the outcast and of showing the motives and influences under which the criminal character has been formed — clearly shows that Bulwer attempted to follow in the steps of the great Romantics, especially of William Godwin and Lord Byron. In his seriously and sincerely meant purpose of revealing and criticizing the social conditions which give birth to criminality, Bulwer was even near to Dickens and Thackeray, as Hollingsworth has pointed out, and creditably differed from his imitators, especially from Ainsworth, who tried to imitate chiefly Scott and the Gothic novelists, without any purpose whatever, and whose novels, as the same scholar has it, were romances of sheer entertainment.[15] This distinction between the leader of the school and his followers, as well as the different degree of talent they possessed (for Bulwer was undoubtedly a talented writer) was also noticed by their contemporary, the critic R. H. Horne (in his book *A New Spirit of the Age* negatively reviewed by Thackeray, but not for this or the subsequent reason). Horne unfortunately exaggerated the distinction into an abysmal difference, condemning *Jack Sheppard* as unworthy of further critical notice and overestimating Bulwer as "a great novelist", whose "name will rank among the masters in the art", and whose "works will live together with theirs".[16] This magnified estimate of Bulwer is rightly rejected by Hollings-

[12] *Lives and Exploits of English Highwaymen, Pirates and Robbers* (1834) (there appeared a review of this work in *Fraser's Magazine* in the same year, under the title "Hints for a History of Highwaymen", which is attributed by some scholars to Thackeray. White, however, pronounced it to be very doubtful — Thackeray's authorship is according to him possible, but remains an unlikely possibility; see op. cit., pp. 74—75), *The Autobiography of a Notorious Legal Functionary*, also called *The Autobiography of Jack Ketch* (1834), and *Richard Savage* (1842).

[13] Op. cit., p. 29.

[14] Lord Lytton, *Pamphlets and Sketches*, The Knebworth Edition, London, 1875, p. 319; see also *Blackwood's Magazine*, XCII, August 1862, pp. 163—165, quoted by Stang, op. cit., p. 154; see also *Zanoni*, ch. IX.

[15] See op. cit., pp. 222—223.

[16] *A New Spirit of the Age*. Ed. by Richard Hengist Horne, With an Introduction by Walter Jerrold, Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, London, New York and Toronto, 1907 (The World's Classics), p. 386.

worth, but even this scholar tends in my opinion to place the Newgate novels on a higher level than they deserve. While he realizes that none of them belongs to a higher class of fiction, he sees in their authors almost innovators in the technique of the novel, insisting that by their way of creating criminal characters they "are early examples of what later fiction was to do again and again".[17] It is true that he has much to say on Bulwer's failures to realize his good intentions, but what he does not in my opinion sufficiently emphasize is the fact that both Bulwer's purpose and his theoretical views on the creation of character lose all their loftiness when translated into his creative images, which thus not only sink to the level of Ainsworth's depictions but appear even more absurd than the latter, which were created without any moral or artistic pretensions. The cause of this degradation of Bulwer's lofty ideals may in my opinion be seen in the operation of his "idealising principle", as Lloyd characterized it, which "professedly disdains the nature on which it works" and acts upon the odours of the real world as a deodorant, robbing it of both colour and warmth and of life itself.[18] Thus I think it will not be unfair to Bulwer, if I evaluate the creative approach of the Newgate novelists in general and their method of creating literary character in particular without paying any further detailed attention to the distinctions between him and his followers. In doing so I intend to draw to a certain extent upon my earlier analysis, published many years before the publication of Hollingsworth's book.

As I have pointed out in that study, one of the most characteristic features of the creative approach of Bulwer and Ainsworth is their slight interest in contemporary reality (although Bulwer's purpose is to show some of its darker aspects). They draw their subject-matter from the past, pore over the pages of the Newgate Calendar to discover materials worthy of "elevated fiction",[19] and find them in the sensational exploits of the notorious criminals of the preceding century, Eugene Aram, Dick Turpin, Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild (Paul Clifford is a fictitious character, but he, too, is placed in the England of the latter half of the eighteenth century). Thus these writers return to those historical events and persons which attracted the attention of the realistic writers of the preceding century, as I have shown in detail in the study quoted (Jonathan Wild aroused the interest of Fielding and Defoe, and Jack Sheppard of the latter novelist; Eugene Aram, on the other hand, caught the attention of William Godwin, though that writer never realized his "notion of making [Aram's story] the foundation of a novel").[20]

The approach of Bulwer and Ainsworth to the rendering of the life of these historical criminals is, however, essentially different both from Fielding's sustained satirical and ironical attack on the very foundation of the society he lived in and also from Defoe's matter-of-fact journalistic style. By exalting their characters into positive heroes, idealizing them out of knowledge, and adapting accordingly the available historical data, Bulwer and Ainsworth in fact uproot them from the soil of the historical and social conditions which gave birth to

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[17] Op. cit., p. 14.
[18] Op. cit., p. 28.
[19] Preface to the 1840 edition of *Eugene Aram*, The Knebworth Edition, p. xi.
[20] Quoted by Bulwer ibid. The story of Eugene Aram caught also the attention of Thomas Hood (see his ballad "The Dream of Eugene Aram, The Murderer", 1829).

their criminality and corrupted their moral character. Thus, in Ainsworth's depiction, Dick Turpin, cattle-lifter and murderer, becomes a gallant fellow, a choice companion, and a superb rider, Jack Sheppard, a common thief, turns into a brave and handsome hero, while Jonathan Wild is evil incarnate, a devil with "blood-thirsty eyes", and the actual role he played in the life of the historical Sheppard is overemphasized. All Bulwer's characters, including those outside his criminal romances, are unconvincing theatrical figures which "assume postures, describe gestures, impersonate qualities", as Lloyd expressed it,[21] but his Eugene Aram, the pale scholar of delicate health, makes, in the garb of the idealized hero, an especially absurd figure. His story was indeed unique in the annals of crime, since the murder he committed for money (in order to acquire the means for scientific research) was not discovered until after fourteen years. Bulwer tries to show the motives of his crime and to lay the guilt upon the social conditions which did not open to this talented man another road to science; but in fact he is more interested in the uniqueness of the case and revels in the thoughts and pangs of conscience of his hero in the period between his crime and his arrest. These absurd and unreal "historical" figures created by the Newgate novelists are surrounded by many fictitious subsidiary characters, mostly in some way mysterious, and all are linked together by means of improbable coincidences and other surprise effects. The central link of the plot is always based on a mystery (a family mystery or an undiscovered crime). The milieu in which these figures move is of course mysterious or at least unusual — the lonely hermitage of Eugene Aram, the haunts of thieves and criminals, prisons "hallowed" by Sheppard's presence and, in *Rookwood* — intentionally written in the style of Mrs. Radcliffe — vaults, churchyards and old mansions. Even nature automatically adapts its moods to the needs of the authors, and in particular of Ainsworth, who prefers night and raving elements to day and sunshine.

A special position among the Newgate novels is held by Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* which was highly estimated by Horne as an example of excellence worthy to rank with the *Beggar's Opera*,[22] and was also praised by Dickens, the author's personal friend, as an "admirable and most powerful novel" having as wide and high aims as had Gay's play, and therefore, in Dickens's opinion, not so harmful as other works of this type.[23] The novel was written at a time when the death penalty for minor offences had not yet been abolished, and transgressors were hanged for petty thefts; Bulwer's purpose, showing traces of the influence of Bentham, Rousseau and Godwin, as Hollingsworth points out,[24] was to reveal the corrupting influence of this "sanguinary Criminal Code" and "vicious Prison-discipline"[25] on the central figure. Hollingsworth rightly assesses this novel as "not merely the first but the only novel to make an open and extended attack on the criminal law" and as the first example of a new type, the "social novel", examining the life of a particular social group and exhibiting

[21] Op. cit., p. 29; see also ibid., pp. 35—36.
[22] See op. cit., p. 388.
[23] Charles Dickens, *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*. A reprint of the first edition, with the illustrations, and an introduction, biographical and bibliographical, by Charles Dickens the Younger, Macmillan and Co., London and New York, 1892, p. xviii.
[24] See op. cit., p. 71.
[25] Preface to *Paul Clifford*, The Knebworth Edition, p. vii.

an evil, namely society's treatment of the criminal. He highly appreciates the humanitarian tendency of the book, as well as its author's conception of the poor as a class at war with the other classes of society. But he ranks the novel too highly as "one of the books which now mark the time as the threshold of a new literary period",[26] and this is surely too much to say for a book which has long since fallen into deserved oblivion, and which did not fulfil its author's highly commendable purpose even in his own time, as I have pointed out in my earlier study and as Hollingsworth also admits. Paul Clifford is an unreal, improbable and idealized figure gradually developing into an admirable hero, who could never convince the readers of his moral degradation and still less of the necessity to abolish the laws which caused it. Hollingsworth is more concerned with Bulwer's depiction of the milieu of the criminal underworld than with the realism or lack of realism of the hero, but arrives at a similar conclusion to my own:

"But the impact of the fable is weak: Bulwer's slums and his house of correction are unrealistic. Actually measuring a cell did not help him. There is no life in his cardboard settings, and the flash language with which he seasons the conversations is obviously the work of an outsider attempting a trick of flavor."[27]

Bulwer's protest against some "errors", as he calls them, of his society, which had its roots in his reforming zeal at the time he wrote, remained — owing to the non-typical nature of his figures — romantic, abstract and inapplicable to real life. The absurdity of his two criminal heroes is considerably strengthened by his language, full of pompous expressions, bombastic phrases, quotations from Latin and Greek, vocative appeals (O Beautiful Evening! O thou divine spirit!) and the like. The Newgate novels of Bulwer's school are literary works of the lowest order, treating in a barbaric way the heritage of the pre-Romantic novelists and poets, degrading the hero of the Byronic type to absurdity in the ridiculous figures of glorified common criminals and trying to revive artificially the "fluttering and feeble pulses" of "old Romance", as Ainsworth expressed it,[28] in the essentially changed social and literary conditions of the eighteen-thirties. The social function which the school fulfilled in its time is now also clear — it is in its essence a literature of an escapist character (in spite of all Bulwer's pretensions), leading the attention of the readers away from contemporary reality into a non-existent romantic criminal underworld.

If we do not count *The Disowned,* which does not seem to me a very typical example of this type of fiction, the first Newgate novel Thackeray read was *Eugene Aram* (in 1832) and it is to his credit that he immediately perceived that the aesthetic assumptions it was founded on were the opposite to his own, then in the stage of their initial development. After having read it, he wrote to his mother that he was very much disappointed with it, pointing out that it was "a very forced & absurd taste to elevate a murderer for money into a hero", and criticizing the sentiments expressed in the novel as "very eloquent claptrap", finding in the whole work "no new character (except perhaps the Cor-

[26] For the quotations and references see op. cit., pp. 27, 65—66, 71, 65.

[27] Op. cit., p. 68. As Hollingsworth points out, Bulwer read books of roguery and several times visited the thieves' quarters in London (see ibid., p. 40).

[28] W. H. Ainsworth, *Rookwood,* Everyman's Library, London 1931, preface, p. 7.

poral) & no incident at all". He admitted, however, that the author did not lack wit and industry, and proceeded:

"Bulwer has a high reputation for talent & yet I always find myself competing with him — this I suppose must be vanity — If it is truth why am I idle?" (*Letters* I, 198).

In my opinion it was not vanity, as Thackeray too modestly thought and as Hollingsworth obviously to some extent also believes,[29] for even if he did not write "his novel" for many years to come, the germ of the novelist was in him even at that early date, as his first literary attempts, following after a very short interval of time, prove. What made him revolt was certainly rather his healthy literary taste, at that time already well developed, and his budding realistic conception of literature and art. His early distaste for Bulwer's creative principles was probably assuming its more definite shape under the influence of his friendship with Maginn in those years and was certainly fully developed when he became, a few years later, a regular contributor to *Fraser's Magazine.*

The editorial staff of this periodical launched a sharp critical campaign against Bulwer in the year of its foundation (1830), when Maginn attacked some aspects of Bulwer's creative approach, especially as they were manifested in his criminal romances. An important phase of this campaign was the parody of Bulwer's novel *Eugene Aram,* published under the title *Elizabeth Brownrigge* in August and September 1832, which was for a long time wrongly ascribed to Thackeray,[30] but was probably written, as Dr. Thrall believes, by Maginn in collaboration with Lockhart.[31] Even though Hollingsworth states that this attack on Bulwer, as well as all the other assaults on *Eugene Aram* and *Paul Clifford,* made chiefly by Maginn and Lockhart in the 1830s, were motivated by "reasons calculated to enlist the support of right-thinking people", "the critics' conviction that the novels had a dangerous tendency" seems to him "the least of their motives".[32] In my opinion, however, the whole Fraserian campaign and especially *Elizabeth Brownrigge* deserve of a somewhat fairer assessment, for in the latter especially, the critics did not wholly neglect even the potential danger inherent in Bulwer's crime fiction. It is true that their main purpose was to parody the chief weak points of Bulwer's creative method (later attacked also by Thackeray) — his cavalier treatment of historical material, too detailed descriptions of milieu, sentimental depictions of executions, showy display of learning, predilection for addressing the reader in lengthy digressions in which meditation upon moral and philosophical problems is accompanied by numerous Latin and Greek quotations, his way of introducing the chapters by quotations from poetry (often from Greek or Latin originals) and his pompous language. They paid at least some attention, however, to Bulwer's way of ascribing subtle feelings and high spiritual qualities to common criminals, thus mixing virtue and vice together in "an inextricable confusion",[33] gaining the sympathies of the readers for low ruffians,

[29] See op. cit., p. 149.

[30] For the history of the conjectures as to the authorship of the parody see Melville, op. cit., I, 131—134; see also White, op. cit., p. 73. Spielmann believed that it had been written by Douglas Jerrold.

[31] See op. cit., p. 63. Dr. Thrall also points out that Maginn, probably in collaboration with Lockhart, satirized the imitators of Scott and criminal romances as early as 1827 in his novel *Whitehall, or the Days of George the Fourth.*

[32] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 97—98.

[33] For the quotation see *Stray Papers,* p. 425.

and so exercising harmful influence upon the morals of the reading public. Thackeray's attacks on Bulwer continue along these basic lines established by Maginn, but the young critic soon outgrew his teacher. As V. V. Ivasheva has shown,[34] his evaluation of the Newgate School is incomparably deeper and more strongly based on principle, for though he also condemns its products from the ethical point of view, as the other Fraserians do, he pays much more attention than they did to the social function of this literature. We should add, however, that Ivasheva included in the analysis which led to this conclusion — and which in my opinion is a correct conclusion and applicable to all those criticisms of the Newgate School which have been definitely assigned to Thackeray — some of the reviews published in *Fraser's Magazine* which she regards as the work of Thackeray, as I have shown in the first chapter,[35] but which cannot be safely attributed to him and were included by White among disallowed attributions.

Thackeray started his criticism of the Newgate School first with book reviews and then gradually made use of all the forms of criticism he had at his disposal — polemical work, satire, parody, marginal critical comments in several works of his not concerned with this school (especially in his review of Fielding's works, of Sue's novel *Les Mystères de Paris* and in *The Irish Sketch Book*), as well as in his letters. As far as the reviews are concerned I include only the two which Professor White has not explicitly rejected as not being by Thackeray but which in my opinion sound very much like his work (although they remain doubtful and have not been reprinted) — the review of Catnach's street ballads "Horae Catnachianae, A Dissertation on Ballads, with a few unnecessary remarks on Jonathan Wild, John Sheppard, Paul Clifford, and — Fagin, Esqrs." (*Fraser's Magazine,* April 1839), which contains, as its sub-title suggests, a longer *exposé* of the whole school, and the even more doubtful "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard" (*Fraser's Magazine,* February 1840).[35a] The other works to be discussed are his polemical work *Catherine. A Story* (published from May 1839 to February 1840 in *Fraser's Magazine* under the pseudonym Ikey Solomons, Esq., Junior),[36] his novel *Barry Lyndon* (published originally under the title *The Luck of Barry Lyndon, A Romance of the Last Century,* By Fitz-Boodle, in *Fraser's Magazine* between January 1844 and December 1844), and his parody *George de Barnwell.* By Sir E. L. B. L., Bart. (published in *Punch* from April 3 to 17, 1847, in the series *Punch's Prize Novelists,* later called *Novels by Eminent Hands*).

[34] See op. cit., p. 74.

[35] See note 47, Chapter I, part II.

[35a] It was not until after I had sent this work to the printers that Professor White informed me in a letter about the most recent evidence (provided by an editorial assistant working with Professor Walter Houghton) which confirms his listing of "Hints for a History of Highwaymen" (see note 12 above) as a disallowed attribution and thus makes Thackeray's authorship of "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard", a review assumedly written by the same author, even more improbable than it previously seemed. Unfortunately this piece of information came too late for me to be able to make the necessary extensive revision in the text, and so the review is still treated, except in the index, as it originally was by Professor White, namely as "the most doubtful item" on the list of Thackeray's contributions to *Fraser's Magazine.*

[36] The name was borrowed from a historical criminal Isaac or Ikey Solomon, who became notorious as the most successful of London fences and served also Dickens, as Hollingsworth points out, as one of the prototypes for Fagin (see op. cit., p. 112).

As I have shown in detail in the second chapter, from the beginning of his literary and critical career Thackeray adhered to the realistic conception of literature and especially of fiction as the faithful imitation of life, possessing great instructive value and playing a very important role in the life of human society, especially by educating the readers to virtue and goodness. These basic criteria are also applied by him in his criticism of the Newgate novels which are found by him wanting in every respect. In all his criticisms of this school Thackeray first and foremost emphasizes that the authors of criminal romances depict the chosen sphere of life untruthfully, that they ennoble and glorify common London thieves, who rob the butchers and bakers on the Strand, turn them into Byronic heroes and thus idealize them out of recognition, and place these absurd figures in an unreal milieu of the romanticized criminal underworld. At the same time he appeals to these writers insisting that they should at last depict the criminals in their real likenesses, without any poetical embellishments and speculative dreaming. The ways in which he applies this criterion are several. In the first place, he formulates it explicitly, either in marginal remarks in his reviews or in his polemical comments in *Catherine* and *Barry Lyndon.* His creative purpose in *Catherine* is for instance summed up in the following comment, very similar to that from *Barry Lyndon* quoted in the second chapter as the illustration of his conception of beauty and truth in fiction:

"The public will hear of nothing but rogues; and the only way in which poor authors, who must live, can act honestly by the public and themselves, is to paint such thieves as they are; not dandy, poetical, rose-water thieves, but real downright scoundrels, leading scoundrelly lives, drunken, profligate, dissolute, low, as scoundrels will be" (*Works* III, 46).

In the second place, he applies this criterion in his critical analysis of the criminal characters created by the Newgate novelists. If he is concerned with such characters as were created after real historical prototypes (Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard, Jonathan Wild and Dick Turpin, Bulwer's Eugene Aram), Thackeray always confronts them with their models, about whom he obviously knew much from authentic historical materials — the *Newgate Calendar,* the newspapers of the given time and street ballads. He always prefers these primary sources — the actual reality — to fiction, and repeatedly points out that they provide the reader with much better instruction about these criminals than the idealized depiction in the Newgate novels. Thus for instance his review "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard" (if it is really his) contains a very interesting confrontation of Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* with the historical criminal and the very remarkable statement that any glorification does Sheppard's character "perfect injustice", for the "plain history of his case, if rightly taken, is infinitely more sad than all the heroics and lamentations of Mr. Ainsworth". In the reviewer's opinion, if Ainsworth had depicted Sheppard's story truthfully, "he might not only have pointed a better moral, but have more adorned his tale".[37] Thackeray also demonstrates to the Newgate novelists how the authentic sources should be used, by selecting as the material for his *Catherine* one of the most brutal murders in the annals of crime straight from the *Newgate*

[37] For the quotations see "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard", pp. 237, 238.

Calendar[38] and assuring his readers in his authorial comments that he would follow his source with great accuracy:

"We are obliged, in recording this history, to follow accurately that great authority, the *Calendarium Newgaticum Roagorumque Registerium*, of which every lover of literature in the present day knows the value; and as that remarkable work totally discards all the unities of its narratives, and reckons the life of its heroes only by their actions, and not by periods of time, we must follow in the wake of this mighty ark — a humble cockboat. When it pauses, we pause; when it runs ten knots an hour, we run with the same celerity" (*Works* III, 113—114).[39]

In two instances — in his depictions of the discovery of Hayes's body and of the execution of Catherine — he even prefers the authentic newspaper accounts to any artistic elaboration. As Loofbourow rightly points out in assessing the first instance, this "insertion of a lump of unassimilated journalism is a crude device; it represents an early phase in Thackeray's integration of 'realism' with allusive parody".[40] In this early stage of his development, however, Thackeray believed that this device helped him to make his point about realism, as the following justification of his procedure in the second instance shows:

"If the critic take the pains to ask why the author, who hath been so diffuse in describing the early and fabulous acts of Mrs. Catherine's existence, should so hurry off the catastrophe where a deal of the very finest writing might have been employed, Solomons replies that the 'ordinary' narrative as above condensed by him, is far more emphatic than any composition of his own could be, with all the rhetorical graces which he might employ" (*Works* III, 183).

The outcome of Thackeray's procedure is, as Loofbourow has shown, that the "climax of *Catherine* is a pastiche of imitation and quotation, recalling the kind of wit perfected by Swift in 'The Tale of a Tub': it ceases to be a novel and becomes an essay skillfully woven of random fragments".[41] With the exception of these two instances, however, Thackeray, as Colby has also shown, did not follow his authentic sources slavishly, but engrafted previous incidents and subsidiary themes, and added some characters. As this latter scholar has rightly pointed out, however, his additions have nothing in common with the embellishments of reality presented by the Newgate novelists:

"Among the ways in which Thackeray fools his readers is by leading them to suppose that he is following his chronicle source slavishly. Actually he introduces details of Catherine's early life for which he had no source, giving her, for example, a lover and a son besides a husband. He seems then to be doing what he upbraids Ainsworth, Bulwer, and Company for doing — embroidering upon reality — but he does it with a difference. The incidents that he takes over from the documentary evidence — the tumultuous marriage of Catherine and John Hayes, the murder of Hayes, and the execution of the culprits — establish his point that fact is at once more interesting and more horrible than romance can make it. On the other hand, his unique additions to the record — which occur mainly prior to the climactic episodes — illustrate his conception of the novelist's proper function and purpose."[42]

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[38] According to Hollingsworth, from the Rev. John Villette's *Annals of Newgate*, London, 1776, I, 394—428 (see op. cit., p. 250, note 96).

[39] See also *Works* III, 78, 79, 31—32; for his preferring newspapers and street-ballads to fiction see "Horae Catnachianae", pp. 408—409, 407.

[40] Op. cit., p. 22.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Op. cit., pp. 390—391; see also ibid., p. 383.

Thackeray does not rest content, however. with verifying the truthfulness of the historical criminal characters in the Newgate novels by means of confrontation with authentic historical material. He confronts them, too, with the masterly artistic elaboration of the identical human material in the works of the 18th-century realists, in Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* and Gay's *Beggar's Opera.* In both his reviews, and in *Catherine,* Thackeray compares Fielding's depiction of Jonathan Wild with the sham criminals in the Newgate novels and does so in passages which have close resemblances to each other. He castigates in them the Newgate novelists (and also Dickens as the author of *Oliver Twist*) for their lack of knowledge of the sphere of life and characters they choose for depiction and extols Fielding as a model to imitate in this respect:

"Fielding, now, *had* some experience about such characters; and oh! with what a difference of humour and perception did he view and write about them. Dickens's Jew, Fagin, is one of the cleverest actors that ever appeared on the stage; but, like a favourite actor, the Jew is always making points to tickle the ears of the audience. We laugh at his jokes, because we are a party to them, as it were, and receive at every fresh epigram a knowing wink from the old man's eye, which lets us into the whole secret. Look, now, at Jonathan Wild the Great — the great, indeed. See how gravely he goes to work, how simply, how unconsciously. There is no leering and bandying with the galleries, to tell you that he is not what he seems; no joking and epigrams about his profession: he is in earnest, as the author was when he described him; as earnest as a great man would be with a great purpose. Fagin is only a clever portrait, with some of the artist's mannerism — a mask, from behind which somebody is uttering bitterest epigrams, — not an immortal man, like the celebrated Jonathan Wild."[43]

As all his statements regarding Jonathan Wild imply, Thackeray very much resented the fact that such a second-rate novelist as Ainsworth had dared to take this historical criminal from the masterly hands of Fielding and Gay and present him, after the immortal creations of the 18th-century masters, as a "ranting, frowning, braggadocio character"[44] resembling figures in cheap farces and having nothing in common with its prototype. This opinion is perhaps most convincingly expressed in the following passage from "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard":

"It is a pity to see the hero of Fielding and the prototype of Peachum swelling into fits of passion, — talking, like meaner knaves, of being actuated by vows in heaven, — snivelling over recollections of bygone love, — in fact, doing in reality what in the hands of other artists, who knew something of what they were about, he is made to burlesque."[45]

In the same review the critic also protests against Ainsworth's having made Wild, in contradistinction to actual reality, a downright assassin:

"He had, no doubt, much to answer for; but his execution was as criminal as any of his own criminal acts. He was hanged, on the most wretched evidence, for a crime in which he was not the principal, under a law directly enacted to entrap him. Why he was sacrificed, it would take us too much space to inquire; but to assign the reasons at length ought to afford another chapter to the history of the most corrupt period of the history of our country."[46]

As follows from the preceding, another critical standard used by Thackeray in his evaluation of the character of Jonathan Wild created by Ainsworth

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[43] "Horae Catnachianae", pp. 408—409.
[44] *Works* II, 486.
[45] "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard", p. 237.
[46] Ibid., pp. 241—242.

was Gay's Peachum in the *Beggar's Opera.* He realized that there was a substantial difference between Fielding's approach and that of Gay to the same prototype and at the same time clearly saw that the wit and satire of both Gay and Fielding have a wide social range and that therefore their works contain a hidden moral lesson which the reader would seek in vain in Ainsworth's shallow romance. The latter depicts the sensational exploits of the historical criminal for their own sake with the single purpose of astonishing the reader and attracting his attention. Thackeray's standpoint is perhaps best expressed in the concluding passage of his *Catherine:*

"In the dreadful satire of *Jonathan Wild,* no reader is so dull as to make the mistake of admiring, and can overlook the grand and hearty contempt of the author for the character he has described; the bitter wit of the *Beggars' Opera,* too, hits the great, by showing their similarity with the wretches that figure in the play; and though the latter piece is so brilliant in its mask of gaiety and wit, that a very dull person may not see the dismal reality thus disguised, moral, at least, there is in the satire, for those who will take the trouble to find it" (*Works* III, 186).[47]

In one case Thackeray confronts Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard with another historical criminal, James Freeny, who published his own autobiography:

"Whereas, in Freeny's life, one man may see the evil of drinking, another the harm of horse-racing, another the danger attendant on early marriage, a fourth the exceeding inconvenience as well as hazard of the heroic highwayman's-life — which a certain Ainsworth, in company with a certain Cruikshank, has represented as so poetic and brilliant, so prodigal of delightful adventure, so adorned with champagne, gold-lace, and brocade" (*Works* V, 164).

In this case Thackeray included also Cruikshank in his rebuke, but when he had earlier considered this artist's illustrations in Ainsworth's *Sheppard,* he placed them high above the text they accompanied and used them as his critical standard for evaluating the latter. In his opinion it was Cruikshank who possessed "a real genius for the terrible as well as for the ridiculous", whose description was therefore "much more brilliant" than the writer's and who "really created the tale", while Ainsworth, "as it were, only put words to it". Ainsworth requires many pages of laboured description to describe for instance the fury of the storm, and yet his words pass clean away from the memory, while Cruikshank represents it in one page which remains before the mind's eye.[48]

It need not be particularly stressed that Thackeray applies his postulate of the truthfulness of the literary character to life not only to the figures of historical criminals, but also to the fictitious personages created by the Newgate novelists, including in his rebukes, for instance, Paul Clifford and Dickens's Nancy.

In the third place, Thackeray juxtaposes to the idealized criminals of the Newgate novelists his own harshly realistic depiction of the same types. This he did for the first time in *Catherine,* which he intended to present to his readers as a drastic medicine against the fashion of criminal romances, a medicine which would arouse in them a wholesome nausea and cure them for ever of their sympathies for criminals. As we have seen, with this purpose in mind he selected

[47] See also ibid., p. 236.
[48] See *Works* II, 484.

from the *Newgate Calendar* an appallingly brutal murder committed by Catherine Hayes (1690—1726) and her accomplices upon her husband. The plot of the novel is situated in the period when this crime was actually perpetrated (the first quarter of the 18th century), but the author's main purpose is not the depiction of the historical background and social relationships of the given epoch. His interest is concentrated upon his criminal characters and their actions, which he intends not only to condemn but also to expose in all their brutality and hideousness. This essential purpose of his is also emphasized in his authorial comments, as for instance the following, to give one not yet quoted:

"But we are bound to stick closely, above all, by THE TRUTH — the truth, though it be not particularly pleasant to read of or to tell" (*Works* III, 78).

From this Truth, in the depiction of which he consults "nature and history, rather than the prevailing taste and the general manner of authors", Thackeray does not intend to depart at any price, not even "for the sake of the most brilliant episode, — no, not for a bribe of twenty extra guineas per sheet",[49] and he is therefore not interested in building up a complex plot packed with sensational and breathtaking events. The character of his depiction of this Truth is determined by his polemical and parodistic purpose, his main media being the ironic approach with which he extols and exaggerates what deserves to be condemned and castigated, and the direct invectives addressed to the Newgate novelists. A no less important medium, however, is that of his parodies, recently very penetratingly analysed by Colby and Loofbourow. Until the publication of Colby's article and Loofbourow's book,[50] Thackerayan scholars were concerned only with the individual parodistic passages, characterizing the chapter "Thames at Midnight" as a parody of Ainsworth's style, Catherine's appointment with Galgenstein at St. Margaret's churchyard as that of Bulwer's approach, the depiction of Hayes's murder as being parodistically aimed at similar episodes in *Oliver Twist* and most Newgate novels, the *tableaux* at the end of the story at Yates and Davidge who, as Hollingsworth has shown, put on stage versions of *Oliver Twist* and *Jack Sheppard,* and at Crummles, "an instrument of Dickens' satire in *Nickleby*".[51] Colby has demonstrated in addition to this and to his above-quoted comment on Thackeray's attack on *Devereux* and popular historical romance in general, that the graveyard episode is also aimed at the Gothic novel, though in this particular case Thackeray's burlesque "counteracts any effect of horror that he may have intended", for the midnight meeting "is treated in so pseudo-genteel and pseudo-romantic a manner as to remove all gruesomeness from the episode". As the same scholar has pointed out, in Brock and Macshane, Thackeray "deflates the pseudo-epical style of the military novelists then in vogue", in his characterization of Tom he "upsets a more hallowed tradition in fiction — the improving tale for children" (especially Miss Edgeworth's much imitated *Moral Tales* and *Early Lessons*), in his depiction of the ball at Marylebone Gardens he satirizes the Silver-Fork novel, while his reference to Count Galgenstein as a maniac in prison is a travesty

[49] For the quotations see *Works* III, 31 and 79.
[50] Both works appeared in 1964 and the two scholars have clearly arrived at their conclusions, in some points remarkably similar, independently of each other.
[51] Op. cit., p. 157.

of Stanton's narrative of his similar ordeal in *Melmoth the Wanderer.*[52] Colby therefore rightly sees in *Catherine* a predecessor of *Punch's Prize Novelists* and *Vanity Fair,* pointing out that Thackeray's parody "is more pervasive than is generally realized, extending to romanticism and sentimentality in any guise" and emphasizing that this succession of literary parodies helps Thackeray to make his point about realism:

"'Fine writing' — false pathos, false elegance, false sublimity, as well as false terror, any prettifying of life — is actually what Thackeray has been castigating throughout his novel-on-novels where the idiocies of popular romance are whipped like the wretched Count Galgenstein. *Catherine* then is a wide-ranging, if sometimes heavy-handed and splay-footed, literary satire."[53]

Loofbourow, too, presents a very pertinent analysis in evaluating *Catherine* as "unmistakably part of Thackeray's artistic development", in contradistinction to *Barry Lyndon* which, as an imitation of Fielding's *Jonathan Wild,* offered Thackeray "little scope for originality". As Loofbourow points out, in *Catherine* Thackeray elaborately exploits "textures of 'fashionable' prose — the sentimental convention and its variant, the romance of crime", combining "the sentimental parody of Mrs. Gore with a sterner satire on the lofty perversions of Bulwer". The reunion of Catherine and the Count is described "in language that modulates through the saccharine harmonies of Mrs. Gore to the reedy resonance of Bulwer Lytton", while "*Catherine's* dénouement is a travesty of fashionable melodrama where Thackeray's insistence on the violence of real crime exposes the psychological impulse responsible for the popularity of criminal romance":

"The etherealized brutality of Bulwer Lytton's novels had accustomed the public to a satisfaction it would not own by name. Thackeray insists on the unpalatable reality."[54]

The melodramatic retribution which meets the Count is according to this scholar "a further parody designed to satirize the sensational conclusions in which Bulwer Lytton distributed poetic justice". In Loofbourow's summing-up, although "*Catherine's* expressive textures often fail to integrate with the narrative, they are forced to work together, and if their conjunction is sometimes constrained, it is always fruitful".[55]

The next opportunity for creating a criminal character faithful to life and not glamorized was provided for Thackeray in his historical novel *Barry Lyndon,* written intentionally in imitation of Fielding's *Jonathan Wild.* That the imitation was conscious and deliberate is obvious not only from the chosen theme and its handling but also from Thackeray's aside to the reader in the conclusion of the novel, already noted, in which he explains his intentions and aims, protests once more against the sentimentalized depiction of life in popular romances and again uses Fielding's works as his critical standard of literary excellence:

"Who knows, then, but the old style of Molière and Fielding, who drew from nature, may come into fashion again, and replace the terrible, the humorous, always the genteel

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[52] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 387, 385, 386.
[53] Op. cit., p. 388; for the above quotation see ibid., p. 385.
[54] Op. cit., p. 21; for the above quotations see ibid., pp. 11, 19, 20, 21.
[55] Ibid., p. 11; for the above quotation see ibid., p. 22.

impossible now in vogue? Then, with the sham characters, the sham *moral* may disappear. The one is a sickly humbug as well as the other" (*Works* VI, 310—311).

In *Barry Lyndon* Thackeray originally intended to provide an effective conclusion to his polemical exchanges with the Newgate novelists by satirizing both the rascal whom he chose for his titular personage and the criminal romances which idealized him. Thus he actually attempted to do the same thing as Fielding had done in his *Jonathan Wild.* But Thackeray's novel, like that of his master, outgrew the confines of a polemic: the novelist not only presented an effective contrast to the romantic criminals then in vogue in his truthful picture of a cynical adventurer, he also realistically depicted the historical conditions in which his anti-hero lived. The novel is therefore first and foremost a work of art and not a polemical and critical weapon. With the exception of the final passage, from which I quoted above, and some commentaries later on deleted, there are no direct invectives addressed to the Newgate novelists, and parodistic passages do not appear at all. The figure of the titular personage, however, is a mighty argument in Thackeray's strife with Bulwer and his disciples — it is a character socially conditioned, fully typical of his time and milieu, and therefore convincing: he is not a traditional picaresque hero, nor the glamorized criminal of Sheppard's type and he is never absurd, as are the figures created by Bulwer and Ainsworth. In spite of these commendable traits, however, Barry is not an equal counterpart to Jonathan Wild. In depicting him Thackeray attempted to imitate Fielding's ironical approach, but he toned it down and did not adhere to it consistently, as Miss Touster has convincingly shown.[56] This was one of the reasons why he did not achieve that intense and venomous bitterness which renders the *Jonathan Wild* of his master a grim satirical picture of Swiftian greatness, revealing the rule of wrong, greed and oppression which operates throughout propertied society. The modification of his irony was not, however, the only reason for his partial success. V. V. Ivasheva has demonstrated that the causes of the comparative weakness of his satire should be sought for in Thackeray's not having successfully revealed the social relationships and contradictions of the given period with such penetrating clarity and in failing to intertwine the fortunes of his main character with those of great historical personages and with momentous historical events so closely as his predecessor had done.[57]

The fourth point is that Thackeray showed the Newgate novelists and Bulwer in particular how absurd their idealized figures of criminals actually were, in his parody of *Eugene Aram, George de Barnwell.* He called his parody after the main personage of George Lillo's domestic tragedy *The London Merchant; or, The History of George Barnwell* (1731) which was based, like Bulwer's *Eugene Aram,* upon a real story, preserved in a popular ballad, about an apprentice who murdered his uncle to secure the means for his dissipations. Thackeray chose this tragedy and its main characters (Barnwell and Millwood, his mistress, who instigates him to crime) because it depicts, like *Eugene Aram,* a murder committed for money and because the main motif running through the whole play has much in common with that of Bulwer's criminal romance —

[56] See Eva Beach Touster, "The Literary Relationship of Thackeray and Fielding", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* vol. XLVI, 1947, pp. 390—391.
[57] See op. cit., pp. 11—13.

that the environment sins against the hero more than he sins himself. As Ray has pointed out, Thackeray was especially exasperated by Bulwer's depicting his murderer "as a saintly figure of universal genius" and by his not merely palliating the murder, but actually justifying it. The edition of 1846, which gave an immediate impulse to Thackeray's parody, contained the following passage, quoted by Ray, in which Aram described his crime and which was deleted by the author from the 1849 revision of *Eugene Aram* as a result of Thackeray's criticism:

"I felt as if I and my intended victim had been left alone in the world. I had wrapped myself above fear into a high and preternatural madness of mind. *I looked on the deed I was about to commit as a great and solemn sacrifice to Knowledge, whose priest I was.* The very silence breathed to me of a stern and awful sanctity — the repose, not of the charnel house, but of the altar."

As Ray further points out, not only "did Bulwer fail to repudiate this view; he even seemed to suggest that there was something to be said for it. At the end of the novel he relates of his hero, Walter Lester,

'In every emergency, in every temptation, there rose to his eyes the fate of him so gifted, so noble in much, so formed for greatness in all things, blasted by one crime — self-sought, but self-denied; a crime, the offspring of bewildered reasonings — all the while speculating upon virtue. And that fate, revealing the darker secrets of our kind, in which the true science of morals is chiefly found, taught him the twofold lesson, — caution for himself, and charity for others. He knew henceforth that even the criminal is not all evil; the angel within us is not easily expelled; it survives sin, ay, and many sins, and leaves us sometimes in amaze and marvel at the good that lingers round the heart even of the hardiest offender.' "[58]

Hollingsworth, on the other hand, in spite of the above evidence presented by Ray, does not agree with him that Bulwer justified Aram's murder, though he realizes that in this particular place of his story Bulwer should have commented upon Aram's attitude and dissociated himself from it, and also points out that "the tone of the book is not quite right":

"Although Aram never, not even at the end, seems morally heroic, it is possible to suppose at times that the author thinks him so."[59]

According to Hollingsworth, Bulwer chose an important and original theme, which was also noticed and highly appreciated by Horne[60] ("that the intellect might delude and that Eugene Aram had made himself the victim of a selfish rationalization"), but the novelist "lacked the spiritual firmness to deal with it greatly, and subjected it to indignity and triviality". Hollingsworth sees Bulwer's main weak point in his "failure to dissociate himself from his hero — basically a failure of imagination and of technique" and points out that Thackeray knew this very well:

"But who wanted to read a technical criticism? Thackeray set himself instead to exploiting the novel satirically and to alienating its readers."[61]

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[58] For the quotations see *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 392 (quoted from *Eugene Aram*, London, 1840, p. 408).

[59] Op. cit., p. 92; see also ibid., p. 255n.

[60] See op. cit., p. 387.

[61] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 217, 91, 92, 216.

Thackeray's parody is then aimed mainly at the distortion of the historical reality in Bulwer's novel, at the glorification of criminals and justification of crime. He succeeded perfectly in ridiculing the romantic figure of the pale scholar of noble manners, kind heart and noble spirit, a serious student of the philosophical problems of life and death, whom Bulwer created from the historical prototype and endowed with the halo of a martyr. He achieved this by transferring the characteristic traits of Bulwer's philosophizing murderer on Lillo's character of the prosaic shop-assistant. His Barnwell, like Aram and other criminal characters created by Bulwer (for instance Paul Clifford), constantly soliloquies in a very pompous manner about the Sublime, the Truthful and the Ideal, quotes from Latin and Greek literature, speaks with the great representatives of the English literature of the 18th century as their equal, presents himself as a morally pure and virtuous man — and at the same time is a common thief who robs the till of his uncle, the owner of the shop where he is employed, and then murders him. In the chapter "The Condemned Cell" Thackeray parodies the sentimental descriptions of the condemned criminals in the Newgate novels, ridicules Bulwer's idealistic philosophical and aesthetic principles and condemns his tendencies to justify Aram's crime. The criminal Barnwell, with whom even the gaoler sympathizes and who is mourned over by the Venerable Chaplain of the prison as an honest man with a kind heart, declares before his death that he does not regret his deed, as he rid "the world of a sordid worm". This is a paraphrase of a similar statement expressed, as Thackeray points out, "much more eloquently in the ingenious romance of *Eugene Aram*" — "I have destroyed a man noxious to the world!" — which Thackeray quotes in a footnote, confessing to "a gross plagiarism".[62] He puts his own view of this justification of crime in the mouth of the Chaplain who comes to give Aram the last consolation before the execution and who points out that

> "the Tragedy of To-morrow will teach the World that Homicide is not to be permitted even to the most amiable Genius, and that the lover of the Ideal and the Beautiful, as thou art, my son, must respect the Real likewise" (*Works* VIII, 97—98).

In his parody Thackeray uses various media — exaggeration, contrast, irony and satire. He gives his work a special composition, selecting examples from Bulwer's imaginary novel and joining them together by his polemical commentary. But the examples predominate over the commentary and in them he masterly parodies Bulwer's magniloquent style filled up with pompous phrases, learned and foreign words and substantivized adjectives written with capital letters (the last characteristic trait of Bulwer's style irritated Thackeray extremely, from his first acquaintance with the novelist's works to the end of his professional critical career[63]). His parody is thus a wholesale attack on Bulwer's style and creative approach in general and on his method of creating characters in particular.

The second basic criterion which Thackeray applies to the criminal characters created by the Newgate novelists is what Hollingsworth calls his "extraordinary" doctrine "that virtue and vice must not be confused; since not to be confused, they must not be mingled in the same character, and vice must not even be

[62] For the quotations see *Works* VIII, 97 and note.
[63] See e.g. *Works* IX, 188, *Contributions,* 176.

made interesting".[64] It was a doctrine applied also by Maginn in his criticism of the Newgate novelists, especially in *Elizabeth Brownrigge,* as we have seen above, and also in an earlier comment of his quoted by Hollingsworth.[65] It is most probable that Thackeray took this doctrine straight from Maginn's hands and not from its original source, not referred to by Hollingsworth. Johnson's essay in the fourth number of *The Rambler* of 31 March 1750, with which we shall be concerned in greater detail in one of the following sub-chapters. The reasons why I think so are several. The first is the obviously not very enthusiastic opinion of Johnson which Thackeray entertained in the years of his professional critical career. This we shall investigate when dealing with his criticism of the English 18th-century fiction. The second is Thackeray's dissociation from Johnson's criticism of Fielding, also to be dealt with later, and the third, perhaps the most important, is the fact that in the 1830s and 1840s Thackeray did not apply this doctrine to Fielding, as did Johnson in the essay, which, as Mayo has it, was "a conscious or unconscious rejoinder to Fielding's theory of the novel as expressed in the initial chapter of *Tom Jones*", and possibly, too, an answer to "Fielding's various satirical references to those 'models of perfection' that are commonly introduced into novels but are never encountered in real life".[66] As I have pointed out in the second chapter, Thackeray, like Fielding, dissociated himself from unmixed positive characters, from admirable heroes, both in his theory and practice, especially in the 1830s and 1840s, and in his own works of fiction of this period presented to his readers either negative characters of unmixed rascality (Catherine, Stubbs, Barry Lyndon), or else (and these formed a far greater number) characters of the mixed kind, neither totally good nor bad, whose "greatest virtues", as Fielding expressed it, are "obscured and allayed by their vices, and those again softened and coloured over by their virtues".[67] In the creation of both his unmixed rascals and mixed characters he drew much, as we have also seen, upon Fielding's creative approach. And yet he categorically declared, in his reviews of the Newgate novels (as well as in assessing Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* and, as we shall see later, some French romantic dramas, and Bulwer's novels *Ernest Maltravers* and *Godolphin*), that virtue and vice should not be mixed in one character. Hollingsworth commented upon this paradox in the following words:

> "In practice he did not keep this mistaken rigor, but the unhappy error was in the texture of his character, to connect itself with his major work as an artist. For Thackeray, among the most sensitive of all authors to the qualities of personality, was deliberately denying his own perceptions. He must have felt uneasily that he was avoiding a truth, evading what he well knew of the complexity of human beings."[68]

Hollingsworth of course concentrates only on Thackeray's criticism of the particular literary school he is investigating, the Newgate School, and so his

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[64] Op. cit., p. 156.
[65] See ibid., p. 93 (quoted from *Fraser's Magazine,* V, February 1832, p. 112).
[66] Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines 1740–1815.* With a catalogue of 1375 magazine novels and novelettes, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 99.
[67] *Selected Essays of Henry Fielding,* Ed. with Introduction and Notes by Gordon Hall Gerould, Athenaeum Press Series, Ginn & Company, Boston, New York, Chicago, London, 1905, p. 84 (from *Jonathan Wild*); see also *Tom Jones,* Book X, ch. 1.
[68] Op. cit., p. 164.

statement must be somewhat corrected. He does not sufficiently emphasize that as a critic Thackeray applied this "extraordinary doctrine" almost exclusively in his criticism of the second-rate criminal romances manufactured in his country and in France, though he did commit the mistake (to be dealt with later) of including, among the inferior authors of such works, Dickens as the creator of Fagin, Sikes and Nancy, and of too categorically condemning similar types of criminal or vicious characters to be found in the dramatic productions of the two main representatives of *L'École romantique,* Hugo and Dumas. His criticism of the 1830s and 1840s does not apply this doctrine to criminal characters created by the great novelists and writers of the preceding century; on the contrary, as we have seen, he extols Fielding's Jonathan Wild and the characters in Gay's *Beggar's Opera* as models for the Newgate novelists of how such types should be depicted. Nor does he apply this doctrine, with the exceptions stated above, in his criticism of the same period which does not concern Newgate novels. As critic he finds nothing morally defective or harmful in the "mixed" characters created by such writers of genius as Shakespeare, Cervantes, Lesage, Chaucer, Jean Paul, etc., nor in those created by Fielding, as we shall see later, including Tom Jones, against whom Johnson's essay was chiefly directed, although its author did not explicitly name this hero. All these reasons lead me to the conclusion either that Thackeray was not directly inspired at all by Johnson's doctrine, but only by a similar theory of Maginn, or else regarded the doctrine as applicable only in a very limited sense, to the "mixed" characters created by Bulwer and the other Newgate novelists, or by the above-quoted French writers.

In applying this doctrine Thackeray again makes use of all the opportunities offered him by his criticism and imaginative work. He formulates it explicitly, especially in a marginal comment in his review of Sue's novel[69] and in his polemically pointed commentary to *Catherine,* in which he rebukes the Newgate novelists (and Sue) for endowing their criminal characters with numerous virtues and at the same time for not expressing sufficiently clearly and unambiguously their negative attitude to the depicted evil. Thus their works lack the hidden moral which the works of Fielding and Gay possess, they tear down the barrier between virtue and vice, evoke in the reader a breathless and in its substance morbid interest in the adventures of the attractive criminals, eventually leading him even to admiration and pity for murderers and prostitutes, and thus exercise a very harmful influence upon his morals. Thackeray appeals to the Newgate authors to evoke the readers' sympathy not for such degraded characters but for the poor and unfortunate and to depict criminals so truthfully that they might not lure the readers to vice:

"But in the sorrows of Nancy and the exploits of Sheppard, there is no such lurking moral, as far as we have been able to discover; we are asked for downright sympathy in the one case, and are called on in the second to admire the gallantry of a thief. The street-walker may be a very virtuous person, and the robber as brave as Wellington; but it is better to leave them alone, and their qualities, good and bad. The pathos of the workhouse scenes in *Oliver Twist,* of the Fleet Prison descriptions in *Pickwick, is* genuine and pure — as much of this as you please; as tender a hand to the poor, as kindly a word to the unhappy, as you will; but, in the name of common-sense, let us not expend our sympathies on cut-throats, and other such prodigies of evil!" (*Works* III, 186—187).

[69] See *Works* V, 471.

Thackeray of course applies this doctrine, too, in this polemical and satirical work itself, presenting his criminals as villains of the highest degree, who are not endowed with any virtues or other positive traits of character, as he points out at several places in the story, and perhaps most clearly in its conclusion:

"Be it granted Solomons *is* dull, but don't attack his morality; he humbly submits that, in his poem, no man shall mistake virtue for vice, no man shall allow a single sentiment of pity or admiration to enter his bosom for any character of the piece; it being, from beginning to end, a scene of unmixed rascality performed by persons who never deviate into good feeling; and, although he doth not pretend to equal the great modern authors whom he hath mentioned [i.e. Dickens, Ainsworth and Bulwer — *LP*], in wit or descriptive power; yet, in the point of moral, he meekly believes that he has been their superior; feeling the greatest disgust for the characters he describes, and using his humble endeavour to cause the public also to hate them" (*Works* III, 187).

Thackeray's categorical statement that the rogues in novels should act like rogues and honest men like honest men and that no work of fiction should contain "any juggling and thimblerigging with virtue and vice, so that, at the end of three volumes, the bewildered reader shall not know which is which",[70] and his strong insistence on the harmful influence of the Newgate novels. which violate these principles, upon the morals of their readers, evoke at first sight the impression that the ethical criterion is the most important and decisive of all those Thackeray employs. But this is not altogether so, as Colby has shown in his analysis of *Catherine.* According to this scholar, in the critical remarks on *Oliver Twist* and *Jack Sheppard* that concluded the original version of *Catherine,* Thackeray

"makes clear that he objected to the criminal characters in these novels not so much because they are glamorized as because their creators have failed to represent them as complete human beings. 'As no writer can or dare tell the *whole* truth concerning them, and faithfully explain their vices, there is no need to give *ex-parte* statements of their virtues.' If an author is to depict criminals, Thackeray implies, let him explain their vices as a realist, not explain them away like the romancer. This is just what he attempts to do with Catherine, and, to a lesser extent, with other characters in the novel."

As this scholar further points out, for Thackeray

"True representation of character meant 'the whole truth' — vices as well as virtues — tracing the sources of both, placing blame where blame is due, while giving due attention to extenuating circumstances. And he always interested himself in 'the canvass of humanity' rather than mere individuals, seeking insight into human behaviour in the worst as well as in the best of men."[71]

That Thackeray regarded the Newgate novels as immoral because they were not faithful to life is obvious especially from the following passage from his review of Fielding's works:

"See the consequences of honesty! Many a squeamish lady of our time would fling down one of these romances with horror, but would go through every page of Mr. Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* with perfect comfort to herself. Ainsworth dared not paint his hero as the scoundrel he knew him to be; he must keep his brutalities in the background, else the public morals will be outraged, and so produces a book quite absurd and unreal, and infinitely more immoral than anything Fielding ever wrote. *Jack Sheppard* is immoral actually because it is decorous. The Spartans, who used to show drunken slaves to their children,

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[70] *Works* III, 31.
[71] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 384, 396.

took care, no doubt, that the slaves should be really and truly drunk. Sham drunkenness, which never passed the limits of propriety, but only went so far as to be amusing, would be rather an object to excite a youth to intoxication than to deter him from it, and some late novels have always struck us in the same light" (*Works* III, 390—391).

It should be also duly emphasized that even although Thackeray rejected the criminal characters created by the Newgate novelists, he did not regard this human material as a sphere forbidden for the novelist, rightly realizing that nothing human should be excluded from literature; but he at the same time believed that the writer of fiction should not concentrate his attention exclusively upon such types, for they represent only a small minority in human society. In this respect he rather surprisingly praised in one instance Bulwer for depicting scenes from both low and high life (though, as he pointed out, the reader may doubt their authenticity), and thus showing a very wise example to his younger literary brethren:

"He uses both materials, but only occasionally; the staple is human nature, which does, to be sure, sometimes form monsters, but the world is not peopled with such: nor should the world of fiction produce them, except in a very small proportion, if it would aim at copying nature."

Worth noticing is also the following statement with which Thackeray concludes his evaluation of "the humble Muse of London", i.e. the street ballads published by Catnach:

"In returning to her, and bidding her farewell, let us make one more protest against the prevailing fashions of 'the low', — the sham low, that is, which amateurs delight to write and read, and which is altogether different from the honest, hearty vulgarity, which it pretends to represent. There is no harm in hearing of the manners and conversation of dustmen, chimneysweeps, thieves, and their like: they are men, and *nihil humanum* is alien to honest readers and critics. But we may hear too much of them. We may find them, on examination, even to be sham thieves and dustmen; and the profit to be derived from the study of such characters ceases straightway."[72]

We should point out, too, that in applying his doctrine of "unmixed" criminal characters Thackeray was guarding not only the purity of the morals of the readers, but also that of their aesthetic taste. As his polemical comments show, he was exasperated at the idea that the reading public was gorged with "hideous scenes of brutal bloodshed",[73] and in consequence of this was losing the capacity for sensitive discernment of literary values. And even if the taste of the public should lie that way, he insisted, the men of genius should teach them:

"Gentlemen and men of genius may amuse themselves with such rascals, but not live with them altogether. The public taste, to be sure, lies that way; but these men should teach the public."

The harm which such literary works do to people whose literary taste is yet undeveloped is summed up by Thackeray in the following comment:

"The reader is excited by the mixture of horror and fun which such works present, who would go to sleep over a tragedy of the regular sober old stamp, where there is none of the gross language, gross character, and outrageous contrasts of the present literary school. In old times, Tragedy used to walk about on a high-heeled cothurnus, pompous,

[72] For the quotations see "Horae Catnachianae", p. 424.
[73] *Works* III, 165; see also "Horae Catnachianae", p. 408.

stilted, and unnatural. He is unnatural now, too, but in the opposite extreme; for he appears without a shoe to his foot, in the likeness of a beggar or a thief."[74]

And finally, even if Thackeray's doctrine had something in common with Johnson's postulate of the unmixed literary character, it certainly did not play such a retrogressive role in the development of fiction as did that of Johnson, especially in the hands of the great critic's followers, of whom Mayo wrote:

"The essay-critics[75] are important because they provide a valuable guide to the tastes and prejudices of those powerful but reactionary forces in English society that on moral, social, and quasi-aesthetic grounds stubbornly resisted the advance of the English novel until at least the time of Scott."[76]

In contradistinction to that of Johnson's followers Thackeray's doctrine, though not based upon purely aesthetic criteria, played a progressive role in its time. As applied in his criticism of the Newgate novelists, it helped Thackeray to clear the ground for the new realistic fiction by sweeping aside the inept and absurd creations of Bulwer, grandiloquent in their pretensions, but false in their very substance. It will be seen below that my opinion here is substantially different from that of Hollingsworth.

There remains one problem yet to be discussed, and that is the actual effectiveness of Thackeray's critical weapons. As far as *Catherine* is concerned, Thackeray expressed in the final chapter his conviction that the book had fulfilled his purpose and that it had caused the eclipse of the Newgate romances. Yet what he then believed, and what Ivasheva also accepts,[77] taking as she does the truth of his statement for granted, was not so. One month after the publication of the last instalment of this story, Thackeray himself characterized *Catherine* as a failure in his letter to his mother:

"Your letter with compliments has just come to hand; it is very ingenious in you to find such beauties in Catherine wh was a mistake all through — it was not made disgusting enough that is the fact, and the triumph of it would have been to make readers so horribly horrified as to cause them to give up or rather throw up the book and all of it's kind, whereas you see the author had a sneaking kindness for his heroine, and did not like to make her utterly worthless" (*Letters* I, 432—433).

Ten years later he wrote quite unequivocably about the failure of *Catherine* as a critical weapon:

"Ten years ago I wrote a satirical story in *Fraser's Magazine,* called *Catherine,* and founded upon the history of the murderess Catherine Hayes. The tale was intended to ridicule a taste then prevalent for making novel heroes of Newgate malefactors. Every single personage in my story was a rascal, and hanged, or put to a violent death; and the history became so atrocious that it created a general dissatisfaction, and was pronounced to be horribly immoral. When the public went on reading the work which I had intended to ridicule, *Catherine* was, in a word, a failure, and is dead, with all its heroes" (*Works* X, 590).

One of the causes of Thackeray's inability to make his book utterly detestable really was, as he believed, that he felt a certain pity for the titular personage

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[74] For the quotations see "Horae Catnachianae", pp, 424, 408.

[75] Mayo includes among them Henry Mackenzie, Richard Cumberland, Anna Seward and the Rev. Vicesimus Knox.

[76] Op. cit., p. 157.

[77] See op. cit., pp. 100—101.

and that, as Colby has shown, "without ever going so far as to make his heroine likeable", he made "some attempt to humanize her". What he does not mention, however, and apparently did not even realize, is that by his superadditions to the *Newgate Calendar* relating to Catherine's education, her first associates and first temptations, he allows at least the reader of our time, if not of his own, to understand, as Colby has pointed out, "the causes that lie behind Catherine's crime without condoning it". Thus even though his "softening touches make Catherine's story less disgusting", as the same scholar proceeds, "they presumably enhanced its value as a cautionary tale":

"In the long run, Thackeray's probing of Catherine's past is supposed to help us in 'discriminating between individual guilt and the community of error'. He manages, without diminishing Catherine's culpability, to make us recognize the part that others have played in her undoing."[78]

The main reason why the readers of Thackeray's time failed to discern the moral significance of Catherine's case and condemned the work as immoral, and why it at the same time failed as a critical weapon, is the immaturity of Thackeray's art. This, as most scholars agree, makes itself felt through the incompleteness of his irony, a certain lack of focus, as Colby has shown, and in his not altogether successful integration of realism with allusive parody, as Loofbourow has pointed out. Especially worth noticing is the analysis of Colby who sees the main reason of Thackeray's failure in his attempting "to do too many things at once" with his book:

"Readers of the time undoubtedly were thrown off also by a novel without a hero — with nothing in fact but villains. Then, too, what were they to make of the pompous exhortations in the midst of farce, of the chameleon-like narrator who is successively jester, lay prophet, chronicler, and theatre manager, of the kaleidoscopic movement in time and place, of the false leads, of narratives begun and dropped, of humour mixed with horror, of so much space given to how the story is to be told, but so relatively little to the telling of it?"[79]

The same scholar also rightly points out that Saintsbury is "over severe in asserting that 'the author never knows quite what hare he is hunting: and the reader is perpetually puzzled and vexed at the way in which the dogs change scent and course' ", adding that "Thackeray was quite sure of his quarry, even if his readers were not".[80] It was of course precisely in Thackeray's inability to transfer this certainty to the reader that the immaturity of his art consisted.

That *Catherine* failed as a weapon of critical polemics is of course proved above all by the fact that criminal romances preserved an undiminished popularity even after its publication, and that the decline of the Newgate novel, "even on the lowest level of 'penny literature' ", was not noted, according to Kathleen Tillotson, until Charles Knight did so in 1846.[81] Yet at least one attempt was made to revive the former fame of the Newgate romances in this very year, for Bulwer published the new edition of *Eugene Aram,* thus im-

[78] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 393—394.

[79] Ibid., p. 395; for the above quotation from Colby see ibid., p. 381; for the opinions of Loofbourow see op. cit., p. 22.

[80] Op. cit., p. 381.

[81] Op. cit., p. 75n., quoting from Charles Knight, *The Old Printer and the Modern Press.* Mayhew noticed this decline somewhat later, in 1851, in *London Labour and the London Poor.*

pelling Thackeray to write his parody for *Punch's Prize Novelists,* which the satirist obviously intended to be his last deadly blow against the whole literary fashion. I feel convinced that this parody did have that effect and agree with Ray that it was the cause of Bulwer's revision of the later editions of this novel and most probably, too, one of the motives of the novelist's endeavour, "in the two novels that followed this revision, *The Caxtons. A Family Picture* and *My Novel . . . or Varieties of English Life*", "to apply his essentially baroque imagination to the literal portrayal of contemporary social reality."[82]

Hollingsworth, too, believes that Thackeray in his parody "defeated" Bulwer. He divides Thackeray's criticism into two periods — "one including the correction of Dickens and ending with the defeat of Ainsworth, about 1840, and the other ending with the defeat of Bulwer, in 1847" — yet he does not quite agree with Ray, maintaining that it is impossible to say whether the parody alone "would have turned Bulwer permanently away from criminal themes"[83] and pointing out that it was not until after publishing *Lucretia* that Bulwer was at last considerably disturbed. This "arsenical novel", as critics termed it, and as Thackeray marginally commented it,[84] was very sharply reviewed by the *Times.* Bulwer, who wrongly thought that the review had been written by Thackeray, asked Forster whether the public really stood on the side of the *Times's* reviewer who had condemned the novel as "a disgrace to the writer, a shame to us all". It was only then, according to Hollingsworth, that Bulwer was forced into seriously questioning the validity of his own judgment and motives, querying the possibility of any redress. Only then he ceased to write any other novels about criminals.[85] Nevertheless I still believe that Thackeray's parody contributed much to the decline of the popularity of the Newgate novels among the wide public and that he himself regarded his battle as having been brought to a victorious conclusion, though he went on addressing the Newgate novelists in polemically pointed comments for some time afterwards, especially in *Vanity Fair*[86] and in the preface to *Pendennis.* I share Hollingsworth's opinion, however, that Thackeray would not have continued in his critical attacks, even if Bulwer and Ainsworth were to have written further crime novels. The end of his fight "coincided with his success as a novelist":

> "He had discovered his powers; he could teach by example rather than precept."[87]

In spite of this statement, Hollingsworth does not believe that Thackeray's contemporaries profited from his criticism or could learn much from the example of his art. As I intend to discuss this view critically, I shall present it as a whole before proceeding to marshal my arguments against it. In Hollingsworth's

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[82] *The Uses of Adversity,* p. 393.

[83] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 16, 217.

[84] See *Works* VI, 589.

[85] For the quotation and references see op. cit., pp. 193—194, 194—198; see also ibid., p. 217.

[86] For his comments in *Vanity Fair* see *Works* XI, 61, 95—96; in a longer passage, later deleted, he also parodied the fashion once again (see *Works* XI, 882, Appendix). In this parody Thackeray skilfully satirizes the predilection of the Newgate novelists for nature in wrath and for night, by parodying Ainsworth's depiction of the great historical storm in *Jack Sheppard,* as well as their delight in mystery and "low" characters, whose "flash" language he exaggerates to such an extent that it becomes almost unintelligible.

[87] Op. cit., p. 218.

opinion, the Newgate novelists met with too many obstacles in the 1830s and 1840s for them to achieve artistic success:

"Since the opponents in the Newgate conflict had antipathies as artists, a critic with sufficient insight — a later-born Coleridge, perhaps — might have explained the contenders to each other as well as to their readers. Everyone suffered from the limited understanding of the modes of representation available to prose fiction. Very few recognized that the imaginative and symbolic methods which were known (if not always appreciated) in poetry could also enrich the novel. Realism had not yet been fully exploited, and its triumphant advance was so exclusive that for seventy-five years after *Vanity Fair* every new effort was presented as a realism made fuller and truer."[88]

Besides the lack of a critic capable of sympathetic assistance in analysing mistakes and grappling with relatively new technical problems, there was, according to Hollingsworth, yet another stumbling block. And this was Thackeray's solution of taking "his place as author in plain sight" and making "his opinions known", i.e. of using personified narrators. His undoubted success frustrated Bulwer in his fumbling search "for the method of the omniscient author who has withdrawn from the book and made himself invisible". According to Hollingsworth, here, as well as in "his grand ambitions for fiction as art", Bulwer "pointed toward developments which others were to bring about in later times". The whole argument is summed up by Hollingsworth in the following passage:

"At a time when Bulwer and Dickens and other writers would have extended the author's prerogative of omniscience as a technique for psychological exploration, Thackeray's achievement constituted in some degree a hindrance. His moral complaints against *Eugene Aram,* since they avoided technical analysis, obscured the view and for a time prevented other authors from instructing readers in the fictional convention which was in need of development. The spectacle of the Newgate controversy contributed, surely, to the generally cautious attitude of mid-Victorian novelists, such as Trollope, most of whom avoided taking risks with technique ... The effect of the controversy on observers was enhanced by Thackeray's personal example — his success in a technique that, supreme development though it was, looked back toward Fielding rather than ahead."[89]

As far as Bulwer is concerned, and apart from a few individual points, it will be obvious by now that I cannot accept Hollingsworth's argument. To be sure, Thackeray was no Coleridge and might perhaps have needed some clear-sighted critic or theorist to formulate his aesthetic conceptions for him and explain them to his readers. Dickens's creative approach, which he did not always evaluate quite justly, might well have been elucidated for him. In the case of Bulwer, however, no such explanations were needed: even if Thackeray avoided technical analysis of Bulwer's novels, he knew very well what was the matter with them. When he was parodying *Eugene Aram* he not only fully recognized "that the imaginative and symbolic methods ... could also enrich the novel", but he also started to exploit them in his own fiction. This has been shown by Loofbourow especially, and we have discussed it in the second chapter. But Thackeray, even much earlier, at the time of his letter to his mother about *Eugene Aram,* obviously realized that the imaginative and symbolic methods used by Bulwer were spurious — and even at that early time his complaints against this novel were not only moral, but also aesthetic. Further, in his novels

[88] Ibid., p. 226.
[89] For this and the above quotations see ibid., pp. 227, 228.

Thackeray did exploit the author's prerogative of omniscience, though he never made himself entirely invisible, emerging both as a satirical commentator revealing the relationship of his personages to society and as an omniscient novelist intimately acquainted with all the thoughts and feelings of his characters and the deepest motives of their actions, a novelist, however, who intentionally does not tell the reader everything he knows and leaves much unsaid between the lines. The method he elaborated in *Vanity Fair* might be characterized as that of concealed psychological motivation, giving his novels, as even Hollingsworth admits, the special atmosphere of a limited epic omniscience: the characters are viewed from the outside, of course through the omniscient eyes of the narrator, and any intrusive penetration into their inward nature is suppressed: thus they remain undissected, retaining the unity of the known and the unknown, recalling the people surrounding us in real life, whom we also fail to know perfectly, and allowing the reader space for the work of his own imagination. This problem, however, as well as the remarkable development of Thackeray's narrative technique in the novels published after *Vanity Fair* (with both of which I have dealt very briefly in my study on his aesthetics), would require a more detailed analysis than I can devote to it here.

If we are to accept Loofbourow's conclusions, and those of my preceding analysis, then Hollingsworth is wrong when he asserts that Thackeray's technique "looked back toward Fielding rather than ahead". There are, to be sure, respects in which it does look back towards Fielding but, at the same time, as Loofbourow has shown, it looks far ahead, much farther than any experiments of Bulwer, even if brought to fruition, could ever lay claim to do. In my opinion there is no doubt whatever that Thackeray could have taught Bulwer, the other Newgate novelists and in fact all his contemporaries much by the example of his art — not only as to the depiction of human nature in general, but also of evil characters and criminal deeds in particular: "no milk-and-water rascals" committing petty offences, but genuine villains involved in "a story of harrowing villany and complicated ... crime", as he himself facetiously characterized the actors of *Vanity Fair*.[90] These are of course essentially different from the glorified vulgar ruffians of the Newgate novelists and their methods are much subtler. This again has been very convincingly demonstrated by Colby[91] and especially by Loofbourow, who analysed in detail the parallels between *Catherine* and *Vanity Fair*, showing the brilliant use Thackeray made in his masterpiece of his earlier parody of the Newgate novels, notably in his treatment of Becky Sharp, by successfully grafting the textures of criminal romance on his narrative medium, in order to perform two important functions. The one, "like parody in *Catherine*, fulfills the satirist's traditional purpose — to discredit literary artifice and to achieve a diminishing perspective on Becky's factitious brilliance", while the other is formal, representing "one of the major elements in the effective artistic pattern of *Vanity Fair*":

> "The criminal romance convention projects an artistic pattern in the Becky—Rawdon—Steyne narrative that is not dependent on the literal plot — an image of amorous melodrama that belies Becky's commonplace nature and satirizes her poetic pretensions. This sequence has a quality of its own, and after its climax in the grand denunciation scene,

[90] For the quotations see *Works* XI, 95—96.
[91] See op. cit., especially p. 396.

Amelia dominates the novel. Textures of criminal romance unify the Becky-narrative, defining it as an entity within the larger context. At the same time, sentimental textures, because of their literary kinship to the conventions of criminal romance — a relationship already exploited in *Catherine* — are a means of correlating Amelia's role with Becky's. The fundamental reciprocity of sentimental and criminal conventions within the fashionable mode integrates the Amelia-Becky narratives within the total conception, and this expressive integration results in a dramatic unity that has sometimes seemed a critical paradox because of the novel's disparate literal 'plots'."[92]

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In attempting to present some final conclusion resulting from the analysis in this sub-chapter, I must at first partly dissociate myself from Hollingsworth's general evaluation of the Newgate controversy as "an imbroglio deplorable, painful, and sometimes comic", even though he mitigates this by emphasizing that there is this much to be said for its protagonists: "they never doubted that the art of literature was an art of power"[93] and were aware of the writers' social responsibility. However deplorable it might perhaps have seemed to contemporaries and however painful it was especially to Bulwer, the part Thackeray played in it was never comic or undignified. Evaluated as a whole, his criticism of the Newgate novels was a consistent, seriously meant and sincere, even though very sharp, critical campaign for realism in literature, aimed in the first place at falsification of actual reality in these works, the untruthfulness of their depictions of the criminal underworld and the falsely idealized figures of criminals. Although Thackeray is very much concerned about the baneful influence of the Newgate romances upon the moral character of their readers, his predominating concern is not in my opinion of an exclusively ethical character — rather than in the corrupting influence of these novels he is interested in their relation to reality, in the relation of the depiction to the depicted. This aspect of his criticism, however, has been so far noticed and duly appreciated only by a very few Thackerayan scholars (especially Loofbourow, as we have seen, Ivasheva and partly Hollingsworth). The last-named scholar, it is true, lays much stress upon Thackeray's moral indignation, but he is also aware of the other aspect of his criticism, as follows especially from his subsequent assessment of Thackeray's position in the whole strife as opponent of Bulwer and Dickens, from which I accept, however, only his evaluation of Thackeray as critic (I do not find myself in entire agreement with Hollingsworth's estimation of Dickens's art, and cannot approve of his tendency to place Bulwer on the same level as Dickens — though, to be sure, in other places he does make a distinction between them, characterizing Bulwer as a writer of talent and Dickens as a genius):

"The man who opposed them was a daylight temperament; for his art, he had not yet drawn from his own depths. In his onslaught upon the other two, in 1840, he was reason chastising the irrational. He could not sympathize with what they were doing, nor could they explain it to him. Their artistic effort, despite its fabric of realism, was symbolic and myth-making; Thackeray's effort was realistic. Bulwer and Dickens could, therefore, plot wildly and could admit coincidence freely, amid the furnishings of the visible world; Thackeray must insist that fiction remain within the probable. With Thackeray's success,

[92] Op. cit., p. 27; for the above quotations see ibid., p. 26.
[93] Op. cit., p. 229.

realism triumphed. Dickens, seeming to be realistic too, went on with his myth-making. Bulwer gave up his murderers, but Dickens did not."[94]

Most of the other Thackerayan scholars, however, either ignore or considerably underestimate this aspect of Thackeray's criticism of the Newgate School, laying stress rather upon its moralistic tendency than its fight against literary artifice. Thus for instance Praz characterizes Thackeray as "an incarnation of the bourgeois reaction against the portrayal of the honourable bandit" and his criticism as a "moralistic satire".[95] As I have pointed out in my earlier study on the Newgate novel, this tendency to limit Thackeray's wide-ranging criticism to one of its aspects and to make absolute identifications between Thackeray and his social class seems to me wrong and unjust to the great satirist. Even Hollingsworth to a certain extent errs, I feel, in the latter aspect, attributing to Thackeray, as Praz does, the emotional attachments of the middle class and seeing the whole strife, though not solely and primarily, in the light of the differences between the class alignments of the three main protagonists (Bulwer being aligned to the aristocracy, Dickens, by birth, "not far removed from the servant class"). According to this scholar, Bulwer and Dickens "understood each other well; but to Thackeray, Bulwer seemed an anachronism in the republic of letters and his books an extravagant denial of middle-class taste and judgment".[96] There is of course much to be said in favour of this view, but I do think that Thackeray's criticism of the Newgate School, like his art, outgrew the limits of his class consciousness. It is of course true, as Praz points out,[97] that he "remains always a gentleman", a writer closely connected with the English middle class by his origin, education and social position, a man unable to free himself from the rigid rules of the Victorian conventional morality. But it is also an indisputable fact that his attitude to the society of his time, including his own class, was, especially in the period of his strife with the Newgate novelists, sharply critical, and that he strongly felt the restraint put upon him by the moral codex of his time and rebelled against it. It is true that he also protested against the cavalier treatment of virtue and vice in the criminal romances, wished to see vice and virtue called by their real names in literature and the criminals depicted in their real likenesses, but in his protest he was influenced not only by the Victorian moral conventions; he continued in the tradition of all his most distinguished predecessors, from Aristotle to the greatest of the English Romantics, who were also convinced that the task of literature was not to tempt the reader to vice, but to educate him to virtue and goodness. Viewed from this angle and with due emphasis upon all their aspects, his relentless critical attacks upon the Newgate novels can hardly be characterized as a "bourgeois" protest, since fighting for a literature true to life in the social conditions of his time inevitably meant including in this truth the darker aspects of bourgeois society, as the great satirist himself amply proved in his later works, especially in the subversive satire of his *Vanity Fair*.

It should be also duly pointed out that, in almost all cases which Thackeray tried from his critical bench when evaluating the Newgate novelists, he stands

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[94] Ibid., p. 225.
[95] Op. cit., p. 161.
[96] Op. cit., p. 224.
[97] Op. cit., p. 207.

out as a judge dispensing justice. When he did not and could not find anything good in the works of Bulwer and Ainsworth, since all of them deviated markedly from the standard of real excellence, he was entirely in the right in pronouncing his sentence of blame upon them and even in using the sharpest shafts of his irony, satire and parody. One of the authors he included in his criticism, however, was not treated by him entirely justly — Charles Dickens as the author of the "Newgate" scenes in *Oliver Twist.* He committed an injustice to the great novelist by including him among the other offenders without making any distinctions between Dickens's lifelike criminal characters and the pretentious and inept creations of Bulwer and Ainsworth, and thus actually lowering him to their level. As I shall point out in greater detail in the chapter devoted to his criticism of Dickens, in spite of this not entirely justified inclusion of Dickens among the much worse offenders, in which I see one of the weak points of Thackeray's criticism of the Newgate School, his assessment of Dickens's treatment of the Newgate material was not wholly unjustifiable from the present-day point of view and quite justifiable from his own.

Another weakness, this time an omission, was noticed by Hollingsworth, who reprehends Thackeray for not having included in the range of his critical attacks the penny serials and the main protagonist of Newgate fiction on this lowest level, G. W. M. Reynolds, and rightly believes that "the inclusion of Reynolds would have given more consistency to Thackeray's warfare". The reason suggested by Hollingsworth seems to me acceptable — that the explanation for the immunity of this author might be sought for in "his having employed Thackeray briefly in Paris in 1836; he was the first publisher, Thackeray once said, who paid him for his writing". I cannot find myself in agreement, however, with Hollingsworth's final statement, which seems to me too sweeping — that whatever the reason for Thackeray's restraint was, the omission of Reynolds proves that he "did not concern himself with the morality of what was offered to the lower classes". That Thackeray did concern himself with the morality of what was offered to these classes is more than obvious (though mostly rather implied than explicitly expressed) from the entire material forming the basis for the investigation done in this sub-chapter (as well as in that on "Artistic Imitation" — see especially pp. 81—82). How much Thackeray was indeed concerned with the harmful influence of Newgate fiction upon the morals of the lower classes is clearly shown by the very fact that the main targets of his criticism were the novels *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard,* the "heroes" of which were, as also Hollingsworth points out, "the folk heroes of poor city boys in the middle of the nineteenth century" — a fact widely known in Thackeray's time, noticed also by foreigners (for instance by Engels), and with an almost absolute certainty, familiar, too, to Thackeray (consider especially his reaction to the dramatizations of *Jack Sheppard* in his private correspondence).[98]

[98] For the quotations and references in this paragraph see Hollingsworth, op. cit., pp. 219, 7; *Letters* I, 395. As also Hollingsworth points out, Thackeray did pay some attention to Reynolds, but only in marginal comments, in which he ranged him among criminal novelists as the author of *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (8 vols., 1849—1856; see *Works* X, 623—624, XVII, 529), or attacked him for political reasons, mainly for his participation in the Chartist movement and in the great Chartist meeting on Kennington Common on 10th April 1848 (see Melville, op. cit., II, 66—67, *Works* VIII, 371, *Contributions,* 194, 195, 196, 197).

To finish my analysis with something positive (for I regard Thackeray's criticism of the Newgate novelists, with all its weak points, as one of the most valuable parts of his critical legacy), I wish to lay due emphasis on the fact that Thackeray's critical attacks on the Newgate novelists are not motivated by personal or political enmity, jealousy or malice, but are based on objective moral and aesthetic criteria. He metes out the same justice to his personal friends Dickens and Ainsworth (though only partial justice in the case of Dickens) as to Bulwer, whom he then did not know in person. It should be particularly emphasized that even in the case of Bulwer Thackeray's judgment is not distorted by any personal or political bias. As we shall see, this writer was one of the main targets of Thackeray's criticism not only as a Newgate novelist, but also as the representative of the Silver-Fork School and author of novels *à la thèse*, as poet and as dramatist, and Thackeray attacked him even personally in one of his critical papers ("Mr. Yellowplush's Ajew", *Fraser's Magazine*, August 1838), ridiculing his appearance (to which also Tennyson and Carlyle had great antipathy,[99] though this is of course no excuse for Thackeray), his affected pronunciation, vanity, conceit and his numerous surnames. In his criticism of Bulwer's Newgate novels, however, with the single exception of his satirical attack, in the introductory part of *George de Barnwell*, on the several surnames Bulwer used after having come into his estate[100] (Thackeray announces the parody as the work of Sir E. L. B. L. BB. LL. BBB. LLL.; Bart). there is no trace of any personal prejudice or enmity. In this I differ from Hollingsworth, who is able to see several positive aspects of Thackeray's criticism of the Newgate novelists, but characterizes his critical approach to Bulwer as "a ten-year vendetta" against this novelist, and tends to see in it an unfair continuation of the earlier personal revenge of Maginn, being thus in my opinion unjust both to Thackeray and partly, too, to his predecessor, who might have perhaps been motivated by personal enmity or political prejudice, but very penetratingly pointed out all the basic weak points of Bulwer's creative approach.[101]

III. THE SILVER-FORK SCHOOL

The so-called Silver-Fork School of fiction, or the fashionable novel, was according to Matthew Whiting Rosa (the only scholar who has so far analysed this fashionable mode in detail[1]) firmly established in 1826 with Lister's *Granby*[2] and Disraeli's *Vivian Grey*, after which followed Bulwer's *Pelham* and a great

[99] For Tennyson's views see G. U. Ellis, *Thackeray*, Great Lives, Duckworth, London, 1933, p. 28; for Carlyle's see *New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. by Alexander Carlyle, 2 vols., John Lane, the Bodley Head, London and New York, MDCCCCIV, I, 188—189.

[100] As Enzinger has shown, this "event is reflected in a letter signed 'Bonosmores' and addressed to the editor of Punch, who is requested to inform the writer what Lytton's name really is, since so many versions are possible" (op. cit., vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 55—56). The letter, entitled "The Author of Pelham", appeared in *Punch* in vol. VI, 1844, No. 141, p. 130.

[101] For the quotation see op. cit., p. 16. According to Hollingsworth, Maginn revenged himself upon Bulwer for having been depicted by this novelist as MacGrawler in *Paul Clifford* (see op. cit., pp. 78—81, 16). Greig, on the other hand, believes that Maginn revenged himself upon Bulwer for the latter's having thwarted his attempt to seduce L. E. Landon (see op. cit., p. 40).

[1] For the bibliographical data of his book see note 17, Introduction.

[2] Thackeray read another novel by Thomas Henry Lister, *Herbert Lacy*, as early as February 1828 (see *Letters* I, 22).

number of novels of this type, produced both by authors who did not lack talent (Disraeli, Bulwer, Hook, Mrs. Gore) and by quite untalented scribblers (Robert Plumer Ward, Lady Blessington, Mrs. Trollope, Lady Morgan, Lady Londonderry, Lady Charlotte Bury, Lady Bulwer, and others).The quoted scholar also provides a useful summary of the characteristic traits of the productions of this school and of the creative approach of their authors. The subject matter of these novels was limited to the narrow sphere of the life of the highest social classes, notably of the aristocracy, the characters had to be of high station and in comfortable circumstances or to play prominent roles in public life (as Rosa has shown, public characters disguised slightly or not at all and introduced among fictitious personages were a typical feature of the fashionable novel, their purpose being to achieve sales[3]), while the plots always concerned love intrigues in aristocratic circles. All these basic elements "that were to make up the stock-in-trade of the fashionable novelist", as Rosa has it, appeared as early as 1824, in Hook's *Sayings and Doings:*

"Here are the balls, the dinners, the hunts, the teas, the gossip, the electioneering, the opera, the theater, the clubs, the marriage settlements, the love marriages, the fashionable marriages, the gambling, and the dissipation — everything, in fact, that makes up the daily round for those fortunate souls who possess accounts at their bankers and live in London."[4]

As far as the creative approach of the fashionable novelists is concerned, it was not in all cases entirely identical — in most of them it was predominantly romantic, while in the case of Theodore Hook and Mrs. Gore it was basically realistic, as Rosa has also pointed out.[5] In spite of the differences in their methods and in the degree of their talent, however, the works of the Silver-Fork novelists were characterized by other common traits than those enumerated above — especially by their embellished and idealized depictions of fashionable society and, as Loofbourow has shown, by romantic conception of love and saccharine and insincere sentimentality.[6] On their lowest level they were characterized, moreover, by antiquated and stereotyped plots, based on an unchanging formula, and a succession of stock characters, all of them idealized and unconvincing. The main publisher of this type of literature was Henry Colburn (satirized by Thackeray in *Pendennis* as Bungay) who published about nine-tenths of this production and earned deserved opprobrium for refusing *Wuthering Heights* and *Vanity Fair.* The Silver-Fork School flourished especially in the second half of the 1820s when it also received its fitting name from Hazlitt, who in his article "The Dandy School" (*Examiner,* 18 November 1827) sharply attacked the authors of fashionable novels, especially Disraeli and Hook, expressing his indignation at the authors of Hook's type, who considered it "a circumstance of no consequence if a whole country starves", "provided a few select persons eat fish with silver forks".[7] Another indignant critic was Carlyle, whose attitude to fiction in general was not very positive, as we have seen, but

[3] See op. cit., p. 105.
[4] Ibid., p. 62.
[5] See ibid., pp. 63, 129.
[6] See op. cit., p. 16.
[7] *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt,* 21 vols., ed. P. P. Howe, J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., London and Toronto, 1934, XX, 146.

who particularly despised the novel of the romantic type and would have rather damned it altogether, seeing in it the supreme product of what he hated most of all — affectation, hypocrisy, charlatanism, dilettantism and artificiality. He therefore consistently and relentlessly attacked this type of fiction, on almost the lowest level of which he placed fashionable novels (the lowest being occupied by the Gothic novels and the dramatic version of Egan's book *Tom and Jerry*), characterizing it as literature in which there was no Reality and which was in its substance false, shallow and insignificant, "artificial fictitious soap-lather, and mere Lying", and so ephemeral as "the foam of penny-beer".[8] He did not rest content, however, with these general attacks and chose as his particular target for detailed criticism Bulwer's *Pelham,* which he sharply condemned in the tenth chapter of the third book of *Sartor Resartus* ("The Dandiacal Body"). He levelled the shafts of his criticism at the young aristocratic dandies of Pelham's type, whose "trade, office and existence" consisted in the wearing of clothes, and depicts them ironically as a "Dandiacal" sect, whose religion was Self-worship, whose chief temple was Almack's, whose sacred books were fashionable novels, whose Bible was *Pelham* and whose leading preacher was the hero of this novel. He then quotes seven basic articles of faith of the sect, in which he burlesques Pelham's "maxims" concerning the art of fashionable dressing.[9] As Rosa has pointed out, however, in this point Carlyle is hardly fair to Pelham and his creator, for Bulwer's essay on clothes is ironical and Pelham is not "a mental lightweight devoted only to the cultivation of the sillier formalities of social intercourse", but is as earnest in his interest in contemporary political problems as was his model Wilhelm Meister.[10] Carlyle's attack upon Bulwer's novel was very effective and forced the author to make some alterations.[11] The great critic even thought of launching a sharp attack upon fashionable novels in general in a separate essay, as follows from his letter to the editor of the *Edinburgh Review,* Macvey Napier:

"I once proposed to Mr. Jeffrey to make a sort of sally on *Fashionable Novels* ... The Pelham and Devereux manufacture is a sort of thing which ought to be extinguished in British literature."[12]

As Roe has pointed out, however, Napier was not much interested in collaboration with Carlyle, against whom he had been warned that he "was a man to be feared as an intense radical and a hysterical worshipper of German divinities".[13]

Carlyle's criticism in *Sartor Resartus* (published originally in *Fraser's Magazine,* 1831) undoubtedly gave an impulse to the critical campaign against this literary school launched by the whole editorial staff of the magazine. G. N. Ray has shown that as early as February 1831 the Fraserians adopted, too, Hazlitt's term and characterized Bulwer as a "Silver Fork Publisher" and the leader of the "Footman School of Novelists". [14] Besides Bulwer, the main targets for the

[8] For the quotations see *Essays* III, 60 and 58.

[9] See *Sartor Resartus,* Chapman and Hall, London, 1896, pp. 217ff, and *Pelham,* Chapter XLIV.

[10] For the quotation see op. cit., p. 19; see also ibid., pp. 76ff.

[11] See ibid., pp. 82—84.

[12] R. H. Shepherd, *Memoirs of The Life and Writings of Thomas Carlyle,* London, 1881, I, 80; quoted by Thrall, op. cit., p. 69.

[13] Op. cit., p. 114.

[14] *The Uses of Adversity,* p. 469, note 20.

sharpest critical attacks of the editorial staff of this periodical, later significantly reinforced by Thackeray, were three female representatives of this type of literature, Mrs. Gore, Lady Blessington and Lady Morgan. As Dr. Thrall and Michael Sadleir have shown, the Fraserians gave the works of these authoresses the fitting label "she-novels", and urgently demanded that life in literature might be depicted "in its real nature" and not in imaginary and artificial pictures and scenes. Of the female writers of the time they partly spared only L. E. Landon (of whom later), some realistic novelists (especially Miss Mitford and Maria Edgeworth) and Mary Shelley.[15] One of the untiring fighters against this literary fashion was Maginn, who summed up the basic characteristic features of fashionable novels in one of his reviews, addressing the reviewed author (Bulwer) in these words:

"Nobody knows better than yourself, that, to make a fashionable novel, all that is required is a tolerable acquaintance with footmen and butlers ... This will supply the high life, the silver fork, the no-twice for soup, the ignorance of Bloomsbury Square, the antipathy to cheese and port, and all the other nice *minutiae* which mark the exquisite knowledge of fashionable existence in these excellent volumes."[16]

The Silver-Fork School aroused deep indignation in several other clear-sighted critics and writers of the time — Engels, Lockhart, the reviewers of *Blackwood's Magazine,* David Masson, Dickens and George Eliot.[17]

Thackeray devoted to the productions of the Silver-Fork School much attention as reader, critic and novelist — perhaps even more than to those of the Newgate School — and added some new critical weapons to those he used in his criticism of criminal romances. He wrote several book reviews, one satirical sketch (*The Fashionable Authoress, Heads of the People,* 1841), two satirical pamphlets ("Leaves from the Lives of the Lords of Literature", *Punch,* January 20, 1844 and "Lady L.'s Journal of a Visit to Foreign Courts. Letter from Lady Judy Punch to Her Grace the Duchess of Jenkins", *Punch,* January 27, 1844, both partly reprinted by Spielmann), two or perhaps three parodies (the two in *Novels by Eminent Hands — Codlingsby,* April 24, May 15—22, 1847 and *Lords and Liveries,* June 12—26, 1847; the third is attributed to him only by Gulliver — one item in the parodistical series *Hints to Novelists, for 1846, The Eclogic, or Gorean, The Comic Almanack,* November 1846) and attacked this literary fashion in many marginal comments in book reviews not directly concerned with it, in his art criticism evaluating the illustrated *Annuals,* as well as in his imaginative works and in letters. The book reviews to be considered in this sub-chapter are the following: two reviews of Miss Landon's novel *Ethel Churchill* (*The Times,* October 6, 1837, reprinted by Gulliver, and *Fraser's Magazine,* January 1838[18]), the review of Lady Charlotte Bury's novel *Love*

[15] See *Fraser's Magazine* IV, 15; quoted by Thrall, op. cit., p. 111.

[16] *Fraser's Magazine* IV, 520; quoted ibid., p. 110.

[17] For Engels's view see Karl Marx—Friedrich Engels, *O umění a literatuře (On Art and Literature),* Svoboda, Praha, 1951, p. 103; for that of the reviewers of *Blackwood's Magazine* see "The Historical Romance", September 1845, pp. 342—343 (quoted by Kathleen Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 79n., 85); for the view of David Masson see *British Novelists and Their Styles,* pp. 229—231 (quoted ibid., p. 87). As Mrs. Tillotson has pointed out, Dickens parodied the style of the fashionable novelists in the twenty-eighth chapter of *Nicholas Nickleby,* in an extract from a fictitious novel *The Lady Flabella* which Kate Nickleby reads to Mrs. Wititterly. George Eliot protested in an anonymous article "Silly Novels by Women Novelists", *The Westminster Review,* October 1856.

(*The Times,* January 11, 1838, reprinted in *Works*), the reviews of Mrs. Trollope's novels *A Romance of Vienna* (*The Times,* September 4, 1838, reprinted by Gulliver) and *The Widow Barnaby* (*The Times,* January 4, 1839, reprinted by Gulliver), of Mrs. Gore's stories *The Snow Storm* (*The Morning Chronicle,* December 31, 1845, reprinted in *Contributions*) and *New Year's Day* (*Fraser's Magazine,* January 1847, reprinted in *Works*[19]), and of her non-fictional work *Sketches of English Character* (*The Morning Chronicle,* May 4, 1846, reprinted in *Contributions*), and those parts of his reviews of Disraeli's novel *Coningsby* (*The Morning Chronicle,* May 13, 1844, reprinted in *Contributions,* and *The Pictorial Times,* May 25, 1844, reprinted in *Works*) which assess this novel as a product of the Silver-Fork School (those parts which deal with this work as a novel of purpose will be discussed in the sub-chapter considering this type of fiction, together with his two reviews of Mrs. Trollope's novel *The Vicar of Wrexhill* and his reviews of three novels by Bulwer, *Godolphin, Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice,* which might be to a certain extent regarded as fashionable novels, especially *Godolphin,* but which Thackeray does not evaluate as such).

To these "traditional" critical weapons of his Thackeray added a new one — a fictitious reviewer — whom he used as his *alter-ego* in launching his critical campaign against the fashionable novel and for reviewing two non-fictional works written in the spirit of this school. This initial stage of his criticism is worth special notice, for it clearly mirrors the distaste and contempt which from the beginning of his work as a critic he felt for the productions of the Silver-Fork School. When he was asked, in 1837, to review a manual of etiquette in high society, *My Book, or The Anatomy of Conduct,* by John Henry Skelton, he expressed his indignation at this sort of literature by not reviewing this book under his own name, but creating the character of the footman Charles J. Yellowplush who, thanks to his intimate knowledge of genteel society, was in his own opinion the only competent person to undertake this task. In this way Thackeray laid additional stress on the idea pervading his whole criticism of the school, that the fashionable novelists did not draw their information about aristocratic society from their direct personal experience, but from the gossip of footmen, and at the same time implied, as Ray has pointed out (referring to Thackeray's later attack upon Bulwer both as man and fashionable novelist in "Mr. Yellowplush's Ajew"), that it was "in footmen like Yellowplush" that Bulwer found "his true public".[20] Through the mouth of his fictitious reviewer (in *The Memoirs of Mr. Charles J. Yellowplush, No. I:* "Fashnable Fax and Polite Annygoats", *Fraser's Magazine,* November 1837, reprinted in *Works*) he then ridicules Skelton's detailed and stupid analyses of quite matter-of-course rules of social conduct, criticizes his stylistic faults and the immodesty with which he speaks about himself in the preface (in this he was not unjust to the author, "a half-demented West-end linen-draper", as Melville characterizes him,[21] who was possessed by the fixed idea that his mission in life was to instruct mankind in

[18] In the summary review "Our Batch of Novels for Christmas, 1837", containing, too, notices of *The Vicar of Wrexhill* by Mrs. Trollope and of *Ernest Maltravers* by Bulwer. Reprinted in *Stray Papers* and *Critical Papers in Literature.*

[19] In the summary review "A Grumble about the Christmas Books".

[20] *The Uses of Adversity,* p. 242.

[21] Op. cit., I, 135.

the true art of etiquette). The book irritated Thackeray mainly because it was the supreme expression of the snobbishness of its author and of the English middle class in general and because Skelton, for all his great pretensions, revealed deep ignorance of the real life of the higher classes.

In the later letters of the *Yellowplush Correspondence* Thackeray then made further use of his fictitious reviewer for assessing the second non-fictional book of this type, the memoirs of Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury of the life of aristocratic society and the royal court, *Diary illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth* (1838), in the review, or rather literary pamphlet, "Skimmings from 'The Dairy of George IV' " (*Fraser's Magazine,* March 1838; he devoted to this work also a regular book review in the *Times* in January of the same year). In both his reviews he characterizes the memoirs as a mean, scandal-mongering, slandering and naughty book, which "does worse than chronicle the small beer of a Court", for its materials "are infinitely more base" — "the foul tittle-tattle of the sweepings of the Princess of Wales's bed-chamber or dressing-room, her table or ante-room, the reminiscences of industrious eaves-dropping, the careful records of her unguarded moments, and the publication of her confidential correspondence". He sarcastically ridicules the authoress's detailed descriptions of all the insignificant events in the royal family, her tendency to boast of her intimate relationship to the Queen and the other members of the royal court, her petty mind and the vulgarity which she in vain attempts to hide behind "a pretty veil of fine words". Through the mouth of his *alter-ego* he emphasizes that the book involuntarily reveals the servility, toadyism, hypocrisy and immorality of the members of the royal court and that there is in it more vulgarity and nastiness than Yellowplush had ever displayed in his whole memoirs. After having read the book, Yellowplush gives preference to his own milieu, in which there is no such scandal-mongering, bitter and wicked quarrelling and hatred as among Queens and Kings, adding an ironic comment that it is of course not for footmen to judge their betters, for "these great people are a supearur race, and we can't comprehend their ways".[22] Yellowplush also prefers his own language with all its faulty spelling to the bad grammar and pretentious style in which Lady Bury expresses her dirty gossip. Never mind the spelling, he says, so long as the sense is right.[23] Although Rosa finds some merits in the book reviewed, pointing out that even if the authoress is not to be relied upon for absolute accuracy, "the consensus of opinion today seems to be that the *Diary* is a fairly authentic account of a disreputable period in English court history"[24], and also finding some excuses for her warped view of society, White has rightly shown that Thackeray's criticism is quite justified. The *Diary* was indeed a scandalous work, characterized by "incoherence and triviality" and containing "sentimental and shallow moralizations". The same scholar underlines the good humour and "the total absence of political rancour" in both reviews and finds them remarkably consistent, though that published in the *Times* is sharper. In both of them, he writes, "we find a subdued delight in the low picture of high life the diarist presents, and an ironic pleasure in the ineptitude of her style":

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[22] For the quotations see *Works* I, 93, 95, 214.
[23] See *Works* I, 211; see also ibid., p. 210.
[24] Op. cit., p. 156.

"Thackeray clearly delighted in this 'Yellowplush' paper. He ignored the political warfare which the *Diary* was exciting all about him to laugh at the spectacle of vanity and vulgarity in the highest ranks of society which Lady Charlotte's volumes so fully documented. The comic footman is perfectly adapted to expose this vulgarity, and his claim to higher manners and morals is outrageously supported by his obviously valid claim to 'souperior languidge'. The language itself is comic, not so much from the forced spelling, but from the ironic and satiric impulse that drives it."[25]

The criteria Thackeray applies to Lady Bury's non-fictional work are based (with the exception of his criticism of the authoress's style) on extra-aesthetic considerations — he condemns the book, and justly, as we have seen, as a corrupting work, nasty in its views of life and, because of its probable enormous popularity, pernicious and socially harmful.

The main criterion applied by Thackeray to the pure products of the Silver-Fork School, the fashionable novels, is again his postulate that literature should be a faithful imitation of life. In the first place, he castigates all the fashionable novelists because their creative interest is concentrated exclusively on one particular and very narrow social sphere — the life of the highest circles of aristocratic society — and that therefore the depiction of society they present is onesided and curtailed. He formulated his own standpoint perhaps most convincingly in those marginal comments in which he directed his criticism also to the Newgate novelists, whose subject matter was similarly limited, though to the opposite pole of society, the criminal underworld. In "Horae Catnachianae" he for instance wrote:

"At one time the literary fashion run *[sic!]* entirely on Grosvenor Square: at present it has taken up its abode in St. Giles's. Both fashions are equally strained and unnatural. A novel-writer may occasionally go both to Almack's and Newgate, but such visits should be exceptions."[26]

In his review "Half-a-Crown's Worth of Cheap Knowledge" he pointed out that contemporary fiction, with the single exception of Charles Dickens, entirely ignored the life of the enormous mass of the working people and concentrated only upon certain narrow strata of society which represented "an insignificant speck" in this mass:

"It may appear a strange affectation, in this blessed year 1838, to affect an entire ignorance of the habits of fourteen-fifteenths of the people amongst whom we live — a poor repetition of Mr. Croker's old joke, who knew not, positively, where about was Russell Square: but the fact is so. Thanks to reviewers and novelists, with the very highest classes of society we are as intimate as with our own brothers and sisters; we know almost as well as if we had been there (as well, as to enable us *to say* that we have), all the manners and customs of the frequenters of Devonshire House — what great people eat at dinner — how their rooms are furnished — how they dance, and flirt, and dress; all this has been described and studied by every writer of fiction who has the least pretension to politeness,

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[25] Edward M. White, "Thackeray, 'Dolly Duster', and Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury", *The Review of English Studies*, vol. XVI, No. 61, February 1965, p. 39; for the preceding quotations see ibid., pp. 36, 37. This article is not devoted to the evaluation of Thackeray's Yellowplush review of Lady Bury's *Diary*; the author uses it to prove convincingly that the parody of the same work, *Passages from the Diary of the Late Dolly Duster*, *Fraser's Magazine*, October and November 1838, which had been erroneously attributed to Thackeray by all his bibliographers, is not by him. To my analysis I should also add that in spite of his criticism, Thackeray drew upon Bury's *Diary* in *The Four Georges* (see *Works* XIII, 804).

[26] "Horae Catnachianae", p. 424.

or the slightest claim to gentility. And who are these people, whom we study, and ape, and admire? At the utmost a miserable forty thousand! Fifteen hundred thousand more are moving in the same streets, of whom we know nothing. No modern writer has given any account of them, except only the admirable 'Boz'. Mr. Bulwer's low life, though very amusing, is altogether fanciful. Mr. Theodore Hook has never — so exquisitely refined is that popular author — penetrated beyond Mecklenburgh Square. Even the habits of people in that part of the town he views with contempt; and is obliged to soar upwards again to the higher atmospheres of fashion, in which only his delicate lungs can breathe at ease" (*Works* I, 133—134).

In applying this criterion to the Silver-Fork School itself Thackeray again uses various methods and media. As in his criticism of the Newgate School he makes use of marginal comment, as for instance the following from his already referred to complaint about the dearth of novels, especially the historical, in his country:

"Fashionable novels we get, it is true; the admirable Mrs. Gore produces half a dozen or so in a season; but one can't live upon fashionable novels alone, and the mind wearies with perpetual descriptions of balls at D— House, of fashionable doings at White's or Crocky's, of ladies' toilettes, of Gunter's suppers, of *déjeuners*, Almack's, French cookery, French phrases and the like, which have been, time out of mind, the main ingredient of the genteel novel with us" (*Works* X, 463).

This critical opinion of Thackeray's is of course even better expressed in his book reviews, especially in those of Mrs. Gore's works and Disraeli's *Coningsby*. In all the three reviews of Mrs. Gore he rebukes the authoress for the narrowness of the depicted social sphere, her exclusive predilection for the fashionable West-End quarters and her select circle of lords and ladies, and for her admiration of the propertied classes and aristocratic titles. In his review of *New Year's Day* he for instance sarcastically comments on Mrs. Gore's including among the possessions saved by Mrs. Lawrie from a sinking ship the inevitable silver spoons and forks, and on the authoress's approach to the character of Sir Jasper Hallet, whose son threatened to drown himself for his father's ill-treatment of him and whose wife died broken-hearted, but who has gained a big sum of money from war plunder and consequently is highly respected in society:

"And don't you see, when a man has 400,000 *l*, how we get to like him, in spite of a murder or two? Our author yields with charming *naïveté* to the general impression" (*Works* VI, 585).

In his review of *Sketches of English Character* Thackeray writes:

"And so, through the two volumes, she dashes and rattles on, careless, out-speaking, coarse, sarcastic, with thoughts the least elevating, and views quite curiously narrow. Supposing that Pall-mall were the world, and human life finished with the season, and Heaven were truffled turkies and the Opera, and duty and ambition were bounded in dressing well and getting tickets to Lady Londonderry's dancing teas, Mrs. Gore's 'Sketches of Character' might be a good guide book."[27]

Even sharper, however, are his critical attacks upon the lopsided picture of English society presented in Disraeli's *Coningsby*. Disraeli's endeavour to introduce the reader "to none but the very best company"[28] makes Thackeray classify this work as a fashionable novel *par excellence*, pushed to the extreme verge of this kind of literature, the very glorification of dandyism, and its author

[27] *Contributions*, 142.
[28] Ibid., p. 40.

as the leading preacher and teacher of dandies. He makes use of this opportunity to address a few ironic remarks to Disraeli's earlier novel *The Young Duke* (characterized by Rosa as one of the most typical products of the school in which everything is superlative — "gold plate, castles, fifty thousand a year, mistresses, gambling, balls, dancers" — so that it is "a caricature rather than an original specimen", which "might have been written by Thackeray for his 'Punch's Prize Novelists' series"[29]):

"It is impossible to help admiring the intenseness of the Disraelite-*ego*. He fancies a thing to the utmost. Those who recollect the prodigious novel of 'The Young Duke', will remember, when Mr. Disraeli had a mind to be fashionable, to what a pitch of fashion he could raise himself: he out-duked all the dukes in the land — he invented splendours which Stafford House never can hope to equal — he dreamed better dreams than Alnaschar himself; and, as in the before-named work he fancied himself fashionable, in this he fancies himself young."[30]

Another remark written in this spirit is addressed to the whole school:

"Not an unremarkable characteristic of our society-novelists is that ardour of imagination which sets them so often to work in describing grand company for us. They like to disport themselves in inventing fine people, as we to sit in this imaginary society. There is something *naïf* in this credulity on both sides: in these cheap Barmecide entertainments, to which author and reader are content to sit down. Mr. Disraeli is the most splendid of all feast-givers in this way — there is no end to the sumptuous hospitality of his imagination."[31]

For enforcing his demand that the picture of society should be much wider than that presented by the fashionable novelists, Thackeray also makes use of his satirical sketch *The Fashionable Authoress,* depicting the titular figure as a novelist interested exclusively in the highest fashionable circles and adding the following comment:

"The public likes only the extremes of society, and votes mediocrity vulgar. From the Author they will take nothing but Fleet Ditch; from the Authoress, only the very finest rose-water. I have read so many of her ladyship's novels, that, egad! now I don't care for anything under a marquis. Why the deuce should we listen to the intrigues, the misfortunes, the virtues, and conversations of a couple of countesses, for instance, when we can have duchesses for our money? What's a baronet? pish! pish! that great coarse red fist in his scutcheon turns me sick! What's a baron? a fellow with only one more ball than a pawnbroker; and, upon my conscience, just as common. Dear Lady Flummery, in your next novel, give us no more of these low people; nothing under strawberry leaves, for the mercy of heaven!" (*Works* I, 571—572).

Also in his parody of the fashionable novel, *Lords and Liveries,* the sharpest arrows of Thackeray's satire are directed against the narrow thematic range of the fiction of this type, which evokes in the reader the impression that nothing exists beyond the world of the aristocratic *élite.* He ridicules the way in which the aristocracy is glorified in fashionable novels and the fawning admiration with which the Silver-Fork novelists present each insignificant detail of their empty and idle life. His main purpose is obviously to demonstrate not only that the creative approach of the fashionable novelists is basically false and inartistic, but also that the genteel world they depict is a ridiculous anachronism, entirely

[29] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 108, 109.

[30] *Contributions,* 39—40; see also a similar comment on this novel, as well as on Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year,* on *Coningsby* and the novels of "Mrs. Armytage" (i.e. Mrs. Gore), in *Works* IX, 330.

[31] *Contributions,* 40; see also ibid., p. 104.

useless and untenable. The hero of the parody is a young man of *ton*, an eccentric and utterly *blasé* dandy Earl of Bagnigge, a cynic and epicure, who "had drained the cup of pleasure"[32] at the age of three-and-twenty. In the hope of finding some novel amusement, he makes a bet that he will spend a week in the house of a jealously guarded rich heiress, wins it by getting into the house disguised as a footman, saves the life of his mistress and marries her. In this character Thackeray very successfully ridiculed the favourite hero of the Silver-Fork novelists — the dissipated dandy surfeited with life, a quite useless creature, unprofitable for human society. The other characters of the parody are all elegant aristocratic swells, whose life is limited to sitting in clubs, to concern for elegant clothes, dainty food and the hunt for rich heiresses. In the burlesque aristocratic titles with which he endows his hero (Alured de Pentonville, eighteenth Earl of Bagnigge, Viscount Paon of Islington, Baron Pancras, Kingscross, and a Baronet) Thackeray mocks at one of the typical traits of the fashionable novel — exaggerated reverence to titled persons.

Thackeray does not rest content, however, with his demand that the thematic range of fiction should not be too narrow, he at the same time insists that if the novelists do persist in depicting only a very limited section of human society, they should at least depict it truthfully. In applying this postulate he makes interesting distinctions between some female novelists and Disraeli. In Thackeray's opinion the depiction of fashionable society, if it is to have any instructive value, should be really true and authentic and therefore preferably written by people of fashion themselves, who possess first-hand knowledge of this sphere of life. He of course realized that he could hardly expect from aristocratic writers a satirical depiction of their own society, which would fully correspond to his own negative conclusions as to the codes valid in that particular part of the great fair of vanities. This is especially obvious from his negative assessment of two fashionable novels by the French novelist Le Comte Horace de Viel-Castel as works a thousand times less entertaining and moral than Swift's depiction of fashionable society in his *Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation*, a depiction which enables the reader not only to laugh with the worthies depicted, but also *at* them, "whereas the 'prodigious' French wits are to us quite incomprehensible".[33] He insisted, however, that if their depiction were truthful, and they had painted the fashionable life as it really was — as a "heartless, false, and above all, intolerably wearisome existence"[34] — it would contain a very wholesome moral for the snobbish middle classes not thought of or intended by these authors. That is why he highly appreciated the *Lettres Parisiennes* by Delphine Corinne de Girardin ("Vicomte de Launay") and at the end of his review (analysed in detail in my previous study) added the following recommendation addressed to the English Silver-Fork novelists:

"And hence the great use of having real people of fashion to write their own lives, in place of the humble male and female authors, who, under the denomination of the Silver Fork School, have been employed by silly booksellers in our own day. They cannot give us any representation of the real authentic genteel fashionable life; they will relapse into morality in spite of themselves: do what they will, they are often vulgar, sometimes hearty and natural; they have not the unconscious wickedness, the delightful want of

[32] *Works* VIII, 115.
[33] *Works* II, 114.
[34] *Works* V, 506.

principle, which the great fashionable man possesses, none of the grace and ease of vice" (*Works* V, 507).

From this rebuke, however, he partly excluded, in other remarks of his, Mrs. Trollope and especially Mrs. Gore, whose depictions were certainly not satirical, but well-informed and authentic. He particularly appreciated that they did not in any way obtrude upon their material, but presented it without any higher purpose, aim or moral as it really was, according to their observations or information, thus allowing the reader space to make his own conclusions. He expressed this judgment of his several times, for instance in the chapter on Literary Snobs in the *Book of Snobs,* in which he reprehended the whole school for snobbery but pointed out that the works of Mrs. Gore and Mrs. Trollope (to whom he gives transparent fictitious names) contained a wholesome moral lesson which the authoresses themselves had not intended:

"Mrs. Cruor's works, and Mrs. Wallop's novels are also wholesome, if not pleasant reading. For these ladies, moving at the tip-top of fashion, as they undoubtedly do, and giving accurate pictures of the genteel, serve to warn many honest people who might otherwise be taken in, and show fashionable life to be so utterly stupid, mean, tedious, drivelling, and vulgar, as to reconcile spirits otherwise discontented to mutton and Bloomsbury Square" (*Works* IX, 333).

He made due distinctions, however, even between these two authoresses, rightly realizing that Mrs. Trollope was much less talented and much more vulgar, coarse and unscrupulous. In the *Book of Snobs* he ironically praised her as a model of refinement and delicacy[35] and in his review of her novel *A Romance of Vienna* criticized her depiction of the Viennese fashionable society as atrociously vulgar, though not devoid of instructive value, for it can give the reader "an accurate notion of *la crème de la crème*".[36] He evaluates her story as having considerable interest in spite of its improbability, for "the Countess's escapes and dangers are related with much liveliness and vigour" and some of the characters are cleverly drawn. But from that point in the story when young Ferdinand pursues his fashionable career at Vienna, the interest "entirely ceases":

"What shall we say of this picture of fashionable German life? The silver-fork school of novels has long been admired; but what is it compared to Mrs. Trollope's branch academy, which may be called the *German* silver-fork school? Such a sad picture of the Austrian nobility must make all the aristocracy of Europe blush for itself. They talk even worse French than our own noblemen do in novels; they are more insufferably dull, and — may we add it? — more atrociously vulgar than any duke and marquis of whom we ever read in a romance. As for the ladies, we grieve to think, from the accurate portrait of them which our clever authoress has given, what a sad set they must be."[37]

In one particular case, however, Thackeray finds Mrs. Trollope's vulgarity acceptable and even commendable, and that is in her successful depiction of a vulgar woman, the heroine of her novel *The Widow Barnaby.* In the prefatory words to his review he points out that he had already been several times compelled to "cry out against the errors and literary crimes of Mrs. Trollope" and that he therefore decided not to review any of her further works, fearing that

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[35] See *Works* IX, 330.
[36] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 217.
[37] Ibid.

his "distaste might have possibly amounted to a prejudice". *The Widow Barnaby,* however, entirely reconciled him with the authoress, for in his opinion it wiped away "a multitude of [her] former sins", and showed "her merits in the most favourable light". What made him praise the novel so much was its titular heroine, in his opinion (not entirely wrong, but only partly justifiable) an original, convincing and lifelike character, drawn with gay and irresistible humour:

"The Barnaby is such a heroine as never before has figured in a romance. Her vulgarity is sublime. Imaginary personage though she be, everybody who has read her memoirs must have a real interest in her. We still feel that charming horror which carried us through these volumes, contemplate in fancy the majestic developments of her person, and listen to the awful accents of her voice."[38]

How highly Thackeray thought of this character is especially obvious from his confronting it with Fielding's female characters of a similar type and placing it on the same level with them:

"Such a jovial, handsome, hideous, ogling, bustling, monster of a woman as maid, wife, and widow, was never, as we can recollect, before brought upon the scene. Not Madame Duval, nor Miss Snap (who afterwards married Mr. Jonathan Wild), not Mrs. Towwows, nor the immaculate Mrs. Slipslop, live in fiction, or appear to us in a light more amiably disagreeable, more delightfully disgusting, than the Widow Barnaby. By the side of those sweet creations of the poet let the widow take her place; her humour is as fine as that of the relative of Cecilia, the chaste bride of Mr. Wild, or the delicate companion of Mr. Joseph Andrews."[39]

Thackeray also gratefully gives unqualified approbation to the improvement in the style of Mrs. Trollope, who in this novel does not commit her usual blunders in her French and writes good English. In the conclusion he positively evaluates her "real *harmless* drollery and humour" on this occasion and her good knowledge of human nature:

"It is as good and amusing as Paul de Kock, and, besides exhibiting a more extensive and accurate knowledge of human nature, is written with much more decorum and moral usefulness."[40]

His praise of this novel is considerably exaggerated, for even if this is one of the better works of the authoress, her characters certainly cannot be put on the same level with Fielding's masterly creations. More fitting is its comparison to the productions of the French *boulevard* writer, who was in these years a favourite of Thackeray but who was later reprehended by him for his vulgarity, lack of humour and absurd caricatures of Englishmen, as I have shown in more detail in my last study.

As far as Mrs. Gore is concerned, Thackeray places her on a slightly higher level than Mrs. Trollope. He has several critical reservations as to her creative approach, as we shall see, but praises her ability to create well observed characters which she can bring to life in a few deft strokes, her uncommon humour, the admirable vivacity and fidelity to nature which some of her descriptions possess, and especially her astounding knowledge of all the details of the life

[38] Ibid., p. 229; for the preceding quotations see ibid., pp. 228–229.
[39] Ibid., p. 229.
[40] Ibid.

of the fashionable dandies and footmen which she has chosen for depiction and which she presents with gravity and naïve respect and without any edifying purposes. On her *Sketches of English Character* he wrote:

"They are clear, sprightly (too sprightly), coarse, and utterly worldly. A direct morality is not called for, perhaps, in works of fiction, but that a moral sentiment should pervade them, at least, is no disadvantage. People's minds will not be refined or exalted by the perusal of this book. The subjects, to be sure, are not very refined or exalted. But if you want a tolerably faithful picture of Pall-mall in 1840, of the dandies who frequented Crockford's, the dowagers and virgins who resorted to Willis's, their *motus et certamina*, intrigues, amusements, and ways of life, their lady's maids, doctors, and flunkies both in and out of livery, such may be beheld in the present microcosm of Mrs. Gore."[41]

On more mature consideration he realized, however, that the book did contain a wholesome moral, identical with that he himself had drawn from his observations of the same milieu and probably even intended by the authoress:

"And we are wrong in saying it has no moral: the moral is that which very likely the author intended — that entire weariness, contempt, and dislike which the reader must undergo after this introduction to what is called the world. If it be as here represented, the world is the most hollow, heartless, vulgar, brazen world, and those are luckiest who are out of it."[42]

That he could accept only such a depiction of the fashionable world that was either openly satirical or at least contained a hidden moral corresponding to his own conception, is especially obvious from his evaluation of Disraeli's *Coningsby*. This novelist is in his eyes a much graver culprit than either Mrs. Trollope or Mrs. Gore are, for he endeavours to represent in his dandies regenerators of a diseased society, which in Thackeray's eyes is absurd and unpardonable:

"Dandies are here made to regenerate the world — to heal the wounds of the wretched body politic — to infuse new blood into torpid old institutions — to reconcile the ancient world to the modern — to solve the doubts and perplexities which at present confound us — and to introduce the supreme truth to the people, as theatre managers do the sovereign to the play, smiling, and in silk stockings, and with a pair of wax candles."[43]

Besides rejecting the notion that indolent and socially useless dandies should appear in the heroic role of the saviours of English society (and rightly tracing the origin of this conception of the novelist to Carlyle's doctrine of hero-worship), Thackeray also points out that these protagonists of Disraeli's political programme are not represented truthfully and do not appear before the reader as lifelike personages. He sees the main cause of this failure in the oriental "luxury of conceit" in which the novelist indulges and which makes him endow his heroes with "picturesque, wild, and outrageous" dandyism, "quite unlike the vapid coxcombries of an English dandy":

"The dandyism, moreover, is intense, but not real; not English, that is. It is vastly too ornamental, energetic, and tawdry for our quiet habits. The author's coxcombry is splendid, gold-land, refulgent, like that of Murat rather than that of Brummell."[44]

These foibles of Disraeli's creative method, his pretentiousness, his delight in false Oriental splendour and fashionable themes and characters, and his

[41] *Contributions*, 140—141; see also *Works* VI, 584.
[42] *Contributions*, p. 142.
[43] Ibid., p. 39.
[44] Ibid., pp. 40—41; see also *Works* VI, 507.

ornamental style, became the targets of Thackeray's masterly parody *Codlingsby*, published under the then transparent pseudonym "D. Shrewsbury"[45] in his *Punch* parodistic series *Novels by Eminent Hands*. The edge of his satire is first and foremost turned against Disraeli's ideology and political programme, as it was embodied in one of the main characters of *Coningsby*, the Jewish banker Sidonia, whom Thackeray ridicules in the figure of Mendoza (this part of his parody will be dealt with in one of the following sub-chapters), but he at the same time very successfully parodies the "silver-fork" tendencies of the author and the general character of his creative approach and style. It is especially in his description of Mendoza's gorgeous London residence that he captured, as Ray has pointed out, "Disraeli's very accent",[46] furnishing it with divans "of carved amber covered with ermine", a fountain "pattering and babbling with jets of double-distilled otto of roses", an ivory pianoforte with silver and enamelled keys and a mother-of-pearl music-stool, hanging the walls with costly pictures and cloth of silver embroidered with gold and jewels, and covering the floor with a white velvet carpet the edges of which "were wrought with seed-pearls, and fringed with Valenciennes lace and bullion".[47] As Merritt has pointed out, Thackeray's parody was a little belated, for by the time of its publication Disraeli was "a far more serious novelist than he had been earlier": his style "had been modified", and though he still delighted in "silver fork" scenes, "they are not as exaggerated as the earlier ones had been". But even this scholar admits that Thackeray's description of Mendoza's apartment "is perilously close to passages in Disraeli's early novels, such as *The Young Duke* and *Alroy*".[48]

As we have partly seen, in his criticism of the productions of the Silver-Fork School Thackeray also pays due attention to the craftsmanship of the novelists he assesses, and we may note here the interesting distinctions he makes between the female and male novelists in general and the individual representatives of both groups in particular. Upon the whole, he places the female novelists on a much lower artistic level than the male, reserving the lowest place for Lady Charlotte Bury, Lady Blessington and Lady Londonderry. His contempt for the authoresses of this type, who had no talent whatever and whose "art" was unbelievably defective, was for the first time revealed in his review of the novel *Love* by Charlotte Bury. He adopts in his review a special critical approach which he obviously regards as most suitable for works wholly deficient from the point of view of art, posing as if he were reluctant to assess the novel directly and proposing to present its mere description. He briefly sums up the plot of the novel (but only of its two volumes, for he was unable to read it to the end), underlining its greatest absurdities only by using italics, and demonstrates the authoress's wretched command of language by merely quoting several short extracts from the novel to which he adds a few ironical comments of his own. He was quite right in assuming that his summary and the quoted extracts would speak for themselves, for they are amply sufficient to enlighten the reader as to the absurdity of the plot, founded upon improbable events which run counter

[45] At that time (1847) Disraeli was M. P. for Shrewsbury.
[46] *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 389.
[47] For the quotations see *Works* VIII, 108.
[48] James D. Merritt, "The Novelist St. Barbe in Disraeli's *Endymion:* Revenge on Whom?", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 23, No. 1, June 1968, p. 86.

to common sense, the untruthfulness of the characters, the general ineptitude and silliness of the novel and its faulty moral tendency. In this case, however, he is obviously not afraid of the possible deteriorating influence of the novel upon the morals of the readers, for he perfectly realizes, as Enzinger has shown, that the "effect of an immoral book" "varies directly with its literary power" and that the work he assesses is, as White has it, "too dull to be dangerous, and too entirely vapid and insignificant to be efficiently immoral".[49] Thackeray's review of Bury's novel was very positively evaluated in its time in a short notice discovered by Gulliver (in an article about new books in the *Torch*) which in the opinion of this scholar could have been written by Thackeray himself, but which even so does, I believe, give a true picture of this piece of Thackeray's criticism:

"The novel of 'Love' however, has been so well castigated by the *Times*, its impossible story so scornfully dismissed, and its careless and unreflecting authoress put *hors de combat*, in such sad and degrading plight, that even if we were inclined to submit her to the *question*, there is not a limb left unbroken upon which to exercise the torture."[50]

Lady Blessington and Lady Londonderry became the targets of Thackeray's attacks in two *Punch* papers. In his "Leaves from the Lives of the Lords of Literature" (January 1844) he presented a parodistic portrait of the former authoress, mocking at her insignificant works written in a "faultless" style, "ornamented with a great number of phrases both in French and Italian, which sparkle through her English like gems in the night". He mentions as an interesting fact that those critics who bestowed "such *laudatory compliments* upon her ladyship's productions" are "rather shy of quoting anything from them" and presents the following "explanation" (pronounced through the mouth of James Grant in whose name this pamphlet is written):

"And why? — from envy to be sure, as I have often found in my own case; the reviewers being afraid lest their criticisms should appear stupid and uninteresting by the side of the writer's delightful text."[51]

His criticism of this authoress is entirely just, for all her works, as Rosa in particular has pointed out, were characterized by verbosity, looseness of construction, absence of lifelike characters, bad taste, superficial observation and weak style:

"Most of her work would never have been published if she had been untitled and obscure."[52]

Thackeray's critical assaults on Lady Blessington are also a telling testimony of his refusal to let personal feelings allow him to deviate from the aesthetic principles which underlie his judgments — when the basic issues of literature were at stake, he did not hesitate in launching a sharp attack even upon his personal friend.[53]

[49] For the quotations see Enzinger, op. cit., vol. 20, No. 4, p. 323; White, op. cit., p. 37.
[50] Op. cit., p. 132.
[51] Spielmann, op. cit., p. 35.
[52] Op. cit., p. 159.
[53] For the information on his friendship with Lady Blessington see Wilson, op. cit., I, 364, II, 78, 148; R. R. Madden, *Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington*, 2 vols., New York, 1855, I, 176; Michael Sadleir, *Blessington — D'Orsay. A Masquerade*, Constable & Co., Ltd., London, 1933, p. 280.

No less trenchantly does Thackeray attack the travel-book of Lady Londonderry, *Visit to Foreign Courts,* published serially in the *New Monthly Magazine.* The work was condemned by criticism, but in spite of that gained great popularity among the snobbish readers who were eagerly interested in the life of the aristocracy abroad. Thackeray ridiculed it in a satirical "Letter from Lady Judy Punch to Her Grace the Duchess of Jenkins", in which he pilloried all the absurdities in the book, mocked at the authoress's snobbery, affected style and excessive predilection for using quotations from French, and ironically emphasized that only "people of fashion", among whom the authoress belonged, could correctly use the English language.[54] His criticism of Lady Londonderry is not motivated first and foremost by his political antipathies, as Forsythe believes (she was the wife of the brother and heir of Lord Castlereagh[55]) — for Thackeray equally sharply criticized the production of Lady Blessington who belonged to the liberal, Whig aristocracy. His critical assault is objective, based upon the main principles of his aesthetic and critical creed, and entirely just.

One of the targets for Thackeray's criticism was also Lady Morgan, whose style (along with Ainsworth's) he parodied in his account of the first day of the exhibition at the Royal Academy, in his article "A Pictorial Rhapsody". He did not choose any of her productions as the object for more detailed analysis, however, and obviously quite liked her novel *The Wild Irish Girl,* as his marginal comments suggest.[56] As Stevenson has pointed out,[57] he may have used this novelist as one of the prototypes for his Becky (Lady Morgan was his personal friend and he was well informed about her personality and adventurous life) and, we should add, may thus have spared her from the deadly blows of his criticism out of pure gratefulness.

As we have seen, Thackeray assigned to Mrs. Trollope and especially to Mrs. Gore a slightly higher place in the hierarchy of the fashionable novelists, as writers whose depictions were at least tolerably truthful, and yet he found Mrs. Trollope too vulgar and voiced several well-placed objections to some further characteristic traits of Mrs. Gore's creative approach than those discussed above. In the first place, he perfectly realized that her works, "exploiting hackneyed idealizations", as Loofbourow expressed it, "represented the purely sentimental aspect of 'fashionable' fiction".[58] In his review of her Christmas story *New Year's Day* he writes with much humour about the excessive sentimentality of this work which made him cry so that he could hardly write, and caused him to "get so bewildered with grief as to lose the power of coherently continuing the narrative".[59] The gap in the text which follows is commented upon in the following footnote signed by the fictitious editor of *Fraser's Magazine,* Oliver Yorke, but written, in my opinion, in this case by Thackeray himself:

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[54] See Spielmann, op. cit., pp. 41—42; for another attack of Thackeray on the snobbishness of Lady Londonderry's travel-book see *Works* IX, 274.

[55] See Robert S. Forsythe, "Thackeray, Critic of His Times", *The Quarterly Journal,* published by The University of North Dakota, 1932, vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 199—200.

[56] See *Works* IV, 291, VIII, 146, XVI, 243.

[57] See A. Lionel Stevenson, "*Vanity Fair* and Lady Morgan", *PMLA,* XLVIII, 1933, pp. 547—551, referred to by Ray in *Letters* I, clvii note.

[58] Op. cit., p. 16.

[59] *Works* VI, 587.

"Our contributor's MS. is here almost washed out with tears; and two printers have been carried off in hysterics, who were merely setting up the types!" (*Works* VI, 587n.).

Thackeray's negative attitude to the conventional sentimentality of Mrs. Gore's fiction is, however, even better expressed in his early parodies of her style than in his review of her Christmas story, in which he assesses her false sentiment as typical rather of "Christmas" literature than of the Silver-Fork School. As I have shown in the preceding sub-chapter, drawing upon the research of Loofbourow, Thackeray parodied Mrs. Gore's expressive modes in *Catherine,* but even this was not the first instance of such a proceeding on his part. As the quoted scholar has shown, as early as his burlesque story *The Professor* (1837) Thackeray ridiculed the sentimental mode by depicting his heroine, a fishmonger's daughter, as a girl "whose sensibilities have been morbidly excited by a course of sentimental fiction".[60] As follows from this quotation, neither these early parodies of his, nor his later *chef-d'œuvre* in this *genre, Lords and Liveries,* are limited to parodying the style of Mrs. Gore alone — his mockery is in all cases addressed at the same time to the sentimental aspect of the fashionable novel in general. Mrs. Gore's sentimentalities and the sentimental convention of fashionable fiction remained an object of Thackeray's parody and satire also in *Vanity Fair,* as Loofbourow has shown, and we shall see later. And even this does not exhaust all the aspects of his relationship to this particular literary convention, for he also profited much as a creative writer from his intimate acquaintance with it and penetrating assessment of it. Later I shall discuss a further point which the quoted scholar has also shown, namely that fashionable fiction furnished Thackeray's mature prose with one of its most fundamental expressive media, very important, too, from the functional point of view.

One of Thackeray's rebukes addressed to Mrs. Gore concerns her technique: in his review of another Christmas story of hers, *The Snow Storm,* he reprimands her for building her plots upon conventional schemes — and especially for using, in this particular story, the expedient of the mysterious old gentleman who comes from India "just in the nick of time — after fifty years' absence — after he has been forgotten and thought dead by everybody — after oppressed virtue is at its last gasp, and is on the point of being sold up — after vice has had a career of prosperity, and has reached a disgusting climax of luck".[61] He has several other well-grounded objections to the creative approach of this authoress, but they concern those traits of her stories which make Thackeray range them among the typical specimens of "Christmas" literature and which will be therefore discussed in the chapter devoted to the evaluation of his criticism of this type of fiction.

In 1841 Thackeray for the first time launched a wholesale critical attack upon all the authoresses of fashionable novels, in his satirical sketch *The Fashionable Authoress.* Through the medium of his satirical portrait of Lady Fanny Flummery, who has raised the economic situation of her family to the desirable level by becoming a fashionable novelist and producing an enormous quantity of "fiddle-faddle novels" and "namby-pamby poetry", Thackeray sharply inveighed against the whole production of the female representatives

[60] Op. cit., p. 16.
[61] *Contributions,* 105.

of the Silver-Fork School. Like these, Lady Flummery has "no lack of that natural *esprit* which every woman possesses; but here praise stops"; like these, she produces poetry which is "mere wind", and novels which are "stark naught"; like theirs, her philosophy is "sheer vacancy". Like Lady Bury, Mrs. Trollope and Mrs. Gore, she is not bound by the rules of grammar and compensates for the ignorance of her own language by taking "little graceful pranks and liberties" with it, and by "fearful quotations" from French, German, Italian and Spanish.[62] In his satirical portrait of the critic Mr. Timson, who servilely fawns upon Lady Flummery and, in return for her gifts and favours, writes eulogies upon her works (eulogies which Thackeray successfully satirizes, as we have seen in the third chapter, presenting in his parody, in addition, the burlesque plot of a typical Silver-Fork novel), Thackeray at the same time shows that the existence of such authoresses gives birth to snobbery in critics and publishers. Upon the whole, however, he regards the influence "which her writing possesses over society" as "quite harmless":

"The woman herself is not so blameable; it is the silly people who cringe at her feet that do the mischief, and, gulled themselves, gull the most gullible of publics" (*Works* I, 575).

Nor does she in his opinion exercise any influence upon literature:

"The woman has not, in fact, the slightest influence upon literature for good or for evil: there are certain number of fools whom she catches in her flimsy traps; and why not?" (*Works* I, 566).

Some other remarks of his show, however, that he was not always so convinced of the entirely harmless effect of the Silver-Fork novels upon the reading public. In his review of a new edition of Fielding's works (*The Times*, September 2, 1840) he points out that "though there is, to be sure, a great deal of matter in the book that is not exactly so delicate as the last novel by the last female author of fashion; and though boys and virgins must read it with caution", he is "very glad to see this great writer's works put forward in a popular form, and at a price exceedingly low", and proceeds:

"A man may be very much injured by perusing maudlin sentimental tales, but cannot be hurt, though he may be shocked every now and then, by reading works of sterling humour, like the greater part of these, full of benevolence, practical wisdom, and generous sympathy with mankind" (*Works* III, 383).

As the social position of Lady Flummery suggests and as is confirmed by Thackeray's remark on the blunder committed by "a celebrated authoress, who wrote a Diaress" (that of calling "somebody the prototype of his own father"[63]), one of the targets of Thackeray's satire is Lady Charlotte Bury who did commit such a blunder, and who also, as Rosa believes, gave him a direct provocation by publishing a series of prayers *Suspirium sanctorum, or, Holy Breathings* (1826)[64] (Lady Flummery's hymn-book boasts of the title *Heavenly Chords*). The sketch has, however, a much wider range. The motives which made Lady Flummery become a fashionable authoress are the same as those which forced

[62] For the quotations see *Works* I, 576, 570, 569, 570.

[63] *Works* I, 570; see also Thackeray's comment on this blunder (this time concerning a daughter and a mother) in his review of Lady Bury's *Diary*, *Works* I, 94.

[64] See op. cit., pp. 149, 157.

Mrs. Trollope to write, the wide literary activity of Thackeray's authoress resembles that of Mrs. Gore and Lady Blessington, while her pictorial likeness points in my opinion to the last-named novelist. There is no doubt, however, that Thackeray had no personalities immediately in mind and that his purpose was not to ridicule the individual authoresses, but the whole literary school.

His last wholesale attack upon the female fashionable novelists, and his most deadly stroke, was the parody *Lords and Liveries, by the Authoress of "Dukes and Déjeuners", "Hearts and Diamonds", "Marchionesses and Milliners", etc. etc.* The titles of the works mentioned by Thackeray are mostly fictitious (the only genuine one is "Hearts and Diamonds", a story from Mrs. Gore's book *The Fair of Mayfair*[65]), but very successfully parody the sort of titles for which Mrs. Gore had predilection[66] and are therefore an acceptable indication that the parody is first and foremost aimed at the acknowledged queen of the school. The range of his parody is however again much wider, for Thackeray's mockery applies to the fashionable novel in general. He ridicules not only the narrow thematic range of Mrs. Gore's novels and of the productions of the whole school, her gushes of sentiment and the sentimentalities of the other authoresses, but also the flashy fashionable slang, richly ornamented with phrases from foreign languages, which was typical not only of Mrs. Gore, but even more so of Lady Blessington, as we have seen, of Lady Morgan, as Horne pointed out, and also of Lady Bulwer and Lady Londonderry, as Thackeray noticed in one of his marginal comments.[67] And he also parodied, as Kathleen Tillotson has shown, the frequent mention of noted firms in fashionable novels, which "had, or came to have, actual commercial value to the author", as "is suggested by a much later burlesque, 'Crinoline and Macassar' in Trollope's *Three Clerks*".[68] To this we should add that Thackeray ridiculed this propensity of the Silver-Fork novelists perhaps most effectively in his later addition to *Punch's Prize Novelists, A Plan for a Prize Novel* (February 22, 1851), which is in the first place directed against the novel of purpose, as we shall see, but in which he also recommends young writers to write "an advertisement novel" instead, which would be not only popular, but would also bring the author some reward from the owners of the advertised firms.

Before we finish with the female Silver-Fork novelists, it is necessary to point out that one writer of the same sex, but not of the same type, L. E. Landon, is left out by Thackeray from his wholesale attacks upon the fashionable authoresses and treated very indulgently, though not uncritically. Yet his two reviews of her novel *Ethel Churchill* indicate that though he did not regard her as a representative of this school, he realized at least to a certain extent that her art shared one characteristic trait with this fashionable mode — that of excessive sentimentality. In both his reviews the main point of his criticism is that the novel is too lachrymose, the sentimental love interest overdone and therefore tedious and "neither pleasant nor wholesome". That he did at least partly realize how close Miss Landon was in this aspect of her creative approach to the

[65] For Thackeray's early positive comment on this novel see *Letters* I, 203 (1832).

[66] At the time of the publication of the parody her novel *Peers and Parvenus* (1846) scored a great success; from the other titles of her works we might mention *Mothers and Daughters* and *The Lover and the Husband.*

[67] For Horne's view see op. cit., p. 166; for Thackeray's remark *Works* IX, 330.

[68] Op. cit., p. 86.

Silver-Fork novelists is suggested by his placing her on the same level with Bulwer:

"But we are not going to praise Miss Landon's novel, for the very reason which has made us cry out against Mr. Bulwer; it is not written in a healthy and honest tone of sentiment; there is a vast deal too much tenderness and love-making, heart-breaking and repining, for persons in this every-day world, — persons who, like ourselves, have to pay butchers' bills for twelve children, and have buried (without shedding a tear) our third wife thirty-seven years ago."[69]

He especially resents the tendency of Miss Landon and Bulwer to present themselves and other literary geniuses as exceptional beings who have some special ills to bear and possess the exclusive privilege of constantly bemoaning their misfortunes. In the following passage in which he vents this complaint Thackeray applies his realistic conception of the position of the artist in society, familiar to us from my second chapter:

"She writes a very painful journal of misery, and depression, and despair. We do not know what private circumstances may occasion this despondency, what woes or disappointments cause Miss Landon or Mr. Bulwer to cry out concerning the miseries attendant upon genius; but we would humbly observe that there is no reason why genius should not be as cheerful as dulness, — for it has greater capacities of enjoyment, and no greater ills to endure. It has a world of beauty and of happiness which is invisible to commoner clay, and can drink at a thousand sources of joy inaccessible to vulgar men. Of the ills of life, a genius has no more share than another. Hodge feels misfortune quite as keenly as Mr. Bulwer; Polly Jones' heart is to the full as tender as Miss Landon's. Weep, then, whimper and weep, like our fair poetess or our sage Pelham, as if their woes were deeper than those of the rest of the world! Oh, for a little manly, honest, God-relying, simplicity — cheerful, unaffected, and humble!"[70]

Besides this principal objection Thackeray has very little to say about L. E. Landon's creative approach (indeed, as Gulliver has pointed out, his "two reviews . . . are hardly more than extensive quotations with a few paragraphs of comment"[71]). But he does, even though very briefly, criticize her characters as too stereotype (all of them being "either consumptive or crossed in love"[72]), the composition as weak and the story as lacking in interest, novelty or excitement, and hence tedious. One of his comments concerns Miss Landon's technique — he reprehends her that she has "no idea of a dramatic character" and that it is Miss Landon herself "that speaks and feels throughout".[73] Whenever Thackeray has something to say in opposition to the writer's creative approach, however, he always returns to praise and in each of these cases commits the mistake of overestimating her merits. There is not a page on which he does not find some mark of a talent, in his opinion uncommon — her "singular wit, high poetic feeling, fearful truth and pathos", depth of observation or "quite a fearful knowledge of the heart"[74] (even though only of her own heart) — all of which make him place her on the same level with Madame de Staël and French memoir-writers. In his *Times* review he comes to the following final evaluation:

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[69] *Stray Papers*, pp. 303—304; for the above quotation see ibid., p. 304; see also Gulliver, op. cit., pp. 204—205.

[70] *Stray Papers*, pp. 304—305.

[71] Op. cit., p. 102.

[72] *Stray Papers*, p. 304.

[73] Ibid.

[74] For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., p. 205 and *Stray Papers*, p. 304.

"To the few who do not know Miss Landon's works the extracts which we have given will show her high powers; those who know her other productions will only be pleased to see how genius gathers strength every day. There may be a few faults of sentiment or composition, but it would be almost a meanness to point them out, when they are accompanied by such great merit."[75]

The root of this critical error of Thackeray's may perhaps have lain in the attitude of the other Fraserians who did not entirely spare L.E.L., as we have seen before, but upon the whole estimated her work too highly, probably mainly because they bore in mind Maginn's lifelong attachment for this authoress.

As regards Thackeray's attitude to the male representatives of the Silver-Fork School, the first point to be noticed is that his critical attacks to a certain extent spared Theodore Hook — he did not review any of his novels,[76] nor did he parody his style either in his *Punch* serial or elsewhere. The reasons for this omission might have been several. In the first place, Thackeray must have realized how much he had been indebted to Hook in the early years of his literary career. One of his earliest works, *The Ramsbottom Letters,* published in the university magazine *The Snob,* was written in conscious imitation of Hook's popular series of the same title, originally published in *John Bull* and in 1829 in the *Western Luminary,* and shares many common traits with the imitated work — the main character Dorothea Julia Ramsbottom, according to Stevenson "plagiarized entire"[77] from Hook's work, the grotesquely faulty spelling, the unbelievable puns and sheer malapropisms. Hook's influence (as well as that of the other representatives of the fiction of "high jinks", especially the eccentric humorist Edward Clarke[78]) may be also felt in the whole tone and manner of Thackeray's early humour. In the second place, Hook's creative approach was predominantly realistic, and his style was not so offensive as that of Bulwer, being easy, natural and pleasant, as Hollingsworth has shown in his comparison of the two novelists.[79] Thackeray did not spare Hook altogether, however, for he obviously gradually realized the essential differences between his mature creative approach and that of his former literary model. What he realized first of all was the narrow thematic range of Hook's fashionable novels, for which he rebuked the novelist as early as 1838 in the passage quoted at the beginning of this sub-chapter. Three years later, however, he found much to praise in the novel *Peter Priggins* which he attributed to Hook, though it was really written by J. T. J. Hewlett,[80] and which he placed above his own early works. His more serious criticism of Hook begins with his *Book of Snobs,* but it concerns exclusively this novelist's relationship to the aristocracy: Thackeray pillories him (under the fictitious name of Theodore Crook) as a literary snob whose fawning

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[75] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 205.

[76] Dr. Thrall attributes to him the partial authorship of the summary review "A Dozen of Novels" (*Fraser's Magazine,* April 1834), in which two novels by Hook were noticed (*The Parson's Daughter* and *Love and Pride*), and which in her opinion he wrote in collaboration with Maginn. This contribution has been, however, recently excluded from the Thackeray canon by Professor White.

[77] *The Showman of Vanity Fair,* p. 25.

[78] For Thackeray's praise of Clarke's "excellent" work *Three Courses and a Dessert* see *Works* II, 428, 434. For Ray's comment on Thackeray's familiarity with another work of this eccentric writer, *The Library of Useless Knowledge* (1837), see *Letters* I, 373n.

[79] See op. cit., p. 48.

[80] See *Works* I, xlix, II, 563—564, *Letters* II, 24.

attitude to the highest social classes is a warning example to all literary men.[81] In *Vanity Fair* and especially in *Pendennis* Thackeray created a satirical portrait of Hook in Mr. Wagg, in which he ridiculed mainly the novelist's appearance, social conduct and some traits of personal character (especially his servile fawning upon Lord Steyne and his contemptuous attitude to poverty and low social position), but through the mouth of Wagg's acquaintances he also addressed a few critical comments to Hook's works. In these he evaluates him as a skilful writer of verses, but a second-rate novelist and dunce, whose works, though enormously popular, are not masterpieces of human intellect and could have been written by anybody.[82]

As far as Bulwer is concerned, Thackeray sharply criticized his novels *Godolphin, Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice,* as we shall see, though rather as novels of purpose than specimens of the fashionable mode, but he did not wholly condemn *Pelham,* in which most scholars see a pure product of the Silver-Fork School (though this novel cannot be fitted entirely into this particular pigeonhole either, for even here Bulwer follows a definite purpose, depicting in it, as especially Ivasheva has shown, the degradation of a young aristocrat as the outcome of his adaptation to his society[83]). It is of course true that Thackeray's attitude to this novel was by no means uncritical. In one of his early letters he criticized it as "rather dull & very impertinent",[84] he parodied its style in his pamphlet "Mr. Yellowplush's Ajew" and ridiculed it in *Jeames's Diary,* the titular figure of which, an upstart footman, studies the behaviour and manners of a "genuine gentleman" from this work and also uses Bulwer's French phrases, of course in his own characteristic spelling. Even sharper is Thackeray's attack on *Pelham* in his assessment of the story "My Turkish Visit", published in one of the illustrated annuals[85] which represented an important branch of the production of the Silver-Fork School. He quotes the description of the apartment of the Turkish ambassador at Paris, furnished with Oriental splendour, and characterizes the style as continuing in "the upholstery line of writing", introduced into English literature by *Pelham.* He points out, however, that the imitator of Bulwer far exceeded his great model, for *Pelham* is "dirt, at which the delicate mind sickens — dross, pinchbeck, compared to this pure gold!":

"Talk of the silver-fork school of romance, gracious heavens! Give silver forks for the future to base grooms, or lowly dustmen. A silver fork, forsooth! it may serve to transfix

[81] See *Works* IX, 332—333.

[82] See *Works* XI, 640—641, 650, 829, XII, 312, 317, 351.

[83] For Ivasheva's views see op. cit., pp. 68—9. Not only the difficulty of classifying this novel, but the even greater difficulty in the case of Bulwer's other productions is obvious from the range of classifications made by this and other scholars. Ivasheva ranks *Pelham* among those novels near in some respects to the Newgate School, and *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice* to the Silver-Fork School; as purely Newgate she considers *Paul Clifford* and *Eugene Aram.* Hollingsworth ranks *Pelham* among the Newgate novels, while Rosa considers this novel, *England and the English,* and the first edition of *Godolphin,* as fashionable novels (see op. cit., pp. 74, 95, 96—98). I have ranged *Devereux* among the historical novels, since it depicts Queen Anne's time, although it is true that its hero is a dandy.

[84] *Letters* I, 228.

[85] Published anonymously in *The Keepsake* for 1838. Thackeray (if he really wrote this article, which White doubts) makes guesses at the authorship, naming several noblemen and noblewomen, including Lady Blessington, and adds a footnote in which he points out that according to Yellowplush, who sought for information in the highest circles, the story was written by Miss Howell-and-James (see *Works* II, 340 and 343n.).

a saveloy, or to perforate a roasted tator; but never let the term be used for the future to designate a series of novels which pretend to describe polite life. After this, all else is low and mean" (*Works* II, 342).

Besides these negative comments, however, he also found something to praise in the novel. In one comment he referred with approval to the character of the disreputable Job Jonson as a successful creation[86] and he seemed to have also realized that even Pelham himself, in spite of his extreme coxcombry, was a surprisingly lifelike character when compared to the other heroes created by Bulwer. This is suggested by his following assessment of this hero as a much less offensive character than Ernest Maltravers:

"The Bond-street dandy, Mr. Pelham, is by no means so offensive as the philosophical dandy, Mr. Maltravers; the former's affectations and egotism are far more natural and manly than the sickly cant of the latter. There was an appetite about Pelham when he went to dinner; a good humour, self-complacency, as he laced his stays and padded his waistcoat, which were excusable, and even pleasing. To love good dinners and small waists is no crime, at least a pardonable feeling in a young fellow with a tolerable figure and a good digestion."[87]

All the evidence we have at our disposal seems to suggest that it was Disraeli to whom Thackeray awarded the highest place as fashionable novelist among the other representatives of this literary school. Even if he addressed to him so many critical rebukes (several of which will be dealt with later, as they concern the political part of *Coningsby* and the novel *Sybil*) and relentlessly parodied his style, he never denied him talent, even in the period when his attacks were sharpest. The following remark has a tone and spirit not to be discerned in the comments upon Bulwer and seems to suggest that he thought of Disraeli more highly than of the former novelist:

"But in taking leave to rank Mr. Disraeli among the coxcombs, we should do him an injustice were we to omit saying that there are coxcombs for whom we have a very high respect, and that we believe this gentleman to be not only a dandy but a man of genius."[88]

As the research done by C. L. Cline reveals,[89] in private Thackeray was even more enthusiastic about Disraeli's genius than he was in his public statements. As this scholar has shown, on the basis of two letters discovered by him in the Disraeli archives, after having published his review of *Coningsby*, Thackeray "desired the acquaintance, if not the friendship, of Disraeli"[90] and made this wish of his known to a friend of the Disraelis (Arethusa Milner-Gibson) who wrote about it to Mrs. Disraeli, adding that he spoke in raptures of *Coningsby* and revealed himself as a great worshipper of Disraeli's genius. We also possess evidence that he eventually did meet Disraeli, in April 1844, and spent a pleasant evening in his house.[91] In public, however, he remained critical of Disraeli's creative approach, and as late as three years after meeting the novelist he published his parody *Codlingsby*, which immediately made an end to the scarcely started friendship, as we shall see later.

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[86] See Gulliver, op. cit., p. 201.
[87] Ibid., p. 215.
[88] *Contributions*, 41.
[89] See "Disraeli and Thackeray", *The Review of English Studies*, vol. XIX, pp. 404ff.
[90] Ibid., p. 404.

In enforcing his demand that the fashionable novelists should depict their chosen sphere of life truthfully, Thackeray not only used all the weapons of criticism he had at his disposal, but also — as in his criticism of the Newgate School — juxtaposed to their sentimentalized depictions his own realistic pictures of the same milieu and characters. The earliest of these are presented by Thackeray under the mask of Yellowplush, whom he introduces as the fictitious author of *"the only authentic picture of fashionable life* which has been given to the world in our time",[92] *The Yellowplush Papers.* And it should be duly emphasized that even in this earliest attempt of his Thackeray was almost wholly successful, for he did create a very effective and drastic contrast to the heroes of the Silver-Fork novels in his harshly realistic portraits of the cynical and wholly morally corrupted young dandy Deuceace and of his even worse old father Lord Crabs. These characters are the first in the imposing gallery of such types which Thackeray created in his earlier works up to *Vanity Fair* and in which he successfully depicted the most typical traits of their class, the class so admired and fawned upon by the Silver-Fork novelists — 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 the stage of development reached in Thackeray's own time, several episodic figures in his stories from contemporary life (Sir Gorgon, George Brandon, Viscount Cinqbars, the arrogant aristocratic guests from *Cox's Diary,* the members of the haughty families of the Tiptoffs and the Kickleburys, the morally corrupted families of the Ringwoods, Cinqbarses, Crabses and Deuceaces, the unscrupulous Bareacres and his aristocratic snobs from the *Book of Snobs*). The summit of this development is of course represented by *Vanity Fair,* in which Thackeray did several very important things at once. In the first place, he for the last time attacked the Silver-Fork School directly. In the introduction to the sixth chapter he suggested that he could tell his story in the "supremely genteel" manner by raising his middle class characters to the ranks of nobility, and at the same time showed his readers (but only in the first edition of the novel) how he would have done it by writing a little burlesque of the style of the Silver-Fork novelists (which was, with the twin burlesque of the Newgate School, deleted by him from the later editions). In the conclusion of this burlesque he explains his reason why he desisted from such a proceeding, enforcing in his explanation one of the basic tenets of his realistic aesthetic creed — his demand that the novelist should be intimately acquainted with the sphere of life he intends to depict:

> "Thus you see, ladies, how this story *might* have been written, if the author had but a mind; for, to tell the truth, he is just as familiar with Newgate as with the palaces of our revered aristocracy, and has seen the outside of both. But as I don't understand the language or manners of the Rookery, nor that polyglot conversation which, according to the fashionable novelists, is spoken by the leaders of *ton*; we must, if you please, preserve our middle course modestly, amidst these scenes and personages with which we are most familiar" (*Works* XI, 884).

In the second place, he replaced the literary conventions prevalent in the fiction of his time by truth to life, and this was a deed of an almost revolutionary

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[91] See *Letters* II, 148.
[92] *Works* I, 165.

character, which was also assessed as such by some of his contemporaries. Thus for instance W. C. Brownell, in his recollection of the impact of *Vanity Fair* upon Victorian England, evaluated the appearance of this novel in the following words:

"Coming as it did into the world of fiction occupied by the writers burlesqued in the 'Novels by Eminent Hands', its substitution of truth for convention had something almost fierce in it."[93]

And he did not of course keep to his "middle" course, as he promised to do in the above-quoted words, but presented, too, truthful and lifelike portraits of the most beloved heroes of the Silver-Fork novelists (the young aristocratic dandy — Rawdon Crawley; the middle-class variety of this type — George Osborne; the landed gentleman [in the idealized depiction of the Silver-Fork novelists presented, as Rosa has it, as a well-educated and well-read man, "interested in up-to-date methods of farming" and "concerned for the welfare of his tenants"[94]] — Sir Pitt the elder; the representative of the highest fashionable circles — Lord Steyne; the social climber — Becky Sharp, etc.). Thackeray takes these stock characters from the hands of the fashionable novelists, but creates in them something essentially different from the figures presented by his predecessors, as for instance Dr. Thrall has shown:

"Dobbin, Becky Sharp, Amelia correct and humanize the typical heroes and heroines of Theodore Hook, Lady Blessington, and other 'fashionable' faddists of the day, as the manners and customs of the Crawley household correct the sham proprieties and delicacies among which those heroes and heroines lived."[95]

Thackeray presents his characters as puppets, but they appear before the reader's inner eye as genuine human beings, incomparably more convincing and interesting than the characters in fashionable novels who were indeed puppets in the proper sense of the word, "amusing enough for a single puppet show", as Rosa has it, but beginning "to bleed sawdust after repeated performances".[96] Rosa compares Thackeray's characters to those presented by Mrs. Gore in her novel *Cecil* and rightly points out that this novel, which appeared only six years earlier than *Vanity Fair* (and was wrongly attributed to Thackeray, we should add[97]), is pervaded by mustiness, "while the toys of *Vanity Fair* shine as undimmed and fresh as though the author had put them away only yesterday".[98] Worth special notice in this connection is the perceptive analysis of Loofbourow, who makes interesting distinctions between Thackeray's personages, characterizing some of them as veritable puppets capable of no development and crumpling into rags at the end of the story (as for instance Lord Steyne), and some as characters whose "vigorous reality is revealed to the reader but not to their fellow actors", who "assume conventional masks", "frustrate the realistic satisfaction of their natural impulses" and, in the world of the novel, "continue mechanically to play their fraudulent parts" (Becky), and proceeds:

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[93] *Victorian Prose Masters*, New York, 1901, p. 33; quoted by Loomis, op. cit., p. 8.
[94] Op. cit., p. 34.
[95] Op. cit., p. 80.
[96] Op. cit., pp. 208—209.
[97] For his comment upon this see *Letters* II, 13 (1841).
[98] Op. cit., p. 208.

"But the rarest characters are those with a capacity for genuine emotional response. They were puppets only so long as they acted an illusion, pulled by the strings of the fashionable mode. In foregoing their fantasy-happiness and ceasing to demand imagined satisfactions, Amelia and Dobbin become human beings, and walk away from us at the end of the novel, leaving their outgrown miniatures behind them."[99]

The fact that in Thackeray's characters we can still see, as Rosa has pointed out, the likenesses of the figures created by the Silver-Fork novelists, of course "transmuted by genius into imperishable figures",[100] alongside his direct attacks upon these novelists in this novel, has led several scholars (besides Rosa and Dr. Thrall quoted above, also G. N. Ray) to the conclusion that *Vanity Fair* is a supreme example of the fashionable novel on the level of high art, by which Thackeray intended to put an end to this sort of literature once and for all. Especially worth noticing is the analysis of Dr. Thrall who shows that the endeavour to expose the absurdities of fashionable novels was only the initial impulse and represents what she calls the "narrow" satire of the novel, while the main arrows of Thackeray's satirical assaults, the "broader" satire, is directed against the social world itself.[101]

John Loofbourow, on the other hand, went much deeper than the other scholars mentioned, and demonstrated through a detailed analysis of Thackeray's style what the novelist did in this novel in addition to what I have discussed above. He realizes, as Dr. Thrall does, that *Vanity Fair* "is satire on artistic as well as human affectations", but shows, moreover, that the fashionable mode "was more than an object of satire for Thackeray", for, "transmuted and assimilated, it is a major theme in *Vanity Fair*", as well as the author's main medium "for the synthesis of diverse conventions that characterizes his mature prose". As Loofbourow points out, the fashionable mode, as a rhythmic medium, "is a neutral presence in his later prose; but when fashionable textures are clearly recognizable, the mode is serving a satirical function". By integrating "the lyric rhythms and images of fashionable fiction with the harsher rhetoric of neoclassical satire and contemporary realism", Thackeray "is able to introduce a phrase that retains the emotional intensity of the fashionable mode but transmutes its insincere idealism into a valid insight". According to Loofbourow, however, the "fashionable mode yields not only satirical insights but psychological content and dramatic form". Romance in *Vanity Fair* is further qualified "by an aspect of human mutability, the relativistic analysis of psychological motivation", fashionable textures being "a medium for multiple viewpoints":

"Throughout the novel, the imaginative certitudes of romance are tested by an imagery of dubious motivation; psychological relativity modifies the symbolisms of emotional permanence — and the textures of 'fashionable' fiction provide the medium for this exchange."[102]

Fashionable textures are thus essential to the colouring of the characters of *Vanity Fair*, who are "consistent types" in the "romance context", while "in fashionable perspective they are mixed, ambiguous creatures". As Loofbourow further emphasizes, both chivalric romance motifs and fashionable textures are of equal importance in the novel and not at any point independent of each other, but representing "different aspects of a narrative integration", for the

[99] Op. cit., p. 32; see also p. 31.
[100] Op. cit., p. 208.
[101] See op. cit., p. 80.

novel "is a synthesis, not a pastiche, of traditions". As far as the creation of structure is concerned, while textures of criminal romance "contour the Becky—Rawdon—Steyne action in *Vanity Fair*", as we have seen, "textures of sentimental satire shape the Amelia—George—Dobbin sequence; their artistic relationship unifies the two narratives":

> "*Vanity Fair's* essential drama, for example, depends on the interaction of expressive modes that mirror emotional realities — the heroines' experience is projected through a sequence of fashionable textures, and the sentimental and melodramatic variants of 'fashionable' fiction that characterize Amelia and Rebecca control the novel's dual dramatic pattern."[103]

Although Thackeray the novelist went on exploiting the fashionable mode in all his novels following *Vanity Fair* as the basis for his personal idiom, as Loofbourow has it, as a critic he attacked the Silver-Fork School for the last time directly in his novel *Pendennis* (and along with it, its branch product, the illustrated annuals, against which he inveighed, too, in one later instance — in *The Newcomes*[104]). As we have seen at the beginning of this sub-chapter and especially in the third chapter, in *Pendennis* Thackeray assaulted in particular the publishers of this sort of literature, Henry Colburn ("Bungay") and Richard Bentley ("Bacon", who published annuals, in contradistinction to Bungay's Silver-Fork novels), though he did not spare even the fashionable poets and novelists (ridiculing them in his character of the aristocratic "poet" Percy Popjoy and in the satirical portrait of Theodore Hook, Mr. Wagg), nor the readers of fashionable novels (Fanny Bolton). In the following years, however, he ceased to pay critical attention to this literary school, having for this at least two well-grounded reasons.

The first of these is fairly obvious: he stopped working as a professional literary critic in 1847 and the focus of his interest was definitely shifted to the field of his own literary work. Secondly, he must have realized that the whole critical campaign had been fought to its victorious end. for this literary fashion, in both its branches of production, was definitely on the wane. As Kathleen Tillotson has pointed out, the fashionable novels began to lose their popularity as early as the 1840s, especially "thanks to the gradual effect of Carlyle's attack on *Pelham* in *Sartor Resartus,* and the continuous sniping of *Fraser's*", particularly of Thackeray: in this decade no fresh name of any note appeared.[105] The same scholar quotes an interesting statement of G. H. Lewes, who early in 1849 "announced that the fashionable novels had at last become 'most *un*-fashionable ... aping the tone of a school and a system of society which really died once and for ever ... on the 10th of April last' ", that is the day of the last Chartist petition and the great working-class demonstration.[106] According to Mrs. Tillotson, the "ghost of the aristocratic novel was still walking in the eighteen-fifties", even if the critics from time to time proclaimed its demise or suggested, as David Masson did in 1859, "that 'no harm would attend

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[102] Op. cit., p. 47; for the preceding quotations see ibid., pp. 30, 14, 9, 14, 14—15, 18, 23, 46—47, 48.
[103] Ibid., p. 15; for the other quotations see pp. 48, 49, 31.
[104] See *Works* XIV, 575.
[105] Op. cit., p. 75; see also ibid., p. 85 and note.
[106] *Fraser's Magazine,* April 1849, p. 419; quoted ibid., p. 87.

its total and immediate extinction', giving the interesting new reason that its frivolous representation of aristocratic politicians 'is catering for Revolution' ".[107] Thackeray himself did not comment on the demise of the Silver-Fork novel, but he did on the decline of the popularity of the illustrated annuals, in a remark (in *Pendennis*) upon Mr. Bacon's *Spring Annual* which was still flourishing at the time of the story, but had, by the time of the narrator, "shared the fate of other vernal blossoms, and perished out of the world".[108] Thackeray's much earlier comment, of December 1845, on his own and Mr. Yorke's pitiless trampling on *Forget-me-nots,* and massacring "whole galleries of *Books of Beauty*",[109] clearly shows that he was well aware how much he himself had contributed to the abatement of their popularity. How well the whole editorial staff of *Fraser's Magazine* realized their own role in this development is obvious from the following quotation from an editorial article published exactly one year after the appearance of the last of Thackeray's reviews of annuals,[110] in January 1840:

"It is no great triumph to say, that to us is in a great measure due the abatement of the nuisance of Annuals, or the plague of novels of the Silverfork school — that we curbed the incursion of namby-pambyism, at one time becoming dangerous in its forcible feebleness, under the guidance of those who counselled Colburn, or Bentley, or other purveyors of novelism progressing at railroad pace."[111]

I do not think, however, that even if Thackeray had gone on working as professional critic and if the Silver-Fork novels and annuals had retained their former enormous popularity in the 1850s, he would have made them the target for his critical weapons. Beginning with the end of the 1840s and increasingly through the following decade, his former sharply negative attitude to this type of fiction was being perceptibly softened and weakened under the influence of the modifications which were then taking place in his philosophy of life, modifications due to the changing political and social atmosphere in England, as well as to Thackeray's own improving material and social position and his first direct contacts with the English aristocracy. These changes did not find immediate reflection in his fiction, in which he goes on satirizing this literary fashion, as we have seen, and even continues to pronounce his judgment upon fashionable

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[107] For the quotations see ibid., and David Masson, *British Novelists and Their Styles,* pp. 229—231; quoted ibid.

[108] *Works* XII, 396. It is worth noticing, however, that, like his hero Pendennis, Thackeray from time to time contributed to the annuals even in these later years, his collaboration being, however, always connected with his friendly relations to their editors. Thus for Mrs. Norton, one of the members of the Brookfield circle, he wrote a poem "The Anglers" (1847), published in her annual *Fisher's Drawing-room Scrap-book* (which he also reviewed, as we shall see later). To Lady Blessington he sent a contribution for her annual *The Keepsake* (*An Interesting Event,* 1849) and to her niece, Miss Marguerite Power, who took the editorship over from her aunt, one contribution in 1851 *(Voltigeur),* one poem in 1853 ("The Pen and the Album") and another in 1854 ("Lucy's Birthday").

[109] *Works* VI, 540.

[110] I.e. "Our Annual Execution", *Fraser's Magazine,* January 1839. The two preceding were "A Word on the Annuals", *Fraser's Magazine,* December 1837 (according to White, Thackeray's authorship in this case, though generally acknowledged, must remain doubtful; see "Thackeray's Contributions to *Fraser's Magazine*", p. 79) and "The Annuals", *The Times,* November 2, 1838.

[111] *Fraser's Magazine,* January 1840, p. 18.

life (especially in *Esmond* and *The Newcomes*[112]), but they do manifest themselves in his marginal comments, public statements and private letters. The first signal of this change might be found in his altered attitude to the heroes of fashionable novels, the dandies, who were formerly the subject of his derisive mockery. In *Mr. Brown's Letters* (1849) we find the following comment:

"There is nothing disagreeable to me in the notion of a dandy any more than there is in the idea of a peacock, or a camelopard, or a prodigious gaudy tulip, or an astonishingly bright brocade. There are all sorts of animals, plants, and stuffs in Nature, from peacocks to tom-tits, and from cloth of gold to corduroy, whereof the variety is assuredly intended by Nature, and certainly adds to the zest of life. Therefore, I do not say that Lord Hugo is a useless being, or bestow the least contempt upon him. Nay, it is right gratifying and natural that he should be, and be as he is — handsome and graceful, splendid and perfumed, beautiful — whiskered and empty-headed, a sumptuous dandy, and man of fashion — and what you young men have denominated a 'Swell'" (*Works* VIII, 262).

In this year and at the beginning of the next decade he begins to speak about Disraeli also in public in that laudatory tone which he formerly used almost exclusively in his private statements. In his two public speeches at the Royal Literary Fund Dinners he evaluated Disraeli as a great novelist and great politician[113] and spoke with respect about his brilliant literary and political career, characterizing him as a possible prototype for the literary hero of some future novelist and positively assessing his fashionable novels *Vivian Grey* and *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy.*[114] He even sent a copy of one of these speeches to Mrs. Disraeli as a proof that "some authors can praise other authors behind their backs".[115] All these eulogies, however, did not reconcile Disraeli to Thackeray's earlier parody *Codlingsby,* at which he took offence immediately after its publication (ceasing to have any further intercourse with Thackeray),[116] and which apparently remained in his memory longer than Thackeray's speeches. Seventeen years after Thackeray's death he created, in his *Endymion,* a very negative portrait of the novelist St. Barbe, which has until recently been regarded as a pure act of revenge on Disraeli's part against Thackeray alone, and which has been especially strongly resented because the attacked author

[112] For Ray's analysis of the differences between Thackeray's attitude to the fashionable world in *Vanity Fair* and in *The Newcomes* see *The Uses of Adversity,* pp. 415, 416, 500, note 21 and *The Age of Wisdom,* pp. 40, 240—241.

[113] He praised Disraeli as politician in public several times even in the earlier years, especially in his six newly discovered articles in the *Calcutta Star* (1844—1845), the possible existence of which was suggested by Ray and which were unearthed by Henry Summerfield, described in his study "Six Newly Discovered Articles by Thackeray" (*The Journal of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda,* April, 1963, XII, pp. 43—51) and published with editorial comment under the title "William Makepeace Thackeray: Letters from a Club Arm-Chair" in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* vol. 18, December 1963, No. 3, pp. 205—233. Thackeray praises here Disraeli's courage in calling the leader of his party, Peel, a traitor to his face, and represents Peel as the writhing victim of Disraeli's subtle wit. For his other earlier and later positive references to Disraeli's criticism of Peel see also *Works* VIII, 291, IX, 318, 334, 335, 340, *Contributions,* 57, 72, and 72n. But we also find comments of the opposite character in which Thackeray places himself on the side of Peel, whom he respected especially for having repealed the Corn Laws (see *Letters* III, 683, *Works* IX, 338).

[114] See Melville, op. cit. II, 74 (The Royal Literary Fund Dinner, May 14, 1851) and ibid., p. 79 (The Royal Literary Fund Dinner, May 12, 1852).

[115] Quoted by Merritt, op. cit., p. 87.

[116] For the evidence for this see *Letters* II, 149n. and Wilson, op. cit., I, 65n.; see also C. L. Cline, op. cit., pp. 407—408.

could not defend himself and because this attack inspired some of his old enemies to new assaults upon him and did much harm to his reputation, as Ray in particular has shown.[117] James D. Merritt has suggested, however, that even if Disraeli did have Thackeray in mind when creating his portrait of an obnoxious snob and an altogether dishonourable writer (of course utterly unlike the original subject of his satire), the immediate case of revenge was probably provided by Carlyle, who, in contradistinction to Thackeray, within five years after receiving a Government pension from Disraeli (in 1874), showed ingratitude, and may have therefore "furnished a model for St. Barbe's most repellent characteristic". According to Merritt it seems probable, however, that when Disraeli "finished the characterization of St. Barbe he felt that he had done vengeance upon both men".[118]

In the period discussed Thackeray considerably corrected, too, his former opinions of the fashionable novels produced by Mrs. Gore. This change of attitude was probably partly motivated by his becoming more closely acquainted with this authoress in the 1850s and finding her a clever and likeable person.[119] The roots of this change, however, lie in my opinion much deeper — namely in the above-mentioned development of his whole philosophy of life in the years we are dealing with. Especially worthy of notice is one of his letters to Mrs. Gore, in which he appreciates her novel *The Hamiltons, or the New Era* (1834, reprinted in 1850) and offers the following apology for his former sharp criticism of her works:

"And I think some critics who carped at some writers for talking too much about fine company ought to hold their tongues. If you live with great folks, why should you not describe their manners? There is nothing in the least strained in these descriptions as I now think — and believe it was only a secret envy & black malignity of disposition wh made me say in former times this author is talking too much about grand people, this author is of the silver fork school, this author uses too much French &c" (*Letters* II, 724).

In spite of his changed attitude to this authoress, however, Thackeray raised an objection, in 1860, when Mrs. Gore associated her own "art" with his and declared, in the preface to her novel *The Banker's Wife,* that he had taken Colonel Newcome from one of her characters. In a letter to her Thackeray pointed out that he had not read the novel and that Colonel Newcome had two living prototypes (his stepfather and General Charles Carmichael).[120]

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The analysis of Thackeray's criticism of the Silver-Fork novelists provides us, I believe, with sufficient grounds to be able to arrive at a brief final evaluation of this important part of his critical legacy. His criticism is in the majority of the cases he considers entirely just and he is at fault only when he is over-lavish in his praise of the titular character of Mrs. Trollope's novel *The Widow Barnaby.* His critical judgments are again based upon the main

[117] See *The Uses of Adversity,* pp. 3—4.
[118] For the quotations see op. cit., p. 88.
[119] Her daughter, on the other hand, the "tarnished beauty" Cecilia Gore, served him as one of the models for Blanche Amory (see *Letters* IV, 425, August 21, 1850, and *The Age of Wisdom,* p. 117).
[120] See *Letters* IV, 195—196.

principles of his realistic aesthetics, and the criteria he applies in verifying the truthfulness to life and artistic value of the products of this literary fashion are in full harmony with his conception of literature as faithful imitation of nature. In the first place, if not altogether consistently here, he confronts the Silver-Fork novels with the realistic literature of the 18th century (though this confrontation leads him in one instance, as we have seen, to erroneous conclusions), in the second place with actual reality itself. The outcome of this critical approach are his protests against the lopsided and untruthful depiction of the life of the English aristocracy in these literary works, which at the same time reflects his own attitude to the depicted sphere — his hatred of this particular social class and its way of life, as well as of the whole social codex and structure of the society of his time. He also pays much attention to the social function exercised by this literary fashion and sees its social harmfulness in its idealized depictions of aristocratic life, by means of which it maintains and supports the old tradition of the servile respect for wealth and social position among the wide masses of readers and especially among the middle classes, the consequence of which is their contemptuous attitude to their own class and especially to the classes standing below them — in short, snobbery. Even if he did not formulate it explicitly, by his condemnation of the idealized picture of the English aristocracy in these works and his emphasis on its unreal and fictitious character, he revealed the very substance of the harmful social function of this sort of literature — its escapist character, its perhaps not always deliberate but nevertheless patent tendency to lead the readers away from the real world to the romantically embellished milieu of the fashionable *élite*. These conclusions are fully valid, however, only for the 1830s and 1840s — as we have seen, during the following decade his former uncompromising attitude to this literary fashion was being noticeably modified. And finally, in his assessments of the individual productions of this literary school Thackeray also discusses the technique exploited by those novelists whom he critically considers in regular reviews or ridicules in his literary parodies.

IV. THE NOVEL OF ADVENTURE

Thackeray paid less attention to another variety of popular fiction in his time, the novel of adventure, than he did either to the Newgate or to the Silver-Fork School, yet it did not escape his notice. He concentrated upon only two of its various types — the military novel, which is in his criticism represented both in its Irish and English branches (Charles Lever, Samuel Lover and Richard Bedingfield), and the American Indian story, represented by James Fenimore Cooper. But even if the scope of his criticism is in this particular case not very wide, he moves within its narrower limits with ease and once again proves his ability to make full use of all his critical weapons — marginal critical comment (both in his journalism and fiction), regular book review, burlesque and parody. The two reviews to be discussed in this chapter (that of Lever's novel *Tom Burke of "Ours"* and of Lover's *Treasure Trove*, the first of the latter's series of novels *£.S.D.; or, Accounts of Irish Heirs furnished to the Public Monthly* by Samuel Lover) are included, together with a brief critical notice of Bedingfield's novel *The Miser's Son: a Tale*, in a summary review "A Box of Novels", *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844. He also reviewed two further novels by Lever and

Cooper (*St. Patrick's Eve* and *Ravensnest*), but since neither of these works can be fitted into the category of the novel of adventure and he does not assess them as such, but as novels with a purpose, these reviews of his will be considered in the next sub-chapter. The parodies to be dealt with are of Lever and of Cooper, both published in *Punch* in his *Novels by Eminent Hands* (*Phil Fogarty. A Tale of the Fighting Onety-Oneth*, August 7—21, and *The Stars and Stripes*, September 25, October 9, 1847).

The main criterion underlying Thackeray's critical judgments of the military novelists is predominantly based on extra-aesthetic grounds: himself a staunch antimilitarist, hater of war and brutality of every kind and sharp critic of the military profession, pomp and authority, he insists that war should be depicted in fiction but very sparingly, or preferably not at all. He applies this criterion in the first place in his reviews, rebuking both the Irish novelists for their military propensities, but making interesting distinctions between them. In both reviewed novels he finds "too much fighting", as follows from the two following quotations, the first of which concerns *Tom Burke of "Ours"*:

"I freely confess, for my part, that there is a great deal too much fighting in the Lorrequerian romances for my taste, an endless clashing of sabres, unbounded alarums, 'chambers' let off (as in the old Shakespeare stage directions), the warriors drive one another on and off the stage, until the quiet citizen is puzzled by their interminable evolutions, and gets a headache with the smell of the powder" (*Works* VI, 391—392).

Lover's novel *Treasure Trove* is assessed by Thackeray from two aspects — as an "exceedingly pleasant and lively" "historical romance in due form", which "has not been written without care, and a great deal of historical reading",[1] but especially as "a romance of war, and love, and fun, and sentiment, and intrigue, and escape, and rebellion"[2] (that is also why it is considered here and not in the chapter dealing with historical romances). His main rebuke is again addressed to Lover's excessive predilection for depicting war events and for overfilling his novel with too many battle-scenes:

"The scene varies too often. We go from Galway to Hamburg — from Hamburg to Bruges, — from Bruges, *via* London, to Paris — from Paris to Scotland, and thence to Ireland, with war's alarms ringing in the ear the whole way, and are plunged into sea-fights, and land-fights, and shipwrecks, and chases, and conspiracies without end" (*Works* VI, 404).

Thackeray does not regard, however, Lever's military propensities as so harmful as those of Lover. In his review of Lever's novel he dissociates himself from the Irish critics who rebuked the novelist for this particular weakness of his, by pointing out that "Lorrequer" is not "the only man in Ireland who is fond of military spectacles" — the *Nation* newspaper regularly publishes war-songs and O'Connell constantly prates about the participation and courage of the Irish in all sorts of battles, flattering "the national military passion".[3] In Thackeray's opinion Lever's novels are much less dangerous than the above-mentioned instances of the Irish fondness for military glory:

"There is bad blood, bitter, brutal, unchristian hatred in every line of every single ballad of the *Nation*; there is none in the harmless war-pageants of honest Harry Lorrequer" (*Works* VI, 392).

[1] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 409, 403, 409.
[2] *Works* VI, 403.
[3] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 392.

Applying to Lever's work his principle, familiar to us from the second chapter, that novelists should not meddle, in their fiction, in political strife, he praises him for not fomenting in his novels rebellion on the part of the Irish and writing with the sole purpose of entertaining his readers. His standpoint is perhaps most clearly expressed in the original dedication of his *Irish Sketch Book* to Lever:

"While political patriots are exposing the wrongs under which the people labour, and telling them as in duty bound to quarrel for their rights, you have found a happy neutral ground, whither you lead them to repose between their quarrels, and where you keep a nation in good humour."[4]

Samuel Lover, on the other hand, is much more stringently condemned by Thackeray, for his military propensities culminate in exaggerated patriotism, if not chauvinism. Thackeray rebukes the novelist for missing no opportunity for praising his nation and especially the glorious Irish brigade and very much resents the rebellious spirit with which Lover appeals to the Irish to fight for their independence and, "shouting out songs of hatred against the Saxon",[5] inflames the same feeling in his compatriots. Thackeray finds this propensity of the novelist to turn rebel very surprising, as he had so far known him as a peace-loving man, "whose gentle and kindly muse never breathed anything but peace and goodwill as yet" and "whose name did seem to indicate" his nature, as a "happy discoverer of the four-leaved shamrock, and of that blessed island 'where not a tear or aching heart should be found' ".[6] The meaning of Lover's "incendiary lyric" (i.e. his military song "Fag an Bealach" which Thackeray condemns as too ferocious) is murder, insists Thackeray and beseeches the novelist to desist from such denunciations of defiance and hatred:

"Leave the brawling to the politicians and the newspaper ballad-mongers. They live by it. *You* need not. The lies which they tell, and the foul hatred which they excite, and the fierce lust of blood which they preach, — leave to them. Don't let poets and men of genius join in the brutal chorus, and lead on starving savages to murder" (*Works* VI, 408).

The task of the novelist or poet is not in Thackeray's opinion to proclaim and incense hatred and exhort to slaughter:

"And I think a poet shames his great calling, and has no more right to preach this wicked, foolish, worn-out, unchristian doctrine from *his* altar than a priest from his pulpit. No good ever came of it. *This* will never 'be food for the world', be sure of that. Loving, honest men and women were never made to live upon such accursed meat. Poets least of all should recommend it; for are they not priests, too, in their way? do they not occupy a happy neutral ground, apart from the quarrels and hatred of the world, — a ground to which they should make all welcome, and where there should only be kindness and peace?" (*Works* VI, 408—409).

As we can see, in his dedication to the *Irish Sketch Book* quoted above and in his rebukes addressed to Lover's rebellious spirit, Thackeray takes the standpoint of his own nation against the Irish, as the following passage from his review of Lover's novel confirms:

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[4] *The Biographical Edition of the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, with biographical introductions by his daughter, Anne Ritchie, 13 vols., Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1898—1899, V, xxix.

[5] *Works* VI, 407.

[6] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 407—408.

"Let a Saxon beseech you to hold your hand before you begin this terrible sport. Can you say, on your honour and conscience and after living in England, that you ever met an Englishman with a heart in his Saxony-cloth surtout that was not touched by the wrongs and miseries of your country? How are these frantic denunciations of defiance and hatred, these boasts of strength and hints of murder, received in England? Do the English answer you with a hundredth part of the ferocity with which you appeal to them? Do they fling back hatred for your hatred? Do they not forget your anger in regard for your misery, and receive your mad curses and outcries with an almost curious pitying forbearance? *Now*, at least, the wrong is not on our side, whatever in former days it may have been" (*Works* VI, 408).

A very similar statement was repeated by Thackeray two years later, in his review of Thomas Moore's book *History of Ireland* (*The Morning Chronicle*, August 20, 1846), in which he denoted the cruel colonial policy of the "noble English lords" towards Ireland, so remarkably well revealed in Moore's history, as typical especially of the Middle Ages but marking, "almost up to the last twenty years, the whole period of our domination".[7] It is noteworthy that in both these comments he excludes from his charge his own time and is convinced of the general improvement of the current situation in Ireland thanks to the efforts of the reformed Parliament, to "justice, peace, and the peaceful genius and labours of great men".[8] These words were written in 1846, a year after half the population of Ireland had died or migrated to America in consequence of the terrible blight on potatoes, the staple food of the Irish peasants. That Thackeray, who was perfectly acquainted with the *grand misère* of Ireland from his own personal experience three years before, described it truthfully in his *Irish Sketch Book*, and throughout the 1840s, especially in his *Punch* contributions, constantly drew the attention of the English public to it, was not informed about these events, is hardly possible. But he was so firmly convinced that the only remedy for the troubles of the Irish people was a peaceful change by means of reforms, that he saw improvement even when there was none. This error has its roots in his whole conception of the Irish question, which is full of contradictions, though in my opinion it contains, too, a few grains of truth. The point which he obviously finds most difficult to settle is the origin of Irish misery and it is very interesting that in some of his conclusions he approaches those of Engels. He did not, and from his point of view could not, lay the blame upon the existing social order in Ireland, where it in Engels's opinion did lie, but he understood, as Engels did, that part of this guilt was inherent in the English colonial policy towards Ireland (though in contradistinction to Engels he believed that it no longer applied to his own time) and part in the national character of the people.

The second criterion Thackeray uses in his evaluation of the military novelists is his familiar postulate that if they intend to stick to their decision to depict exclusively war and military life, they should depict them truthfully. In his opinion, this hideous reality should never be endowed with romantic glamour, nor should military courage and glory be presented as social and aesthetic ideals. He especially resents the propensity of the military novelists to embody these ideals in their positive characters by raising the soldier to the pedestal of the admirable hero and presenting him as a man proud of his occupation and of his military feats. It is very interesting, however, that in his two reviews

[7] For the quotations see *Contributions*, 164, 165.
[8] Ibid., p. 166.

of the works of Lever and Lover Thackeray does not apply this criterion of his very strictly, in fact almost avoids applying it altogether. His review of Lever's novel is predominantly laudatory and, besides the above-mentioned rebuke concerning this novelist's extreme predilection for depicting war scenes, he finds nothing amiss with his creative approach to them and does not assess them as glamorized or in any other respect unfaithful to life. On the contrary, he much praises the opening chapters of the novel, which depict Tom Burke's adventures in his own country, before he enters the French service. In Thackeray's opinion, these chapters "are the best because they are the most real":

"The author is more at home in Ireland than in the French camp or capital, the scenes and landscapes he describes there are much more naturally depicted, and the characters to whom he introduces us more striking and lifelike" (*Works* VI, 394).

He positively evaluates, too, Lever's depictions of the miserable poverty and terrible condition of the Irish people, and accepts their truth on the basis of his own Irish experiences. Warm words of praise are bestowed by him, moreover, upon some scenes, in his opinion capitally described, such as the burning of Malone's cabin, and upon Lever's lively pictures "of Irish life and an Irish mob", one of which he also quotes. His approach to Lever is so good-natured, indeed, that he almost invalidates the judgment pronounced upon the novelist's warlike propensities, besides the additional rebuke of his delighting too much in "numerous hunting and steeplechasing descriptions", by pointing out that Lever does not aim at instructing "Dissenting clergymen and doctors of divinity",[9] but writes for a special audience, consisting of simpler readers who enjoy his stories either for their entertaining character or for their depictions of that sphere of life in which they are particularly interested — the "fast men" at colleges, the young cornets and captains at mess-tables, whole garrisons all over the British Empire, and the country folk. Indeed, the enormous popularity of Lever's novels, even if only among readers of these particular types, almost disarms the critic, who while he does voice some objections to Lever's craft, as we shall see, nevertheless ends his review with the following conciliatory passage:

"Indeed, as the critic lays down the lively, sparkling, stirring volume, and thinks of its tens of thousands of readers; and that it is lying in the little huckster's window at Dunleary, and upon the artillery mess-table at Damchun; and that it is, beyond the shadow of a doubt, taken in at Hong-Kong, where poor, dear Commissioner Lin has gazed, delighted, at the picture of 'Peeping Tom'; or that it is to be had at the Library, Cape Town, where the Dutch boors and the Hottentot princes are longing for the reading of it — the critic, I say, considering the matter merely in a geographical point of view, finds himself overcome by an amazing and blushing modesty, timidly apologizes to the reader for discoursing to him about a book which the universal public peruses, and politely takes his leave of the writer by wishing him all health and prosperity" (*Works* VI, 401—402).

His review of Lover's novel is for the most part devoted to the objections referred to above, addressed, as we have seen, to one particular song, but the general creative approach of the novelist is assessed by Thackeray positively. He points out that the book "is written with ability, and inspires great interest" and praises Lover for having chosen the 18th century for the time of his romance, when warriors and chivalry yet deserved their names, and their game was not yet played out:

[9] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 398, 392.

"The novel carries us back to the year 1745, when the respected Mr. Edward Waverley distinguished himself in the service of his late Royal Highness the Pretender, and when men, instead of bandying compliments and *congés* in Belgrave Square, flying thither in hack-cabs, with white kid gloves on, and comfortable passports in their pockets, turned out on the hillside sword in hand, and faced Cumberland's thundering dragoons, and saw the backs of Johnny Cope's grenadiers" (*Works* VI, 403—404).

Thackeray's praise is also bestowed upon some of the lyrical poems inserted into the story, which he evaluates as "pleasant, kindly, and sweet lyrics, such as the author has the secret of inventing, and of singing, and of setting to the most beautiful music" and one of which, characterized by "the real, natural, *Lover*-like feeling", he quotes. He does the same in his notice of Bedingfield's novel, quoting two stanzas from the lyric inserted into the story, which he characterizes as "pretty, wild fantastical lines".[10] His whole assessment of Bedingfield's work is contained in the following passage, in which he voices his objection to the writer's style, but otherwise is more laudatory than critical:

"*The Miser's Son* ... is evidently the work of a very young hand.[11] It, too, is a stirring story of love and war; and the Pretender is once more in the field of fiction. The writer aims, too, at sentiment and thoughfulness, and writes sometimes wisely, sometimes poetically, and often (must it be said?) bombastically and absurdly. But it is good to find a writer nowadays (whether it be profitable for himself is another question) who takes the trouble to think at all. Reflection is not the ordinary quality of novels, whereof it seems to be the writer's maxim to give the reader and himself no trouble of thinking at all, but rather to lull the mind into a genial doze and forgetfulness" (*Works* VI, 410—411).

As far as the favourite hero of the military novelists is concerned, Thackeray has nothing to say about him in the above-quoted notice of Bedingfield's novel, and very little in his review of Lover. The only rebuke he addresses to the hero of the latter novelist is that his name does not suit the heroic role in which he is made to appear:

"But the hero's name is *Corkery. Bon Dieu!* can the lovely Ellen Lynch of Galway, the admired of a Brady, a Bodkin, a Marshal Saxe, the affianced of a Kirwan ..., can Ellen Lynch marry a fellow by the name of Corkery? I won't believe it. It is against all the rules of romance. They must both die miserably in No. XIII, or young Ned Corkery must be found to be somebody else's son than his father's the old grocer of Galway. But this matter has been settled long ere this; and if Ellen and Edward are married and happy (though, indeed, some people are married and unhappy, and some happy and unmarried, for the matter of that), if they have taken the matrimonial line, Ellen, I would lay a wager, is not Mrs. Corkery" (*Works* VI, 403).

Thackeray has much more to say on Lever's heroes in his review of *Tom Burke of "Ours"*, but he does not reprehend the novelist for selecting his types

[10] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 409, 410.

[11] He of course knew very well that the author was his old schoolfellow, the "Little Dick B", whom he mentioned to Mother in one of his letters from Charterhouse (see *Letters* I, 18 and note). Why Thackeray addressed this mild critical rebuke to his old friend is explained by him in a letter to Bedingfield of 13th May 1844: "I got angry on reading 'The Miser's Son' at some reflections on Thomas Carlyle made by a young author — I shouldn't have allowed the words to stand had I seen a proof, but men in our trade write as fast as they speak unadvisedly sometimes. I will pick a crow with you some day, if you like, about some 'fine writing' in your novel: wh moved my bile — while other parts struck me as exceedingly clever poetical and thoughtful" (*Letters* II, 167—168). Thackeray expressed his critical opinions, too, on other works of this writer, *The Peer and the Blacksmith* (1844), which was dedicated to him, and *The Blind Lover* (1845), but only in private correspondence (see *Letters* I, 18n. and II, 192—193).

from the ranks of the military profession. To be sure, he does briefly notice that Lever's heroes are stereotype figures, resembling each other both in their "great admiration for the military profession" and in their personal characteristic traits:

"As Scott's heroes were, for the most part, canny, gallant, prudent, modest young North Britons, Lorrequer's are gallant young Irishmen, a little more dandified and dashing, perhaps, than such heroes as novelists create on this side of the water; wonderfully like each other in personal qualities and beauty" (*Works* VI, 393).

But otherwise he bestows nothing but praise. In the first place, he evaluates Lever's heroes from the moral point of view, thus discerning and praising another trait which they all share — modesty and scrupulous purity of mind:

"And there is no reader of Mr. Lever's tales but must admire the extreme, almost womanlike delicacy of the author, who, amidst all the wild scenes through which he carries his characters, and with all his outbreaks of spirits and fun, never writes a sentence that is not entirely pure" (*Works* VI, 393).

He finds the explanation for "this excellent chastity of thought and expression" in the Irish national character — "it is almost a national virtue with the Irish, as any person will acknowledge who has lived any time in their country or society".[12] This opinion of his is founded on his personal experience gained especially in the few happy years of his marriage to an Irish wife and confirmed during his stay in Ireland.

In the second place, he dissociates himself from the Irish critics (including O'Connell) who hurled at Lever abuse "for presenting degrading pictures of the national character". With the exception of the character of Darby the Blast who, "with his fine words and sham humility, his savage fidelity and his admirably affected loyalty", is in his opinion "an excellent, though not a flattering Irish portrait", he finds in Lever's novels nothing which would allow these critics to be right. In his opinion the abusive attacks of the Irish critics are motivated by envy of the successful novelist and he vents his indignation at their cruel and unjust treatment of their own compatriot, "the good-humoured and kind-hearted writer, who quarrelled with none, and amused all",[13] and who is certainly not, according to Thackeray, "a stark traitor and incendiary" and a libeller of Ireland, as the critics would like his readers to believe. In this Thackeray is not entirely in the right, however, for Lever's novels did to a certain extent favour (though this was not their author's intention) the spreading of incorrect ideas about the Irish national character, especially among those English readers who regarded his heroes as typical.

In the third place, he dissociates himself as well from the English critics who found in Lever's novels a source of "boundless merriment" and entirely failed to recognize "the fund of sadness beneath". He substantiates this judgment by writing a longer *exposé* of a "characteristic of the Irish writers and people, which has not been at all appreciated by the English" and which is in his opinion "that of extreme melancholy". In this part of his review he accuses some romance-writers and dramatists of cruelly wronging the Irishman by misrepresenting him in their wildly gay and entirely sham Irish characters, and

[12] *Works* VI, 393.
[13] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 390, 396, 391.

thus leading their readers to suppose "that all that Irish gaiety was natural and constant; that Paddy was in a perpetual whirl of high spirits and whisky; for ever screeching and whooping mad songs and wild jokes; a being entirely devoid of artifice and calculation".[14] The criterion he applies to these figures is actual reality itself, as he became acquainted with it from his direct personal experience. In this point, however, the attitude Thackeray assumes in his review differs from that expressed in his earlier *Irish Sketch Book,* where he accused even Lever of misleading his readers about the Irish character. He pointed out that the Irish people were anything but gay (though he obviously to a certain extent accepts the explanation of a "delightful old gentleman" who said "that all the fun had gone out of Ireland since Father Mathew banished the whisky from it"), and proceeded:

"I have seen a great number of crowds and meetings of people in all parts of Ireland, and found them all gloomy. There is nothing like the merry-making one reads of in the Irish novels. Lever and Maxwell must be taken as chroniclers of the old times — the pleasant but wrong old times — for which one can't help having an antiquarian fondness" (*Works* V, 67).

In his review he emphasizes, too, that "it is only after an Englishman has seen the country that he learns how false these jokes are; how sad these high spirits, and how cunning and fitful that exuberant joviality, which we have been made to fancy are the Irishman's every-day state of mind",[15] but he excludes from his rebuke Lever, as I have suggested above. In his opinion Lever's

"characteristic is *not* humour, but sentiment — neither more nor less than sentiment, in spite of all the rollicking and bawling, and the songs of Micky Free, and the horse-racing, and punch-making, and charging, and steeplechasing — the quality of the Lorrequer stories seems to me to be extreme delicacy, sweetness, and kindliness of heart. The *spirits* are for the most part artificial, the *fond* is sadness, as appears to me to be that of most Irish writing and people" (*Works* VI, 390).

In these comments Thackeray well grasped the characteristic traits of the whimsical, extravagant and tender Celtic humour, but is surely too benevolent to Lever, in all respects a second-rate humorist, who had little sense for measure and whose humour was therefore not only farcical, but sometimes crude.

The critical approach Thackeray had chosen in his review of Lever's novel (and in the whole summary review "A Box of Novels") was, however, deliberate on his part. In his prefatory words he comments at some length and with much humour on the gradual retreat of the editorial staff of *Fraser's Magazine* from its former ruthless methods, praises his colleagues for having grown mild and peaceful with the progress of time and expresses his own "resolution to reform in that matter", writing this introduction (from which I quoted when dealing with his critical creed) with the express purpose of preparing the editor "for an exceedingly humane and laudatory notice of the packet of works which you were good enough to send me". And he does fulfil his purpose, for his evaluation of Lever, Lover and Bedingfield (as we have just seen), of Willibald Alexis (as we have seen before), and of Dickens (as we shall see later), is predominantly laudatory and even the rebukes addressed to Lover can be characterized, as he interpreted them himself, as "words of tender reproach". In fulfilling his purpose

[14] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 390, 388, 389.
[15] *Works* VI, 389.

Thackeray applies, moreover, another tenet of his critical creed, cited in the third chapter, that the critic should not "find fault with a book for what it does not give", and he therefore concentrates mainly upon what the reviewed writers do provide and pays more attention to their merits than demerits. Yet he does take at least brief notice even of the latter, drawing the reader's attention to the conventional romance patterns to be found in Lover's story, in twelve of the instalments of which he has learned that "the wicked rival has been done for — that circumstances look prosperously enough for the hero — that he has saved the heroine from a proper number of dangers, and made himself agreeable to her father",[16] and objecting to the same pattern in Lever's novel in the following sentence:

"His stories show no art of construction; it is the good old plan of virtue triumphant at the end of the chapter, vice being wofully demolished some few pages previously" (*Works* VI, 393).

The other rebukes to be found in his review of Lever concern this novelist's unfortunate choice of the name of the French critic Amédée Pichot for a villain, and, further, Phiz's illustrations, which he evaluates as bad caricatures, suggesting that he could point out "sundry errors in costume" committed by both the designer and writer, if he were "inclined to be severely accurate and not actuated by that overflowing benevolence which is so delightful to feel".[17] It is worth at least brief notice that the reviewed author entirely failed to appreciate the good-natured tone in which the review was written, regarded it as a mean and cruel attack, and "wrote angrily to Ainsworth about 'Thackeray's rascality' ".[18] Although he had been in the previous years quite a good friend of Thackeray, was pleased with his compliments when he met Thackeray for the first time when the latter, during his visit to Ireland, stayed at his house at Templeogue, and positively responded to Thackeray's warm dedication of the *Irish Sketch Book* to him,[19] after the publication of the review he ceased to have any further intercourse with his critic.

As the above analysis of Thackeray's reviews of the productions of the military novelists suggests, if we wish to learn what his critical opinion of these works really was, we must turn to other pieces of his criticism, in which he was not actuated by "overflowing benevolence", but by his critical purpose of revealing weak points and ridiculing the whole literary fashion. These we find, of course, in his burlesques and parodies. The first of them is his early burlesque *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, the secondary purpose of which was to ridicule the boastful heroes of Harry Lorrequer's type in the titular hero, an Irish Münchhausen. Through the medium of his story, narrated by the hero himself, Thackeray inveighs against the propensity of the military novelists to launch their heroes on too great a number of adventures, mostly verging upon improbability, to make them perform too many feats with the express purpose

[16] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 386, 387–388, 386, 392–393, 403.

[17] *Works* VI, 394.

[18] Quoted by Stevenson, op. cit., p. 122; see also *Letters* I, cxlvii.

[19] For Lever's reaction to Thackeray's compliment paid to his rendering of the German student song "Der Papst lebt herrlich in der Welt" (which Thackeray later made King Richard sing in *Rebecca and Rowena* under the title "Commanders of the Faithful"), see Melville, op. cit., I, 148; for Lever's reaction to the dedication of the *Irish Sketch Book* see ibid., 146.

of revealing their courage and other military virtues, and to let them boast of the successes of their regiment in particular and the British army in general. The culminating point in Thackeray's critical campaign against this fashionable mode is represented, however, by his *Punch* parody *Phil Fogarty,* which he published under the transparent pseudonym "Harry Rollicker". In the titular character of the parody, who is also the narrator of his own story, Thackeray very successfully parodies not only Tom Burke of "Ours" who served him as his main model, but at the same time the stereotype hero of Lever's novels in general — the eccentric, daring and gay young officer, who is constantly involved in unexpectedly dangerous or amusing situations, who distinguishes himself as a soldier in battles and is incessantly bragging of his military feats. The main device he uses is, as in all the burlesques and parodies so far discussed, exaggeration of the characteristic traits of the parodied original, along with an additional emphasis laid upon typical details. Like Tom Burke, Phil Fogarty proves his military virtues in a battle with the enemy, the French army, but it is he who leads the whole regiment in the attack and his direct opponents are the highest commanders of the opposing side, Murat and Napoleon himself, the latter personally aiming a cannon at Phil and thus immediately causing the hero to be knocked down by the wind of the cannon-ball and to lie for six weeks in a delirium. Like Lever's heroes, Phil is constantly boasting of his military feats and of his success in society, impressing, as Tom Burke does, the greatest celebrities of the Parisian *élite* (besides Napoleon, Talleyrand, Ney, Murat, and Soult, who figure in Lever's novel, Thackeray adds Madame de Staël).

The conventional romance patterns upon which Lever's novels are built are ridiculed by Thackeray especially in the second part of the parody, in which the hero describes his unexpected salvation by one of Napoleon's officers, Irish by origin, who brings him to Paris while he is still unconscious, and then relates how he became the object of the intrigues of the Emperor's court. Lever's predilection for surprising and illogical turns of plot is parodied especially in the sudden change in Napoleon's relationship to Phil. The Emperor at first wants to attach the young hero to his service, bribes him with military orders, titles and commands and uses a beautiful young girl, the ward of Phil's saviour, Lady Blanche Sarsfield (with whom Phil of course falls in love), as his agent to tempt Phil to become a traitor. But when Phil wounds Blanche's suitor, who is none other than Marshal de Cambacérès, in a duel, Napoleon turns into his deadly enemy, ordering his officers to shoot him. However, Phil's life is saved: in the first place by the fact that the muskets and cannons of his enemies are not loaded (for the latter were only executing a famous manoeuvre, not fighting at the moment) and in the second by his jumping his horse over Napoleon's head (a remarkable feat, indeed, since the Emperor was also sitting on horseback), and fleeing, "with an army of a hundred and seventy-three thousand eight hundred men" at his heels. Lever's rollicking humour, his propensity for mingling sentimentality and brutality and for enlivening his novels by intermingling the narrative with lyrical and military songs, is best hit off in the introductory part of the parody, in which Thackeray burlesques a typical episode from Lever's novels (the officers resting in the interval between two attacks, preparing "a soldier's supper", joking and singing songs).

Thackeray's parody is written, however, in a very good-natured tone and even if the parodist naturally concentrates upon the foibles of Lever's creative method,

his text at the same time mirrors even some positive aspects of the parodied original. As Clapp has pointed out, "'Phil Fogarty' captures Lever's high spirits as well as his mannerisms, thus escaping the objection that parody-judgments are incomplete in that they feed on weaknesses rather than virtues".[20] All this, however, was again not observed by Lever, who took offence for the second time and is said to have declared that "he might as well shut up shop".[21] Like Disraeli, he even retaliated by depicting Thackeray in his novel *Roland Cashel* as Elias Howle, a literary hack who is willing to write anything from statistics to satire, and demeaning himself so far as to ridicule the appearance of the great novelist and expressing doubts about his personal honesty and sincerity.[22] Thackeray accepted Lever's revenge with amused astonishment that the object of his parody could have felt so offended,[23] and wrote about the whole affair in a long letter to the publisher of Lever's novel, Edward Chapman, on 22 November 1848, in which he confessed that he was sorry and annoyed to see that his former friend had committed himself so far as to make remarks about his person and at the same time granted Lever the right of criticizing his works and parodying his style. He pointed out that he had handled Lever in kid-gloves, for he had left out of his parody "his bad French w^{h} is one of the great points a caricaturist would not fail to seize",[24] and proceeded:

"I never could bring myself to consider Lever seriously as an author, but thought him one of the most charming and agreeable men I ever met in my life" (*Letters* II, 455).

Finally he expressed his willingness to shake hands with Lever and asked Chapman, as his publisher and friend, and as a gentleman, not to have his house "made the office for publishing this dreary personality".[25] The effectiveness of Thackeray's parody is shown not only by the parodied novelist's retaliatory counter-attack, but first and foremost by Lever's ensuing attempts to alter the character of his novels and make his creative method more realistic (beginning with *The Daltons,* 1850—1852). It seems that Lever did not nurse his grudge so long as Disraeli, for in the preface to the 1872 edition of *Tom Burke of "Ours"* he evaluated Thackeray's parody positively, making an ex-post revision of his original attitude to it:

"Thackeray's inimitable burlesque of the book did not, as I am sure he never intended it should, describe it, nor has anyone more thoroughly relished this novel by an eminent hand than the well quizzed object of it."

This changed attitude was probably the outcome of the eventual reconciliation between the two writers which took place in the 1850s. In 1859 Thackeray generously helped Lever to find possibilities of publication,[26] in the first years of the 1860s he enabled him to contribute occasionally to his *Cornhill Magazine* and in this last period of his life wrote about Lever and his work in a kind-hearted tone, though occasionally still with an undertone of light irony.[27]

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[20] "Critic on Horseback", p. 296.
[21] Quoted by Marzials, op. cit., p. 140 and Melville, op. cit., I, 289.
[22] See *Novels of Charles Lever,* 27 vols., London, 1897—1898, XIV, ch. 22.
[23] See *Letters* II, 451—452 and note.
[24] *Letters* II, 455—456.
[25] *Letters* II, 456.
[26] See two letters from Thackeray to Lever, *Letters* IV, 143—144.
[27] See *Works* XV, 693, XVII, 356.

Finally, in his critical campaign against the military novel, as in that against other fashionable modes, Thackeray made full use of his most effective weapon — his own art. While the hero of his earlier burlesque, *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan,* may be regarded as a parodistic portrait of the heroes of Lever's novels, in his *Barry Lyndon* he showed the military novelists how the hero of this type should be truthfully depicted and created thus a very effective contrast to their characters. Like the heroes of the military novelists Barry is an Irishman (though not a contemporary of Lever's heroes), a young man fond of adventure and inclined to boast of his feats, but in contradistinction to them he is a downright scoundrel. In his elaboration of the war-motif in this novel, Thackeray uses the same material as Lever does (though older by a century — but this is not of decisive importance, since the wars depicted by both novelists were carried on in a society the basic structure of which had not substantially changed), but he tears down the romantic embellishments with which this novelist and other authors of his type adorned it. Thackeray's novel is not a romantic story about the gay adventures of his hero in the Seven Years' War, but a truthful picture of the cruelties and atrocities perpetrated by this war especially upon common soldiers and the common people, which even his villainous anti-hero clearly sees and understands, although he takes part in them himself.

Even more important in this connection are Thackeray's three great novels, *Vanity Fair, Esmond* and *The Virginians,* in which we find his mature treatment of the same motif, alongside several authorial comments (in the first and third novel) directly addressed to the military novelists. In *Vanity Fair* and *The Virginians* Thackeray depicts battles and other military events only very laconically or altogether avoids depicting them directly, ranking himself in his authorial commentary among the civilians and referring his readers to the descriptions of similar events in the works of the popular authors of military novels. In *The Virginians* he directly refers his readers to Lever:

"Had I the skill of my friend Lorrequer, I would follow the other Harry into camp, and see him on the march, at the mess, on the parade-ground; I would have many a carouse with him and his companions; I would cheerfully live with him under the tents; I would knowingly explain all the manoeuvres of war, and all the details of the life military. As it is, the reader must please, out of his experience and imagination, to fill in the colours of the picture of which I can give but meagre hints and outlines" (*Works* XV, 693).

In *Vanity Fair* Thackeray does not depict the battle of Waterloo directly, as Lever did in *Charles O'Malley,* a depiction Thackeray characterized, in private conversation, as "much too imaginative and high-flown, in fact audacious and regardless of all probability",[28] but in the reactions and feelings of the civilians in the rear. As Loofbourow has it, "the war appears in the novel as a symbolism of violence, not as an objective fact — its literal climax, George's death, occurs off-stage". I do not agree with this scholar, however, that the battle-sequence in this novel is only "a brilliant background for self-generating emotions". While I believe Loofbourow is in the right when he says that "Amelia's jealousy and fear of losing George, Becky's aggressive coquetry, George's narcissism, would have followed without Waterloo",[29] nevertheless he does not take into account

[28] Quoted by Stevenson, op. cit., p. 110, from Major Dwyer's reminiscences.
[29] For the quotations see op. cit., p. 176.

what Edgar F. Harden characterized as "the disruptive effects of the war on the world reflected in the novel".[30] Loofbourow has also shown (as I have mentioned in my second chapter), that in *Esmond* Thackeray presents "a sardonic analysis of national gallantry" through the medium of the war experiences of his hero, who, we should add, essentially differs from Lever's military heroes in being ashamed of his trade when he witnesses or remembers the horrors of war participated in, and in dissociating himself from their idealized depiction in Addison's poem, as well as from the poet's glorification of the military hero Marlbourough. Even though Loofbourow is in my opinion not entirely in the right in regarding Thackeray's treatment of the war-motif in *Esmond* and *Vanity Fair* as wholly disparate, his interpretation of the functional role of the war-sequence in *Esmond* seems to me well substantiated:

"In *Esmond*, however, the war-sequence is the effective instrument of the hero's separation from the Castlewood family ...; and Esmond's effort to win military prestige is the literal equivalent of his emotional compulsion. Without the experience of human suffering during the campaigns, the delusive idealism of Addison's heroic decorum would lose its point."[31]

Before coming to the final evaluation of Thackeray's criticism of the novel of adventure, we must still pay at least brief attention to his critical opinions of the American variety of this fashionable mode, which must be treated separately, both because of its different character and also because the author who cultivated it, James Fenimore Cooper, was a much greater artist than the other authors discussed in this sub-chapter. Thackeray's earlier impressions from reading Cooper's novels were of mixed character, while his attitude of the 1850s might be characterized as uncritical enthusiasm — he ranked Cooper's novels above those of Scott, referred to the final scene in *The Prairie* as surpassing anything he had met with in English literature, and ranged Uncas and Leatherstocking not only among his particular favourites, but also among the immortal creations of literature, placing them on the same level with the characters created by Shakespeare and Sterne, and with Addison's Sir Roger de Coverley, and higher than those of Scott.[32] The period in between — the 1840s — is the time when he paid Cooper formal critical attention (in his review of *Ravensnest*, to be considered in the next sub-chapter) and when he parodied his style in one or perhaps two parodies. His attitude in this period might be characterized as both critical and admiring, for even though his review is negative, his parodies are good-natured and jocose rather than malicious or venomous. According to Gulliver, the first parody of Cooper written by Thackeray is to be found in the little parodistic serial *Hints to Novelists* (*The Comic Almanack*, November 1846), in the part entitled *The Topographical, or Transatlantic*. The author of the parody briefly suggests to literary beginners how to write a novel in the Cooperian style, parodies Cooper's way of describing the milieu in which his stories are placed and the language of his Indian characters, and proceeds:

"(The Indians should always speak in the third person: 'fire-water', 'great spirit', 'pale-

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[30] Edgar F. Harden, "The Function of Mock-Heroic Satire in *Vanity Fair*", *Anglia*, Band 84, Heft 2, 1966, p. 187.

[31] Op. cit., p. 176.

[32] For his comments see *Letters* II, 156, Wilson, op. cit., I, 80, 322, II, 15–16, 81–82, *Works* XVII, 598.

faces', 'wampum', &c., will add to the effect; and the general habits may be ground up from recollections of the Egyptian Hall.)"[33]

More famous and effective, and undoubtedly authentic, is Thackeray's *Punch* parody quoted above, *The Stars and Stripes, by the Author of "The Last of the Mulligans", "Pilot", &c.* He chose as the main targets of his satire the two aspects of Cooper's creative approach which he obviously regarded as most typical — the spirit of American chauvinism which he believed he had discerned in Cooper's novels and the novelist's method of creating his Indian characters. As far as the first aspect is concerned, Thackeray is too prone to generalizing, for American chauvinism is a trait characteristic only of some of Cooper's tales (according to Ivasheva of *The Pilot, The Spy,* and in a lesser degree of *The Last of the Mohicans*[34]). At any rate, however, he captures it very successfully, especially in the episode depicting the encounter of the French King Louis with the American minister Benjamin Franklin, in which he presents the latter as an impolite character, lacking in respect to the royal personage he meets and exaggeratedly convinced of the superiority of the United States over the whole world. As Ivasheva has shown, in his depiction of Franklin, Thackeray did not intend to satirize the personal or political character of this American statesman, whom he greatly respected, but a certain social phenomenon — national conceit in all its forms and varieties and the pretensions of any one nation to supremacy over other nations.[35] Cooper's Indian characters are parodied in the portrait of the Indian warrior Tatua — like Cooper, Thackeray devotes much space to the description of his appearance, costume and ornaments, lays stress on his undaunted courage, pride and disinclination to waste time in empty talk and, when he does make him speak, it is in a language very much resembling that issuing from the mouths of Cooper's Indian characters, as well as that proposed for such types by the author of the earlier parody. In the second part of his parody Thackeray good-naturedly ridicules two of Cooper's stock figures — a trapper from his Indian tales and a sailor from his romances of the sea. The first of these two portraits (Leatherlegs, alias Natty Pumpo) is aimed at the character of Leatherstocking (alias Natty Bumppo), while the second (Tom Coxwain) at such types as for instance Long Tom Coffin in *The Pilot* (both these characters of Cooper becoming not very much later the objects of Thackeray's enthusiastic admiration, as we have already seen). Yet even these two characters are the protagonists of American chauvinism which is manifested in their boastful talk about the victories of their ship over the British.

Assessed as a whole, Thackeray's parody very deftly captures Cooper's mannerisms and the whole character of his style, except for its author's not entirely substantiated attacks upon Cooper's alleged chauvinism. These attacks, however, were not motivated by any ill feeling towards the novelist or his compatriots, whom Thackeray even in this period, when he had not yet become closely acquainted with the Americans from direct personal experience, obviously regarded rather as brethren speaking the same language (though he had some critical reservations as to their social manners and, moreover, to their way of pronouncing the English language, as follows from the language he attributes to

[33] Gulliver, op. cit., pp. 129—130.
[34] See op. cit., p. 143.
[35] See ibid., pp. 143, 145.

Franklin) than as foreigners. In spite of this, however, his assaults upon American chauvinism were not acceptable to the Americans, as is obvious from the fact that his parody of Cooper was omitted by the editor in the Appleton reprint of *Novels by Eminent Hands.*[36]

Like his parody of Cooper, his whole critical campaign against the producers of the novel of adventure is essentially just. It is not motivated by malice or personal rancour against the criticized authors, but is founded upon Thackeray's wholesome distaste for any falsified depiction of reality in art, for the irresponsible attitude of any novelist to his craft and for carelessness in style and composition.

V. THE DIDACTIC NOVEL

Under the heading of this sub-chapter I include all those works of fiction which Thackeray critically assessed predominantly as didactic novels or novels *à la thèse* (though he does not use either of these terms), whether the purpose they followed was philosophical (Bulwer's "metaphysical" novels *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice* and their predecessor *Godolphin,* and Madame Sand's *Spiridion,* which may be classed, however, also in the following category), religious (Mrs. Trollope's *The Vicar of Wrexhill*) or political (Soulié's novel *Le Bananier,* Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve,* Disraeli's *Coningsby* and *Sybil* and Cooper's *Ravensnest*). Thackeray's critical campaign against novels of this type begins as early as June 1833 in his review of Bulwer's novel *Godolphin* (published in the *National Standard* and not yet reprinted) and falls into two distinct periods which differ from each other not so much in Thackeray's critical approach, which remains essentially the same in both, as in the range of his criticism. While in his review of *Godolphin* and in all the reviews written up to 1843[1] he inveighs against the foibles in the creative approach of individual novelists cultivating this type of fiction and as his only critical weapon uses the book review, in the middle of the 1840s (with some previous signals to be discerned in his reviews of the novels of Madame Sand and Soulié) he launches a wholesale attack upon the novel *à la thèse* as such, enriching his critical armory by new weapons — burlesque and parody.

One of the main criteria he applies to the novels he evaluated in the period I suggest as the first, is based upon extra-aesthetic considerations — he never fails to vent his protest whenever the doctrine propagated by the reviewed author was in itself unacceptable to him, though this criterion, as I should

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[36] See Wilson, op. cit., I, 80.

[1] They are the reviews of *Ernest Maltravers* in the *Times,* September 30, 1837 and in *Fraser's Magazine,* January 1838; of *Alice* in the *Times,* April 24, 1838; of *The Vicar of Wrexhill* in the *Times,* October 25, 1837 and in *Fraser's Magazine,* January 1838; of *Spiridion* in the *Corsair,* September 14 and 21, 1839, and of *Le Bananier* in a summary review "French Romancers on England", the *Foreign Quarterly Review,* October 1843. His *Times* reviews of *Ernest Maltravers, Alice* and *The Vicar of Wrexhill* are reprinted by Gulliver, those of *Ernest Maltravers* and *The Vicar of Wrexhill* from *Fraser's Magazine* ("Our Batch of Novels for Christmas") in *Stray Papers* and *Critical Papers,* those of *Spiridion* and *Le Bananier* in the *Works.* The review of *Godolphin* has been attributed to Thackeray by Melville; Donald Hawes, however, in his newly published study "Thackeray and the *National Standard*" (*The Review of English Studies,* vol. XXIII, No. 89, February 1972, pp. 35—51), throws some doubt on his authorship.

add here and shall seek to prove later, was never so decisive as to make him condemn the whole work, if it came up to his other standards. Especially worth noticing in this respect is his early review of *Godolphin,* in which he also proved his critical discernment by not assessing this novel as another example of fashionable fiction, but as a novel with a purpose. As Rosa has pointed out, this novel in its first version (which Thackeray reviewed) "is recognizably a fashionable novel despite the inclusion of much more theory drawn from Radcliffe, Godwin, and Goethe than was customary" and must have seemed such to the contemporary reader, for it was not until its later second version (1850) that Bulwer "made changes which emphasize the differences between it and the conventional fashionable novel", coming thus "closer to what he called a 'metaphysical' . . . novel"[2] (fully represented in his fiction for the first time by *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice*), and making a definite break with the fashionable mode. In his review Thackeray does not connect this novel with the Silver-Fork School (nor with Bulwer, for that matter, treating it as a work of an anonymous author, as it was published, though occasionally throwing out a hint which suggests that he guessed the author's identity), but pays detailed attention to its purpose. As he points out, the aim of the author, as declared in the preface to the novel, was "to show the influence exercised by the great world over the more intellectual, the more daring, and the more imaginative of its inmates of either sex".[3] Such a purpose in itself seems to him absurd and too generalizing:

> "High life. for such we presume to be meant by 'the great world', is answerable for giving birth to, and parentally fostering, many follies and vices; but to embody as many as can well be conceived, in a given number of characters, and, because those characters are made to move in this sphere, declare that they are necessarily produced by such a station, is about as absurd as it would be to say because the author of Godolphin has scribbled, and still scribbles, to the imminent danger of his publisher's shelves, which have to bear the weight of the unsaleable 'raw material', that, *constat,* he is to be answerable for all the trumpery that shall be coined by greater blockheads than himself — when such are found."[4]

As I have shown at greater length in "Thackeray as a Reader and Critic of French Literature", the doctrines propagated by Madame Sand in her *Spiridion* and by Frédéric Soulié in *Le Bananier* are also unsatisfactory or highly objectionable to Thackeray. He has serious reservations regarding the ideas propagated by the French authoress, whom he characterizes as the high priestess of the "new" religion imported to France from Germany (i.e. pantheism and transcendentalism), condemning her "new Apocalypse" as a distorted caricature of a doctrine and dissociating himself especially from her open attacks on the received Christian creed, which he castigates as blasphemous. The doctrine propagated by Soulié is resented by Thackeray even more strongly than that to be found in *Spiridion.* As I have shown in the quoted study, he sharply criticizes the French novelist for intending to demonstrate that England abolished slavery in her colonies neither out of love of the black race nor out of mere humanity, but with the aim of ruining the French and Spanish colonies; that the English are therefore natural enemies of the French and that slavery is a praiseworthy institution which should be maintained in the French colonies. Thackeray regards such a purpose as in itself unworthy of an artist, his anger

[2] For the quotations see op. cit., p. 95.
[3] *The National Standard,* June 15, 1833, p. 370.
[4] Ibid.

being especially aroused by Soulié's having placed himself on the side of the French slave-owners, painting "negro slavery as a happy condition of being" and inventing "fictions for the purpose of inculcating hatred and ill will".[5]

Thackeray very strongly resents, too, Soulié's attempts to ascribe base motives to the English abolition movement, about which he speaks with warm sympathy, characterizing it as "the noblest and greatest" that ever a people made, "the purest and the least selfish".[6] In this judgment, however, he is more motivated by his offended national feelings and his prejudices against the French than by a genuine sympathy to the slaves themselves. Even if he never regarded slavery as "a happy condition of being" and never gave his whole-hearted consent to the slave-owning system as such, he never fully shared, as Ray has also pointed out, "the moral loathing of slavery which inspired the abolitionists".[7] Increasingly since the 1850s, when Thackeray visited the United States and saw the slave-system functioning, his standpoint was diverging from that of the leaders of the abolition movement and approaching that of the Southern plantation owners. He found much that he could accept in the latter's arguments for slavery[8] and from what he was shown assumed that the Negroes were happy in their situation, well taken care of by their masters and fairly treated (and so depicted them in *The Virginians*), his attitude to them being at the same time strongly coloured by racial prejudices[9] (which found their expression especially in the character of Captain Woolcomb in *Philip*). Up to the period of the Civil War in America, when he placed himself definitely on the side of the South, as several of his contemporaries confirm[10] (though even then he was willing to hear the other side), his attitude to slavery was not entirely identical with that of the plantation-owners, for the problem obviously disturbed him a great deal and he felt that he did not understand it well enough to be able to pronounce any finite judgment upon it. This attitude strongly influenced, too, the literary judgments which he pronounced as a reader — he refused to read Mrs. Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,[11] maintaining, in the first place, that such painful themes as slavery were not suitable for fiction and, in the second place, that slavery was a much more complicated problem than is presented by Mrs. Stowe:

"I dont believe Blacky *is* my man & my brother, though God forbid I should own him or flog him, or part him from his wife & children. But the question is a much longer [one than] is set forth in Mrs Stowe's philosophy: and I shant speak about it, till I know it, or till its my business, or I think I can do good" (*Letters* III, 187).

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[5] For the quotations see *Works* V, 483.

[6] *Works* V, 489.

[7] *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 316.

[8] See his arguments for slavery in *Letters* III, 199—200, 224; through the mouth of Harry Warrington, however, he protests against the system.

[9] See e.g. *Letters* III, 199, 273—274.

[10] As for instance John R. Thompson, Leslie Stephen, Bayard Taylor and James Alston Cabell (see Wilson, op. cit., II, 42—44 and 73—74). For a more recent analysis of his attitude see *The Age of Wisdom*, pp. 316, 484; see also *Letters* III, 566—567, IV, 213, 237.

[11] For his reaction to this novel see *Letters* III, 157, 273. He also drew a burlesque "Womanifesto" (see *Letters* III, 181, 187, Wilson, op. cit., I, 183) to ridicule the address issued against slavery in London by some English ladies, in which he underlined, as Ray has pointed out, "the ignorance of these genteel agitators" (*The Age of Wisdom*, p. 216). He also makes Lady Ann Newcome sign "the address to Mrs. Stowe" (*Works* XIV, 363).

In two cases Thackeray finds the original purpose of the novelists whose works he reviewed acceptable — that of Bulwer in *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice* and of Mrs. Trollope in *The Vicar of Wrexhill.* Bulwer's aim of letting the reader "into the inward heart of a man — nay, more, to show us step by step his progress towards truth"[12] seems to him very ambitious and praiseworthy as it is declared by the novelist, but unacceptable in the form in which it appears in the novel. Also Mrs. Trollope's aim of defending high church Protestantism against the attacks of the Evangelical sects seems to Thackeray laudable:

"It is hard to say what moral end has been proposed or can be answered by the publication of this book. That Mrs. Trollope, in her zeal for the tenets of high church Protestantism, should be anxious to show that her form of religion is superior to that of any other sect, is only a laudable enthusiasm upon the lady's part, who has both a good cause to advocate and no ordinary talent to back her cause."[13]

But whether he finds the purpose of the novelists whom he critically considers acceptable or not, in each case he always applies some further criteria before pronouncing his final judgment. One of these is his concern about the moral value of the instruction provided in the works assessed. In the first place, he applies to their authors his postulate that a writer who takes upon himself the role of moralist, philosopher or social reformer has the right to do so only if his private life is blameless and his morals unquestionable. As I have shown in my study on his criticism of French literature, he applies this postulate of his in particular to George Sand, who is in his opinion not the proper person to proclaim the demand for the emancipation of woman and to pose the problem of marriage ties (as she does in her three earlier novels *Indiana, Valentine* and *Lélia,* which he briefly considers in his review of *Spiridion*), for she herself broke the bondage and found consolation elsewhere, is therefore prejudiced and so personally committed that "her arguments may be considered to be somewhat partial, and received with some little caution".[14]

In the second place, he insists that the characters who are the protagonists of the novelist's doctrine should also be of unexceptionable morals, for if there is any serious discrepancy between what they are doing and what they are proclaiming, even the philosophy which they propagate becomes very questionable from the moral point of view. He applies this view, which is based on his postulate of "unmixed" criminal or vicious characters discussed earlier, especially to two characters created by Bulwer, Godolphin and Maltravers, though he measures these characters at the same time by purely aesthetic criteria, as I shall partly show in the following and enlarge upon later. As Thackeray rightly points out, Godolphin in Bulwer's depiction is an impertinent, cool, nonchalant and extremely weak man, the development of whose character is treated by the author in lamentably bad taste. When a boy, he participated in all sort of vice and dissipation and, "if he had any redeeming qualities, we were certainly left in entire ignorance of them". When we meet him again in Italy after some years, he is still notorious for his excesses, but at the same time stands out as an idealist, "whose dreamy wanderings are after human per-

[12] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 215.
[13] Ibid., p. 205.
[14] *Works* II, 230.

fectibility".[15] Thackeray is extremely irritated by this absurd figure of a philosophizing debauchee and condemns it in the following comment, laying stress especially upon its inconsistency:

"Page after page we are bored to death with the musings of this solitary dreamer. Now, we deny that such a character is at all natural; we are quite sure that it is only in such a trashy book as the one before us, that, with this excess in refinement, could be coupled all that is gross and sensual. A man having a diseased imagination might yearn after an object free from the stains of mortality, but he could not at the same time be one in whom was centred its most degrading attributes; he could not be one who would seek to turn virtue, when he found it, into vice, and to spread, by the force of example, a contagion that would stand for ever between him and the realization of his dream; finally, he could not be one without soul, without feeling: and this we shall show Godolphin to be. He is an indolent sensualist, and no more. The attempt to make him pass muster by decking him in the masquerade of philosophy, is contemptible. His actions have their birth and being in self, and the sickly sentiments he utters fail to conceal it."[16]

Similarly, too, in *Ernest Maltravers,* Bulwer intended to depict an ideal hero, but created only a scoundrel, whose actions are in constant contradiction to his pompous declamations about virtue, his endless ranting about the stars and Greek plays and prating "about his own perfections and his divine nature". As Thackeray points out, Maltravers teaches Alice that there is a God and then seduces her, this catastrophe coming "after this picture of virtue and love, this talk of God and judgment, this prating about the 'science of life, the desire for the good, the yearning after the true, the passion for the honest' ".[17] Bulwer's hero discourses like Socrates, but acts like Charteres:

"Seduction, to be sure, is a trivial incident in novels, and flippant remarks about chastity are stale and common; but such subjects fall ungraciously from the mouths of sages."[18]

The outcome of such a creative approach is in Thackeray's opinion an absurdly caricatured figure of a "ranting fool", which invalidates Bulwer's original purpose:

"He cannot see that the hero into whose mouth he places his favourite metaphysical gabble — his dissertations upon the stars, the passions, the Greek plays, and what not — his eternal whine about what he calls the good and the beautiful, is a fellow as mean and paltry as can be imagined; a man of rant and not of action, foolishly infirm in purposes and strong only in desire; whose beautiful is a tawdry strumpet, and whose good would be crime in the eyes of an honest man. So much for the portrait of Ernest Maltravers; as for the artist, we cannot conceive a man to have failed more completely. He wishes to paint an amiable man, and he succeeds in drawing a scoundrel: he says he will give us the likeness of a genius, and it is only the picture of a *humbug.*"[19]

At the same time Thackeray is convinced that the philosophy which Bulwer places into the mouth of his hero is his own philosophy:

"But let us have done with Maltravers the philosopher. We are not going to press the point that this character is neither more nor less than Mr. Edward Earle Lytton Bulwer. That gentleman expressly declares that all men are 'fools' who see in this windy declaimer of bad morals, this vain spouter of pompous twaddle, only the morals and egotism of

[15] For the quotations see *The National Standard,* June 22, 1833, p. 390.
[16] Ibid.
[17] For the quotations see *Stray Papers,* p. 297, Gulliver, op. cit., p. 202.
[18] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 203.
[19] *Stray Papers,* pp. 293—294; see also his similar remarks in *Catherine, Works* III, 31, 32, 46.

the author himself; in spite of this imputation of folly, we are convinced that the writer is mistaken, and not the public. We defy even his most ardent admirers to fancy that in the principal personage of every one of his novels it is the character which speaks, and not the *ego* of the author."[20]

And not only is it Bulwer's own philosophy, it is a sham philosophy into the bargain, not genuine and wholesome teaching:

"A ploughboy is a better philosopher and moralist than this mouthing Maltravers, with his boasted love of mankind."[21]

The critic compares Bulwer's philosophy to the wife of Goldsmith's Beau Tibbs whom her husband "presented to the world as a paragon of virtue and *ton*, and who was but the cast-off mistress of a lord", and proceeds:

"Mr. Bulwer's philosophy is his Mrs. Tibbs; he thrusts her forward into the company of her betters, as if her rank and reputation never admitted of a question. To all his literary undertakings this goddess of his accompanies him; and what a cracked, battered, trull she is! with a person and morals which would suit Vinegar Yard, and a chastity that would be hooted in Drury Lane. The morality which Mr. Bulwer has acquired in his researches, political and metaphysical, is of the most extraordinary nature. For one who is always preaching of Truth, of Beauty, the dulness of his moral sense is perfectly ludicrous."[22]

Thackeray is also very much concerned about the harmful influence of such a philosophy, which, for all its showy splendour, reminds him "of the sewer".[23] As I have suggested above, he regards Maltravers in this respect as much more offensive than Pelham:

"But Maltravers and his philosophy are more important matters. A man who preaches morals, who, with an air of authority, sets himself down to teach virtue and truth, has a far more serious influence for good or for evil, and because at once amenable to a far higher tribunal, than a young star who plays a few of the pranks and follies incident to his age. What a heavy charge is this man taking on himself! What a multitude of others will listen and believe him on his word! What a position is he in towards those whom he professes to teach, and above all towards the truth which he pretends to deliver! If he fail in his trust to one or the other, if he err ignorantly or knowingly, if his vaunted system of morality be but a lie put forward by a foolish vanity or by a corrupt heart, in what an awful situation stands our philosopher! In amusing the world, an author writing with decency and good temper can run no great risk of doing harm; but he should think before he begins to instruct, for he tampers then with God's coin."[24]

We shall see later that Thackeray has serious moral reservations, too, regarding Mrs. Trollope's novel, condemning it as a "most odiously and disgustingly indecent" book, containing scenes and descriptions which "could scarcely be less unscrupulously filthy", "if they had been written by Fielding or Louvet",[25] as he maintains with less than justice to the first-named writer. His moral sense is offended, too, by Madame Sand's early novels, especially *Lélia*, which he characterizes as "a regular topsyturvyfication of morality, a thieves' and prostitutes' apotheosis",[26] not daring to particularize the authoress's "peculiar" notions of morals which in his opinion might offend the squeamish English reader.

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[20] Gulliver, op. cit., pp. 215—216.
[21] *Stray Papers*, p. 297.
[22] Ibid., p. 293.
[23] Ibid., p. 300.
[24] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 215.
[25] For the quotations see *Stray Papers*, pp. 292 and 291.
[26] *Works* II, 230.

All the other criteria he applies to the authors he is evaluating in the period we are dealing with are based upon aesthetic standards. In the first place, he rebukes all of them for having failed — for several reasons — in attaining their ambitious aims. In his review of *Godolphin* he shows in detail how its author failed in elaborating his purpose through the medium of his characters. He points out that in none of these personages does the writer succeed in demonstrating the evil influence of the "great world", for their vices (and here he is in the right) are not in any way peculiar to this sphere of life. Godolphin's profligacy, for instance, "was the result of being thrown on the town at fifteen years of age", and his "heartlessness, if not innate, was learned *out* of 'the great world', wandering in Italy".[27] Owing to the author's signal failure in accomplishing his purpose, Thackeray points out that the second volume deserves less reprobation than the other two, for the author "does not even try to delude us into the belief" that he shows the influence of the "great world" upon his personages:

"Indeed, it would appear that, despairing, as he evidently did at the end of the first volume, of succeeding in the attempt, he entirely gave up the notion in the second, but without having the candour to say so. Had he here thrown overboard the dead-weight that was sinking him, — the dead-weight of an object to which his abilities were unequal, and simply declared his intention of shewing the consequences of unbounded vanity and unbridled passions, he might perhaps have attained a moderate portion of success: but this he has not done; for although, as we have said, he gets rid of 'the great world' for a length of time, he returns to it before he brings his story to a conclusion, and would then have his readers to infer that the characters, as they stand out in his latter scenes, are characters that have been moulded by the society in which we see them moving; and this, without any reference whatever to, or reflection upon, the other important circumstances which have in reality made them what they are."[28]

It was Thackeray's opinion that in *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice* Bulwer failed in attaining his high aim mainly because he did not confine his attention to subjects suitable to his own powers, i.e. to "the humorous and the sarcastic", in which he could give rein to his keen perception of the ridiculous, but "is always striving after the style of Plato", persisting that "his real vein is the sublime" and thinking fit "to turn moralist, metaphysician, politician, poet",[29] in none of which roles he was, moreover, in earnest. Bulwer's hero is nothing else but a mouthpiece of the novelist's own philosophical and moral views, and the latter's purpose thus becomes too obtrusive, exercising a baneful influence upon the naturalness of his depictions:

"A little more politics and Plato, and the natural disappears altogether from Mr. Bulwer's writings; the individual man becomes as indistinguishable amidst the farrago of philosophy in which he has chosen to envelop himself, as a cutlet in the sauces of a French cook."[30]

And not only Bulwer's purpose, but also his own personality is too obtrusive: Maltravers is only "an old actor in a new part", for all the characters so far created by Bulwer "are only so many appearances of the same character placed in different coats and circumstances" — namely the author himself:

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[27] *The National Standard,* June 15, 1833, p. 370.
[28] Ibid., June 22, 1833, p. 389.
[29] For the quotations see *Stray Papers,* pp. 297, 292.
[30] Ibid., p. 293.

"He has not dramatic power sufficient to create a great character; he can give a very lively sketch of a small one; he can seize peculiarities with much humour and neatness; he can weave the incidents of a story with tolerable skill; he can describe those incidents and peculiarities in a very pleasing and impressive language and style; but here, as we think, his power ends, and his merit too. The hero appears upon the stage, and straightaway the style becomes intolerably bloated and pompous; the genius of Mr. Bulwer, the ill-usage which has been shown to Mr. Bulwer, the self-love of Mr. Bulwer, the piques of Mr. Bulwer, appear in every line; it is only Mr. Bulwer placed in imaginary circumstances, and acting, or rather talking, accordingly."[31]

Thackeray is very much irritated by this "most concentrated, consummate, ludicrous egotism" on the part of Bulwer, which makes itself felt everywhere in his works, but especially in "the guidance of his puppets and the action of his drama",[32] and condemns it altogether, using as his critical standard the creative approach of three great writers who possess, in contradistinction to Bulwer, real genius:

"How little in the works of Fielding, of Scott, of Cervantes, does the author intrude upon the reader, and yet each had his woes, and wounded vanities, and his literary wrongs."[33]

Like Bulwer, Madame Sand too is reprimanded by Thackeray for transforming herself into a philosopher and thus overstepping the boundary of the novel as a literary form, and neglecting her old trade of novelist, of which she was the very ablest practitioner in France. As I have shown in my study on his criticism of French literature, Thackeray rebukes her, in the first place, for attempting to proclaim her doctrine by drawing upon her imagination instead of her learning, and presenting a sentimental tale instead of argument. In the second place, he criticizes the way in which she elaborated her purpose — that of showing "the downfall of the Catholic church; and, indeed, of the whole Christian scheme" — in the characters and plot of her novel, voicing his objections especially to the titular character, whom the authoress made the mouthpiece of her own convictions and whom he characterizes as a strange mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. Such a curious personage cannot in Thackeray's opinion convince the reader of the truth of Madame Sand's religious speculations, but is rather proof that she had gone hopelessly astray in her quest. In spite of this, however, the novel does contain in Thackeray's opinion a good moral, "though not such an one, perhaps, as our fair philosopher intended", namely a warning to dabblers in religious speculations that it is after all better and safer not to listen to the doctrines of the philosophers who constantly change their creeds, but to remain quiet and sober, "in that quiet and sober way of faith"[34] of one's ancestors. As these quotations suggest, George Sand's doctrine, not acceptable to Thackeray in itself, and, moreover, propagated by her in an incompetent way, leads him to a conservative adherence to old-established beliefs and to distrust of any progress in religious thought, a standpoint not wholly characteristic of him in this period of his life.

Mrs. Trollope and Soulié are blamed by Thackeray for trespasses of a slightly different character. They both enforce their purpose in too obtrusive a manner, but are guilty besides of monstrously exaggerating the foibles of the opposing

[31] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 216; see also ibid., p. 215.
[32] For the quotations see ibid., p. 203.
[33] Ibid., pp. 203—204.
[34] For the quotations in this paragraph see *Works* II, 233, 240, 242.

party and exemplifying them in their negative characters. Mrs. Trollope set forth — in Thackeray's opinion — on a very foolish mission in undertaking "to be the champion of oppressed Orthodoxy", for although she has "a keen eye, a very sharp tongue, a firm belief, doubtless, in the high-church doctrines, and a decent reputation from the authorship of half-a-dozen novels, or other light works", these "are feeble arms for one who would engage in such a contest". She "has not exactly the genius which is best calculated to support the Church of England, or to argue upon so grave a subject as that on which she has thought proper to write", meddles with matters which she does not understand and, "having very little, except prejudice, on which to found an opinion, she makes up for want of argument by a wonderful fluency of abuse" and by being "outrageously cruel in her treatment of her adversary".[35] Thackeray accuses her especially of the cardinal sin of erroneous generalization — of representing all her negative characters, who are all recruited from the opposing party, the Evangelical sect, as incarnations of evil and thus transferring the bad traits of individual sinners to be found in any religious sect to a whole group of persons. The outcome of such a proceeding is in Thackeray's opinion "a gross and monstrous libel on the part of the authoress" and greater bigotry than that which she pillories. He demonstrates this especially by the following analysis of the titular character of the novel:

"If the Devil himself had been the great patron of what is called the New-Light Sect, Mrs. Trollope could not, or perhaps would not, have hated it worse. She takes for her hero a shining leader of the party, and endows him with a character which certainly must be copied from the personage whom we have just named. She does not give him the shadow of a good quality, except a very handsome person (if this may be deemed one). She makes him a liar, a lecher, a coward, a hypocrite, a tyrant and a swindler, whose only charm consists in his black whiskers and white teeth, and his happy knack of mingling indecency with blasphemy, and, under cover of an address to the almighty, pampering the grossest passions of his audience — women for the most part, who fancy they worship God, but adore the vicar."[36]

In Thackeray's opinion, Mrs. Trollope "had much better have remained at home pudding-making or stocking-mending", for "she has only harmed herself and her cause (as a bad advocate always will)" — her novel, as a party attack, being "an entire failure".[37] As I have suggested, he has, moreover, serious moral reservations as to the novel, which he regards as dangerous to public morals. He points out that by describing so accurately the vicar's vices, of which it would be better "not to speak at all", Mrs. Trollope has only shown that she is "but too well acquainted with scenes which [her] pure eyes should never have beheld", and thus has degraded her good wit and good intention shamefully, exposing herself at the same time to possible and quite justifiable rebukes from the opposing party that she "learned all this wickedness" at church:

"No moralist (and above all, no woman moralist) can use such weapons as these without injuring herself far more than her adversary."[38]

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[35] For the quotations see *Stray Papers*, pp. 281, 282, Gulliver, op. cit., p. 205.

[36] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 206; for the preceding quotation see *Stray Papers*, p. 288.

[37] For the quotations see *Stray Papers*, pp. 281, 292.

[38] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 206; for the preceding quotations see *Stray Papers*, pp. 284, 285, Gulliver, op. cit., p. 207.

As I have shown in the already-quoted study, Soulié is sharply criticized by Thackeray for elaborating his purpose in his characters (especially in the figure of the perfidious Englishman, Mr. Welmoth, drawn in extremely black colours) in such a way as to foment the chauvinism of the French and their hatred of the English. This part of Thackeray's argument is strongly coloured by his prejudices against the French, kindled to unusual heat by Soulié's grotesque representation of English character and all the other offences he commits against the English nation in his "trumpery novel". In the conclusion of the review Thackeray vents his main grievance — that Soulié as novelist should so far overstep the boundaries of the novel as a literary form as to choose a theme suitable for a political pamphlet, and to use that sort of argumentation which should "be left to the writers of the leading articles". In Thackeray's opinion the novelist has a perfect right to exercise "the utmost severities of his imagination" upon the villains he had himself created, but he should not "deal in specific calumnies, and inculcate, by means of lies, hatred of actual breathing flesh and blood. This task should be left to what are called *hommes graves* in France, the sages of the war newspapers".[39]

In the reviews we are dealing with Thackeray has also much to say upon what we might call legitimate novel-interest, i.e. characters, plot, situations and style. Thus in his review of *Godolphin* he pays detailed attention to Bulwer's method of creating characters, criticizing his personages as inconsistent (especially Godolphin and Constance), pointing to a serious discrepancy between the admiration with which the author comments upon Constance and the way in which he makes her act and rebuking him for many other absurdities and illogicalities in his characterization, which he ridicules in brief ironical remarks ("a showy nose! good Lord!" etc.). He also objects to the excessively long descriptions of the characters, as well as to the tediously lengthy monologues and dialogues, one of which occupies "the moderate space of forty-four pages!" His indignation is especially aroused by the mysterious Radcliffean figure of the "romantic visionary" Volktman, with whom Godolphin spends the greater part of his time in Rome in "so mysterious and unearthly" conversations, as Bulwer characterizes them, that Thackeray is "actually afraid to republish them". He has not so many reservations as to the character of Volktman's daughter Lucilla; as it is presented in the early stages of the story, and approves of Bulwer's rendering her devotion to her lover "in an inverse ratio to the worth of its object", a point in which he discerns "a good deal of nature", though he doubts whether this was the novelist's intention.[40]

Thackeray's opinion of the character of Ernest Maltravers is sufficiently clear from the earlier analysis: he regarded this personage as an unconvincing lay figure, considering it to be "more talkative, more adroit, but less real" than Pelham, reality being in his opinion destroyed chiefly by Maltravers's "fatal, prosing, tedious habit of talking about himself".[41] On the other hand, however, he points out that some of the minor personages in *Ernest Maltravers* are "hit off" very neatly, for instance the funny old husband of Madame de Ventadour

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[39] For the quotations see *Works* V, 502.

[40] For the quotations see *The National Standard,* June 15, 1833, pp. 371, 373; June 22, pp. 389, 390.

[41] For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., pp. 215, 217.

and the participants at a ball at Naples. He finds warm words of praise, too, for the character of Alice, which is in his opinion "neither more nor less than charming" and drawn with talent:

"There is a reality in it, a certain grace of innocence and affections, which show him to be no mean artist."[42]

As far as Mrs. Trollope's characters are concerned, Thackeray finds very little to praise, assessing positively only "a capital burlesque of a serious fancy-fair, and a Jew-Missionary to Wabheboo; which exhibits a most unwomanlike genius for slang and drollery", but condemning the titular figure of the novel as not true to life. In his opinion, the indecencies and blasphemies of the vicar "go far beyond the genuine limits of satire, as they exceed the bounds of truth".[43]

Thackeray has not a little to say, too, on the plots of the novels he evaluates. Thus he sums up at some length and with much humour the plot of *Godolphin* ("the plot! shades of departed genius, forgive us!"), rejecting its foundation as absurd and condemning the whole conventional pattern upon which it is built. His sharpest rebukes are aimed at the "most violent" way "in which Lucilla is dragged into the third volume" and the "absurd and improbable" part she is made to enact,[44] and at the execution of Vernon's revenge which arouses in him moral indignation as well. In his review of *Alice* Thackeray criticizes the whole argument of both this novel and *Maltravers* — the search of the hero for truth — as lacking in originality, and considers the truth eventually found so self-evident as not to be worth the quest. On the other hand, however, he estimates quite favourably the two first chapters of *Ernest Maltravers* as being "in Mr. Bulwer's very best manner", told as they are "with admirable liveliness and effect".[45] The "conduct of the story" in Mrs. Trollope's novel is praised by him as "capitally arranged" and the events characterized as "extraordinarily striking and real".[46] From Madame Sand's novel he positively appreciates only one episode, in which the authoress successfully evokes the atmosphere of the cloister and sacristy, praises her fine fancy and her capability of keeping up "the natural *supernaturalness*" of the scene by means of suitably chosen details.[47]

And finally Thackeray pays due attention, too, to the style of these authors. The writer who irritates him most by this aspect of his creative approach is, not surprisingly, Bulwer, and that in all the three novels reviewed. The speeches put by Bulwer into the mouth of some of the characters in *Godolphin* are characterized by Thackeray as the crazy drivellings of maniacs and the language of Ernest Maltravers assessed as "endless *blague*", a string of windy sentences possessing no meaning, yet "gravely delivered with all the emphasis of truth and the air of profound conviction".[48] As the reviewer emphasizes, every arrival of Bulwer's hero on the scene signifies a turn from good to bad and the appearance of a "wicked and disgusting cant", while his departure is immediately to be noticed in the general improvement of "the style, the interest, and the

[42] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 202; for the preceding quotation see ibid., p. 216.
[43] For the quotations see *Stray Papers*, p. 291; Gulliver, op. cit., p. 206.
[44] For the quotations see *The National Standard*, June 15, 1833, p. 371; June 22, p. 390.
[45] For the quotations see *Stray Papers*, p. 294.
[46] Gulliver, op. cit., p. 206.
[47] See *Works* II, 235.
[48] For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., p. 203; *Stray Papers*, p. 296.

morals".[49] From Mrs. Trollope's novel Thackeray quotes one very clever piece of writing, adding that for all his grave reservations he is not going "to question at all the undeniable talent of the authoress of the *Vicar of Wrexhill*".[50] The only writer, however, whose style he genuinely admires, is Madame Sand, as I have pointed out in my last study. He pays generous tribute to her wonderful power of language and "exquisitely melodious and full" sentences which remind him of "the sound of country bells — provoking I don't know what vein of musing and meditation, and falling sweetly and sadly on the ear".[51]

As far as the value of Thackeray's reviews as criticism is concerned, we may say that in the case of the English writers his critical assaults are entirely just. In his reviews of Bulwer's novels he vents his protest against those critics who prostitute their talents by misplaced praise of such second-rate works and thus lead the public astray. In his first review of *Ernest Maltravers,* however, he is milder in his tone than in that of *Godolphin,* where he includes even the author himself among professional "puffers", as a man who knows the system of puffery and calculates its effects, for, being aware "that there is no legitimate interest whatever in his story, he endeavours, in his preface, to engender a spurious one". Thackeray intends to "do strict justice upon this 'extraordinary production' " and for this reason lets the author occasionally speak for himself, quoting from his preface and novel plentifully. His endeavour to be objective and just in his criticism is also confirmed by his re-reading the second volume of the novel, when a friend suggested to him that it "contained some good ideas, well expressed". He found out, however, that he might have spared himself the labour and that his friend had been "wofully led astray by a wretched metaphysician, and very middling writer". His final judgment is then totally negative: he condemns *Godolphin* as a trashy book written in "wretched taste",[52] and finishes his review with the following contemptuous words:

> "And with this we throw from us 'Godolphin'; trusting that, in the execution of our duty, we may never have to dissect a subject so valueless again."[53]

And he does deliver justice in this case, for *Godolphin* really is a very curious novel, compounded, as Rosa has it, "of even more diverse elements than *Pelham*",[54] some of which, especially the basic strain of Gothic romance, as well as Bulwer's inept borrowings from Goethe, were in direct contradiction to Thackeray's budding aesthetic ideas and therefore unacceptable to him.

In his first review of *Ernest Maltravers* Thackeray turns not only against Bulwer's enraptured admirers who laud him "as a heaven-born genius", but also against his detractors who spurn him "as a ninny" and plunge him "in the blackest mud of the *bathos*". Both critical attitudes are regarded by Thackeray as very harmful, for "the abuse lavished upon him (however well-founded)" naturally makes him place his faith in the opinion of his admirers and, moreover, strengthens him "in his darling fault of egotism", making him "imagine

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[49] For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., p. 216.
[50] *Stray Papers,* p. 288.
[51] *Works* II, 232.
[52] For the quotations see *The National Standard,* June 15, 1833, p. 370; June 22, pp. 389, 390.
[53] *The National Standard,* June 22, 1833, p. 393.
[54] Op. cit., p. 93.

that he must be a man of wondrous merit, on whom critics sometimes so angrily fasten", and thus perverting "the natural bent or bias of his mind": "he is a novelist no more, he is a God uttering oracles".[55] In his reviews Thackeray proved in my opinion a better judge than either the friends or the enemies of Bulwer of whom he writes. This is not, however, the opinion of all Thackerayan scholars. Saintsbury, for instance, omitted the summary review "Our Batch of Novels for Christmas", which contains Thackeray's second review of *Ernest Maltravers*, because of its being "clumsy and amateurish" and a "slating" written "in the Mr. Bludyer style"; Greig characterizes Thackeray's approach as brutal "bludgeoning" and Melville thinks that he applied the lash with the utmost vigour, went too far in his zeal for pure and healthy literature and showed what might easily have been constructed as personal animus against the author, "though, as a matter of fact, the objections he entertained against this author were purely abstract".[56] As we have seen, however, in spite of all his very sharp attacks, most of which are in my opinion entirely justifiable (except perhaps one passage not quoted above in which he addresses a few ironical remarks to Bulwer's personal appearance, rarefied tastes and "artificial courses" which in his opinion exercise a baneful influence upon his literary work[57]), Thackeray does also bestow praise upon several descriptions, episodes and characters. It is even probable that his reviews published in the *Times* might have originally contained still more positive comments. At least Macready, in his diary of 14th April 1838, records a statement of Thackeray that from what he wrote on Bulwer for this paper every word of praise was left out.[58] I can therefore find myself in agreement with G.N. Ray who points out that although these reviews are "sufficiently harsh", they "are not entirely hostile. Thackeray admits his admiration for *Pelham*, and he shows that he is not blind to Bulwer's imaginative power, his wide knowledge of life, and his intermittent command of witty dialogue".[59] Nor, as he was himself convinced. is Thackeray's review of Mrs. Trollope's novel unfair, though he at the same time realized that the critical weapons he had used were very sharp.[60]

As far as the novels of Sand and Soulié are concerned, Thackeray's evaluation is in places coloured by his national prejudices, as I have pointed out in my previous study, but it is not unjust. His treatment of *Spiridion* is quite justifiable, for this work, like the other novels *à la thèse* produced by the French authoress, is filled with confused metaphysics and misty symbolism and is unequal both in its composition and its truthfulness to life. And he was not so unfair as to fail to recognize and appreciate the beauty of her style and admit that in her genius and eloquence she could take rank with Rousseau and Byron. His review of Soulié's novel is quite fair, for the weak points he has found and castigated are real demerits of this second-rate work which was "manu-

[55] For the quotations see Gulliver, op. cit., p. 201.

[56] For the view of Saintsbury, see *Works* X, xx; of Greig, see op. cit., p. 37; of Melville, see op. cit., I, 171.

[57] See *Stray Papers*, pp. 292—293.

[58] Quoted by Stevenson, op. cit., p. 80.

[59] *The Uses of Adversity*, p. 242.

[60] When, after publishing his review, he was invited to a dinner-party at which Mrs. Trollope was to be present, we are told: "'Oh, By Jove! I can't come', he exclaimed. 'I've just cut up her 'Vicar of Wrexhill' in a review. I think she tells lies'" (quoted by Melville, op. cit., I, 155n. from Richard Bedingfield's *Recollections of Thackeray*).

factured" by the author for a definite political purpose provided by certain politicians, as Thackeray has it, and has fallen into deserved oblivion.

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In the middle 1840s, when the social novel in particular, alongside the "political" and "religious", was in its heyday and reaching the zenith of its popularity, Thackeray begins to be much more disturbed than he had previously been by a conspicuous tendency to be observed among the novelists, namely an inclination to go too far in their endeavour to make their works instructive, to use them first and foremost for didactic purposes and thus produce, instead of novels, political, religious or economic pamphlets and manifestos. Having carefully read several works of some contemporary writers of fiction (Disraeli's *Coningsby* and *Sybil,* Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve,* Cooper's *Ravensnest,* Mrs. Trollope's *Jessie Phillips,* Eugène Sue's *Juif errant,* as well as Jerrold's and Dickens's works published in this period), he feels bound as critic to sound the alarm against their treatment of the novel. Above all in his review of Lever's novel (*The Morning Chronicle,* April 3, 1845), but also in the other reviews published in this magazine and concerned with fiction (notably in those of Disraeli's *Coningsby,* May 13, 1844, and *Sybil,* May 13, 1845, and of some Christmas stories to be dealt with in the following sub-chapter; in less measure in his review of Cooper's novel, August 27, 1846), Thackeray develops his interesting argument concerning the social and political commitment of fiction with which I dealt in detail in two of my previous studies and have here summed up in my second chapter along with my own conclusions. This argument contains his mature formulation of some of his older criteria, as well as of some not entirely new, but not yet explicitly applied by him in his criticism of novels *à la thèse* or of any other type of fiction.

One of the older criteria he continued to apply in the period I am dealing with is that of his familiar extra-aesthetic considerations which make him reject the propagated doctrine itself. He applies this criterion especially in the case of Disraeli's novels *Coningsby* and *Sybil,* the acknowledged literary manifestos of the "Young England" party, even although his rejection of the doctrine is not absolute. He appreciates the positive aspects of Disraeli's thesis as it is embodied in these novels: the truthful exposure of the dirty political game of the Whigs and Tories, and the severe hits at both parties. It is good, he is convinced, "to find gentlemen sitting with the present government acknowledging the cant of its professions, the entire uncertainty of its aims, the hollowness of its views, and for the imminent convulsions of the country its utter inadequacy to provide". But even if Thackeray appreciates Disraeli's revelation of the evils of political and social life in England, the remedy the novelist prescribes for their removal seems to him entirely ineffective — he points out that when Disraeli "comes to legislate for them ... his reasoning becomes altogether unsatisfactory". Thackeray professes himself unable to decipher the parable of "Young England" and to understand what are the aims of this new political programme, which he denotes as a mystery wanting "a key as much as any problem hitherto unexplained in this world".[61] In spite of this, however, in his summary of the

[61] For the quotations see *Contributions,* 42, 79.

doctrine, which he presents in his review of Smythe's *Historic Fancies* (published in the *Morning Chronicle* in the interval between those of *Coningsby* and *Sybil*), he succeeds in grasping its main drawbacks, explaining the progress it has made since its first appearance and even demonstrating that such a political programme is very unsatisfactory, for it is in its substance vague prophecy and dangerous demagogy, which disturbs men's minds by offering them "something as yet undefined" as a remedy for their present troubles.[62] From Thackeray's whole argument it is obvious that he particularly resented the fundamental principle of the Young Englanders' doctrine — the proposal for the revival of some undefined "good old times", in fact "those wicked middle ages", as he characterized them elsewhere, "of which romancers like to make chivalrous pageants, and we madmen in Young England and Young Ireland prate about" but which are "now considered damnable by all proper men".[63] He finishes his review of *Coningsby* by highly appreciating Disraeli's definition of the English government, but pointing to the inconsistency between this definition and Disraeli's political ideals:

"We wish Sir Robert Peel joy of his Young England friends; and, admiring fully the vivid correctness of Mr. Disraeli's description of this great Conservative party, which conserves nothing, which proposes nothing, which resists nothing, which believes nothing: admire still more his conclusion, that out of this nothing a something is to be created, round which England is contentedly to rally, and that we are one day to re-organize faith and reverence round this wretched, tottering, mouldy, clumsy, old idol."[64]

No less vigorously does Thackeray criticize the doctrine propagated by Cooper in *Ravensnest,* the main tenet of which is that *"a landed gentry is precisely what is most needed for the higher order of civilization"*.[65] As Thackeray points out, this tenet is enforced by the novelist especially in his record of the honours of the Littlepage family in its three generations, in which the landed aristocracy is celebrated as an exclusive and indispensible social class, "a record full of the same sentiment of exclusiveness, a sentiment which, having been denounced time out of mind by the movement party in the old world, is just beginning to be taken up by the aristocratic party in the new". Thackeray, himself a hater of aristocratic privileges, finds such an attitude to this social class anachronistic and untenable:

"What strange vicissitudes occur in the history of our race! A premium upon landowners in democratic America, just at the very time the country-gentleman party have been turned to the right about in aristocratic England!"[66]

The purpose followed by Lever in *St. Patrick's Eve* seems to Thackeray not so objectionable in itself as that of Disraeli or Cooper. Lever's aim is to show that the only remedy for the Irish national evils is the return of the absentee landlords to their Irish manors. In Thackeray's opinion, as "a general proposition none can be more amiable and undeniable than this": the remedy "is of the mildest sort and such as could not possibly do harm to that or any other

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[62] See ibid., pp. 55—56.

[63] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 165 and 60; see also Jeames's remark on Young England in *Works* VII, 399.

[64] *Contributions,* 50.

[65] Ibid., p. 170; quoted from Cooper.

[66] Ibid.,.p. 170; for the preceding quotation see ibid., p. 169.

afflicted country". He doubts, however, whether this "medicine would be sufficiently powerful".[67]

Another objection Thackeray lodges against "political" novelists is their inconsistent and infirm political creed: they change their political views either several times during their literary career (like Disraeli) or even within one work, like Mrs. Trollope in her novel *Jessie Phillips: a Tale of the New Poor Law* (1842—1843). This objection is vented by Thackeray especially in the argument mentioned above, in the following words:

"Let us remember, too, how loosely some of our sentimental writers have held to political creeds: — thus, we all know that the great philosopher, Mrs. Trollope, who, by means of a novel in shilling numbers, determined to write down the poor-laws, somewhere towards the end of her story came to a hitch in her argument, and fairly broke down with a confession that facts had come to light, subsequent to the commencement of her story, which had greatly altered her opinions regarding the law; and so the law was saved for that time. Thus, too, we know that the famous author of 'Coningsby', before he propounded the famous New England philosophy, had preached many other respectable doctrines, viz., the Peel doctrines, the Hume doctrines, &c.: all this Sir Robert Peel himself took the pains to explain to the House of Commons the other night, when the great philosopher alluded to called the right honourable baronet an organised hypocrite."[68]

It is worth noticing, however, that Thackeray does not apply this criterion in his reviews of Disraeli's novels, but only in a marginal comment in his *Book of Snobs,* where he pillories this writer especially for his propensity towards changing his political convictions according to his needs. Even here, however, he does not deny Disraeli's talent, knowledge of political problems and courage in the political struggle, and confesses that he likes "to see him in his public position — a quill-driver, like one of us", because "he makes our profession *respected*".[69] To a certain extent Thackeray applies this criterion in his review of Cooper's novel, where he shows the discrepancies between the views this novelist expressed in his travel-book *Gleanings in Europe: England* (1837) and in his novel *Ravensnest.* Whereas in his travel-book Cooper revealed himself as a hater of aristocratic privileges and "a thorough-going equality-man", the hero of his novel, the American squire Littlepage, and his uncle Ro are fine specimens of aristocrats with a patriarchal enthusiasm for their inherited landed property and a great pride in their origin and family traditions, which Cooper characterizes as "that very justifiable pride which belongs to *enduring respectability and social station*". Whereas in his travel-book Cooper clearly expressed his conviction of the superiority of the Americans over all the other nations, in his novel he makes his two main characters mouthpieces for his own critical assaults upon nearly all political and executive institutions of the land of which he and they "are so proud".[70]

As in his criticism of the novels discussed in the first half of this sub-chapter, however, the criteria so far discussed do not play a decisive role here, for he again evaluates the works of the "political" novelists by several other principles, which he also formulated in his theoretical argument. In this he categorically

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[67] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 75, 74.

[68] Ibid., pp. 71—72.

[69] *Works* IX, 334 (Disraeli is referred to under the fictitious name "Ben de Minories").

[70] For the quotations see *Contributions,* 168, 169, 172; for another similar comment on Cooper's travel-book see *Works* V, 403.

declared that writers of fiction should not officiate as social regenerators, deep philosophers and politicians, but should keep to their own ground —

"amusing by means of amiable fiction, and instructing by kindly satire, being careful to avoid the discussion of abstract principles, beyond those of the common ethical science which forms a branch of all poets and novelists' business — but, above all, eschewing questions of politics and political economy, as too deep, I will not say for your comprehension, but for your readers'; and never, from their nature, properly to be discussed in any, the most gilded, story-book."[71]

The proper theme of the novelist is in his opinion human life and society:

"Morals and manners we believe to be the novelist's best themes; and hence prefer romances which do not treat of algebra, religion, political economy, or other abstract science."[72]

As I have pointed out in the second chapter, Thackeray's statements in which he excludes political problems, including the "Condition-of-England question", from the sphere of the novelist's interest, seem at first sight very heretical, yet they are based upon well-substantiated reasons which are more clearly displayed in his concrete appreciation of individual authors and their works than in his theoretical pronouncement. What he really had in mind was that the novelists should not overload their novels with obtrusive "moral ballast", i.e. explicit instruction. This is not an entirely new criterion, but nowhere so consistently applied as in his *Morning Chronicle* reviews of novels *à la thèse.* From this point of view he found Disraeli's novels particularly objectionable. One of their grave demerits he considers to be the great number of digressions and commentaries in which the author inflicts his political beliefs upon his readers. *Sybil,* as he points out, is even more overloaded with such a ballast than is *Coningsby* and he ironically suggests a list of reference books to be sent by book-sellers to their country correspondents as "a key" to this novel, mentioning books on history, economy, agriculture, manufacture, banking and credit. After having read this necessary literature on the problems discussed in the novel, "the reader would be competent to judge this wonderful author", and "to form theories for himself, after mastering such a political encyclopaedia". Thackeray returns to this rebuke in the conclusion of the review where he points out that he would have been glad "to see a number of disquisitions, religious, retrospective, and prophetic, omitted. If a man professes to write a book 'in a light and unpretending form', as our author does, why introduce into it subjects both heavy and pretentious?"[73]

The other culprit in this respect is Cooper, of whose novel Thackeray writes:

"With regard to the book generally, we must observe that, although printed in the usual fashionable novel form, it is the least lively affair of the kind we have ever met with. Indeed, we do not see how it could be otherwise, the incidents being few and common-place, and the dialogue all turning upon political and social questions."[74]

Another criterion which Thackeray applies in the reviews we are dealing with, and which is familiar to us from all his criticism so far discussed in this work,

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[71] *Contributions,* 71.
[72] Ibid., pp. 77—78.
[73] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 79, 86.
[74] Ibid., p. 174.

is his postulate that the novelists should be familiar with their subject, preferably from their own personal experience. According to his view, contemporary "political" novelists "meddle with subjects of which their small studies have given them but a faint notion" and thence "treat complicated and delicate questions with apologues instead of argument". This is, as he concludes, "not only dishonest, but it is a bore". He applies this postulate especially to the authors who occupy themselves with one of the themes he excluded from the thematic range of fiction, the "Condition-of-England" (or Ireland) question (Disraeli and Lever). He praises Disraeli's aim of including within the framework of his depiction of contemporary society in *Sybil* not only the life of the highest social classes, but "the whole cycle of labour", the working class both in town and country, and gives ungrudging tribute to his depiction of the terrible colony of agricultural labourers, drawn "with honesty, truth, and hearty sympathy", in which he sees the best part of the novel. Particularly praiseworthy in his eyes is the novelist's endeavour to introduce the reader into the "mysterious" world of factory workers and miners. But in this case, as Thackeray clearly understands, Disraeli's depictions are not satisfactory, not because he has no sympathy with his subject, but because he lacks the necessary experience and familiarity with it. This is most strikingly revealed in his delineation of the characters of factory workers and miners, "with whose features the writer is not sufficiently familiar to be able to sketch them off with the ease that is requisite in the novelist".[75] Thackeray also suggests what should be the equipment of the writer who would venture upon this hitherto almost entirely neglected ground:

"A man who was really familiar with the mill and the mine might now, we should think, awaken great public attention as a novelist. It is a magnificent and untrodden field (for Mrs. Trollope's Factory story was wretched caricaturing, and Mr. Disraeli appears on the ground rather as an amateur): to describe it well, a man should be born to it. 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."[76]

For all his critical words addressed to Disraeli's depiction of the English working class, the reviewer is able to see its social significance: he is convinced that even if these descriptions are not entirely faithful to life, "they are written with genuine feeling", and they can do good by turning the readers' attention to this novel subject and by sending travellers from the higher classes to manufacturing and mining districts. He highly appreciates (and quotes) Disraeli's well-known revelation of the "two nations" existing side by side within English society and praises his attempt to rend asunder the veil dividing them:

"If this book can have made any members of the one nation think of the other, it is something to have done; to our idea Mr. Disraeli never said truer words than that the one nation does not know what the other does, and that it is time they should be acquainted."[77]

We may see, then, that although Thackeray was convinced that the novelist "ought to be a non-combatant", he is able to appreciate the help a writer of fiction can give to the cause of the oppressed by drawing the attention of the

[75] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 101, 80, 82—83.

[76] Ibid., p. 80; the reference to Mrs. Trollope's novel here concerns, as Ray points out, *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1839).

[77] *Contributions*, 81; for the preceding quotation see ibid., p. 80.

public to their miserable condition, even if he is not able to depict it entirely truthfully or offer any effectual remedy for its improvement.

The utter inadequacy of the "political" novelists to present any such remedy for the social evils they depict is indeed the object of Thackeray's most serious complaint. He formulates his views at some length in his review of Lever's novel, but applies them in all the reviews I am dealing with at present, as well as in that of one of Dickens's Christmas stories, with which I shall deal in the next sub-chapter. As we have seen, he explicitly rejected the remedies offered by Disraeli and Cooper and doubted the efficiency of that proposed by Lever. But he goes further, criticizing as well the way in which these writers embody their beliefs artistically. What he mainly objects to is the fact that instead of suggesting a practicable solution they offer moral fables, at the conclusion of which the good poor are rewarded and reconciled to the wicked rich, by them greatly reformed:

"Has any sentimental writer organised any feasible scheme for bettering the poor? Has any one of them, after weeping over poor Jack, and turning my lord to ridicule, devised anything for the substantial benefit of the former. At the conclusion of these tales, when the poor hero or heroine has been bullied enough — when poor Jack has been put off the murder he was meditating, or poor Polly has been rescued from the town on which she was about to go — there somehow arrives a misty reconciliation between the poor and the rich; a prophecy is uttered of better times for the one, and better manners in the other; presages are made of happy life, happy marriage and children, happy beef and pudding for all time to come; and the characters make their bow, grinning, in a group, as they do at the end of a drama when the curtain falls, and the blue fire blazes behind the scenes."[78]

This is not, in Thackeray's opinion, "the way in which men seriously engaged and interested in the awful question between rich and poor meet and grapple with it". Men like Cobden and Sir Robert Peel go into battle armed with facts and figures, and their conduct is based upon "cogent prudential reasons", for the contest in which they participate is a serious one on both sides:

"The novelist as it appears to us, ought to be a non-combatant. But if he persists in taking a side, don't let him go into the contest unarmed; let him do something more effectual than call the enemy names. The cause of either party in this great quarrel requires a stronger championship than this, and merits a more earnest warfare."[79]

From this point of view Thackeray criticizes Disraeli for attaching to his *Sybil* a conventional happy end, which, as he sarcastically remarks, is not a successful realization of Disraeli's purpose of connecting the two nations by means of the marriage of the heroine and Egremont, a marriage which was meant to "typify the union of the people and the nobles"; in fact Egremont is "a dandy aristocrat of not over good blood", whose "family is living upon the spoils of holy monasteries", while Sybil, though at first presented as "the daughter of a pattern Chartist", turns out "to be one of the old, old nobility of all, a baroness of forty thousand pounds a year".[80]

Nor is Lever in Thackeray's opinion a competent person to propose a practicable solution of the situation in Ireland, even if he is familiar with it, for this can be done only by experts:

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[78] Ibid., pp. 73—74.
[79] Ibid., p. 74.
[80] For the quotations see ibid., p. 82.

"The landlords may be wickedly to blame; the monsters get two per cent. for their land; they roll about in carriages, do nothing, and drink champagne; while the poor labourer remains at home and works and starves; — but we had better have some other opinion than that of the novelist to decide upon the dispute between them. He can exaggerate the indolence and luxury of the one, or the miseries and privations of the other, as his fancy leads him."[81]

Thackeray makes, however, some distinctions between this novelist and the other "sentimental" politicians to be found among the contemporary writers of fiction. In contradistinction to these (and to Mrs. Trollope and Soulié, whom Thackeray rebuked for a similar fault earlier), Lever does not content himself with making an outcry against the opposing party, but proposes a remedy, and a remedy, as we have seen, not wholly rejected by his reviewer — the return of the absentee landlords. Even the main idea of the novel is acceptable to Thackeray, namely that the rich have their duties towards the poor and should share their wealth with them, as they "are but the stewards of heaven's bounty to the poor". Yet the way in which this idea and Lever's general purpose are elaborated in the characters and the plot of the novel does not come up to Thackeray's standard. His criticism, however, is in my opinion only partly justifiable. Where he is in the right is in pointing to the main weakness of Lever's approach — his depiction of the hero of the story as a man incapable of retaining his original nobility of character in the absence of his landlord, either in prosperity, when he becomes idle and fond of drinking, or in adversity, when he shows himself capable of even committing a crime. As Thackeray rightly realizes, such a character seems to have been specially invented to suit the novelist's purpose, but it is not true to life, leading Lever, moreover, to erroneous generalization: he lays the whole guilt for the idleness and criminal propensities of the tenant upon the absent landlord, who should be present to teach him better, and makes the mere return of the latter the instrument of saving the former from murder, as well as of bringing about the ultimate reconciliation of all parties and a happy end for everybody. Where Thackeray is wrong, however, is in his suddenly transferring his criticism from the sphere of Lever's art to that of the actual reality depicted in the novel, condemning not only the novelist's but any verdict upon landlords as preposterous and attempting to prove that Lever's social facts were wrong. He reserves it as his right "to put in a word for the landlord, just for novelty's sake"[82], and when he does so, he disregards objective historical facts by making his defence of Lever's Irish landlord general for all landlords and capitalists, committing a further error by being unfair to Dickens whom he names in this connection:

"Here we have an Irish judge convicting the landlords of '*guilt*, in deriving all the appliances of his ease and enjoyment from those whose struggles to supply them were made under the pressure of disease and hunger'. Why not hunger? Without hunger there would be no work. We have just seen Mr. Lever's peasant, idling and drinking when he got his farm for nothing, and when he is to pay his landlord, the latter is straightway brought in *guilty*. What a verdict is this! All property may similarly be declared iniquitous, and all capital criminal. Let fundholders and manufacturers look out — Judge Jerrold will show them no favour, Chief Baron Boz has charged dead against them, and so we see it has been ruled in Ireland by the chief authority of the literary bench."[83]

[81] Ibid., p. 73.
[82] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 74, 76.
[83] Ibid., p. 76.

As in his reviews of other types of fiction, so too in those of novels *à la thèse* Thackeray devotes some attention to the novelists' craft, though much less than he does to their intention. Thus he gives unstinted praise to Disraeli's faithful depiction of the political tricks and practices of the English political parties and lays stress on the author's gift of humour and satire, which is often directed against things, persons, and practices deserving to be ridiculed. As Disraeli's best achievement in *Coningsby* Thackeray regards his satirical portraits of contemporary politicians, his "amusing bitter sketches of Tadpole, Rigby, Monmouth, and the rest, of which the likenesses were irresistible, and the malice tickled everybody", but he makes his praise rather too extravagant by seeing in Disraeli a direct successor of Swift in this style of delineation, surpassing all the other disciples of the latter in dexterity. So too is he over-lavish in his praise of the character of Rigby in his second review of the novel, pointing out that a "better portrait of a parasite has never been written since Juvenal's days" and expressing his belief "that even ages hence people will read this book as a singular picture of manners and society in our times". *Sybil,* on the other hand, as he points out, lacks the evidence of Disraeli's gift of malicious political caricature, which is the strong point of *Coningsby,* even if the rogueries of the "cabals of parliamentary parties" are satirized in it successfully and "the Chartists and their conspiracies, and their impracticable selfishness" are equally bitterly castigated. He approved, however, of Disraeli's satirical pictures from the life of aristocratic society and of some convincing subsidiary characters from this milieu, which contain "admirable observation and satire" and seem to him, and quite rightly, "to be most brilliantly hit off, more so than the plebeian likenesses, the men and women of the mines and the factories".[84] In his *Morning Chronicle* review of *Coningsby* Thackeray pays some attention, too, to Disraeli's style:

"He writes for a page or two in passages of the most admirable and pure English, thoughts finely poetical, fresh, startling, or ingenious; but one may be pretty sure of not being able to turn half-a-dozen leaves without coming upon something outrageous."[85]

In the conclusion of his review of Lever's novel Thackeray deals with the objection lodged against his criticism by a friend of his, who declared "that the story [had] nothing to do with politics; that no critic [had] a right to judge it in a political sense; and that it [was] to be tested by its descriptive, its humorous, its pathetic, or romantic merits". Thackeray preserves his doubts as to the validity of this statement, but, to forestall possible objections of this sort on the part of the readers or the author himself, he adds a very brief evaluation of the merits and demerits of the novel, starting with the statement that "a great deal may be said in praise, and a little in blame of Mr. Lever's new story".[86] He finds some serious blemishes in Lever's style, which he characterizes as "exceedingly careless", and blames the author for his outrageous treatment of grammar:

"A regard for that mother whom the critic and the novelist ought to revere equally, the venerable English grammar, binds us to protest against this careless treatment of her."[87]

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[84] For the quotations see ibid., p. 78, *Works* VI, 508, *Contributions,* 82, 83, 82.
[85] *Contributions,* 41.
[86] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 76—77.

His praise is summed up in the last paragraph of the review:

"In regard of the merits, the narrative has the animated, rapid, easy style which is the charm of the author's writing, the kindly and affectionate humour (which appears in this volume to greater advantage, because it is not *over laughed* by the boisterous jocularity which we find in some of his other works), and the gay and brilliant manner of depicting figure and landscape, which distinguishes Mr. Lever's dexterous and facile hand. Parts of the tale are told with exceeding pathos and sweetness; and he who begins must needs go through it, with interest and with unabated pleasure."[88]

As I have pointed out above, in this second period of his critical campaign against the novel *à la thèse,* Thackeray also makes use of those critical weapons which had lain unexploited in his critical armory in the first — parody and burlesque. He did so for the first time in his parodistic portrait of the Jewish banker Sidonia from *Coningsby* in the already discussed parody of Disraeli's novel in *Novels by Eminent Hands.* This portrait is Thackeray's most damaging attack both upon the novelist's personality and political doctrine, but especially upon the latter. Sidonia is to a great extent Disraeli's autobiographical portrait, as Thackeray rightly pointed out in both his reviews of the novel, especially in that published in the *Pictorial Times:*

"He paints his own portrait in this book in the most splendid fashion: it is the queerest in the whole queer gallery of likenesses; he appears as the greatest philosopher, the greatest poet, the greatest horseman, the greatest statesman, the greatest *roué* in the world; with all the qualities of Pitt and Byron, and Burke, and the great Mr. Widdicomb of Batty's Amphitheatre. Perhaps one is reminded of the last-named famous individual more than of any other" (*Works* VI, 507).

At the same time, however, Sidonia is the main protagonist of Disraeli's ideology, a very seriously meant embodiment of the novelist's political, social and aesthetic ideals, or, as Merritt has it, "Disraeli's idealized symbol of the alienated artistic sensibility and of the unjustly judged Jew". Thackeray parodies this character in the figure of the Jewish old-clothes merchant Raphael Mendoza, whom he endows with all the positive traits characteristic of Sidonia, exaggerated and caricatured into the grotesque, with the purpose of tearing down the romantic trappings enveloping this figure as Disraeli depicted him. The similarity and contrast between the two personages are undeniable. Both men are tremendously rich and belong to the rank of the great capitalist magnates who dictate the policy of whole states, but Thackeray's Mendoza is forced, as Merritt points out, "to masquerade as a Jewish merchant to avoid the inevitable censure of Christians jealous of his wealth". Mendoza walks through the streets of London in shabby clothes and does his business in a dirty small shop, but behind it he has a splendid apartment (one of many others) from which he conducts the policy of the whole world. Both Sidonia and Mendoza are altruistic and save tottering governments with loans from their enormous wealth, both are prominent philosophers and are endowed, moreover, with some other positive traits characteristic of the heroes of romances (both possess personal courage, Sidonia is a splendid rider and Mendoza an oarsman). Thackeray in his parody of Sidonia goes into the smallest details — for instance the Arabian horse which Sidonia received from the Egyptian Pasha figures in the parody as a *caïque*

[87] Ibid., p. 77.
[88] Ibid.

presented to Mendoza by the Turkish Sultan. Sidonia talks to Coningsby about his intimate intercourse with the royal courts in Russia and Spain and about his encounters with the people of his faith and race in all significant places — Mendoza is visited by the Czar's messenger, the ambassador from Spain, Louis Philippe himself and other prominent personalities who fawn upon the merchant and are all of Jewish confession. As follows from this brief outline, in the character of Mendoza Thackeray successfully derides the philosophical and political ideas embodied in the original created by Disraeli. It is first and foremost this novelist's militant Judaism, manifested in the exaggerated eulogies he bestows upon the genius of the Jewish nation and his tendencies to ascribe Jewish origin to all the great historical personalities. Thackeray caricatures this part of Disraeli's doctrine by ascribing a Jewish origin not only to Louis Philippe, mentioned above, but even to the Pope. Thackeray's parody hits its target with deadly precision and is one of the best to be found in the whole *Punch* series. As Merritt has shown, he "made Disraeli's style and his noble ethnic hero utterly ridiculous, and ... Disraeli may have well nursed a grudge against him for having done so".[89] The range of Thackeray's satirical weapons is not, however, limited exclusively to purely literary parody, but is extended to the social life behind it. As Ivasheva has pointed out, Thackeray divests even Mendoza's wealth itself of its romantic glamour by revealing that he had acquired it by extorting shillings and pennies from the poor.[90]

Thackeray's last sustained attack upon the novel *à la thèse* is represented by his burlesque *A Plan for a Prize Novel,* written in the form of an open letter "from the eminent Dramatist BROWN to the eminent Novelist SNOOKS", published in *Punch* on 22 February, 1851 and attached to his *Novels by Eminent Hands.* Through the mouth of his spokesman Brown, Thackeray proposes to the popular novelist Snooks how to conform in his next work to the current literary fashion of the novel with a purpose and at the same time "be rewarded at a still higher figure", and suggests to him, as I have mentioned before, to write an advertisement novel, showing him at the same time how to do it. In his prefatory words we find the following categorical protest against fiction written with a purpose:

"Unless he writes with a purpose, you know, a novelist in our days is good for nothing. This one writes with a Socialist purpose: that with a Conservative purpose: this author or authoress with the most delicate skill insinuates Catholicism into you, and you find yourself all but a Papist in the third volume: another doctors you with Low Church remedies to work inwardly upon you, and which you swallow down unsuspiciously, as children do calomel in jelly. Fiction advocates all sorts of truths and causes — doesn't the delightful bard of the Minories find Moses in everything?" (*Works* VIII, 175).

As his burlesque plan of an advertisement novel clearly shows, however, even in this case Thackeray's protest is not in fact addressed to the social or political commitment of literature as such, but to those second-rate novelists who were unable to clothe their purpose in adequate artistic form.

Before coming to the final conclusion I should at least briefly point out that after publishing his burlesque with the above-quoted satirical remark addressed to Disraeli, Thackeray changed his opinion of this author's political novels, as

[89] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 86—87.
[90] See op. cit., p. 126.

he did that of Disraeli's Silver-Fork productions. In his speech at the Royal Literary Fund Dinner of May 1852, in which he praised Disraeli's early fashionable novels, he also found warm words of praise for the trilogy *Coningsby, Sybil* and *Tancred,* in which Disraeli "explained to a breathless and listening world the great Caucasian mystery".[91]

Since this is the last time I am to be concerned with Thackeray's criticism of Bulwer as novelist, I should also duly emphasize that even his attitude to this writer, whom he persecuted so relentlessly, began to change at the end of the 1840s. Although even in the following decade we find in his letters a few critical remarks addressed to Bulwer's creative method,[92] we also find comments in which he characterizes his former criticism of this writer as too "savage", expresses his regret at having pelted "at that poor old Bulwer & others" and apologizes for his attacks on account of "the days of hot youth" in which they were written.[93] In his speech of May 16, 1849, at the Royal Literary Fund Dinner, he pointed out how some literary men greatly advanced themselves by their labour, mentioning also Bulwer, though not referring to him by name, as the author of *Letters to John Bull, Esq.,* which had gone through eight editions up to that date.[94] On 21 June 1853 he wrote a letter directly to Bulwer, drawing attention to his. Thackeray's, now public apology for the former critical assaults which had been published in the preface to the 1852 American edition of *Mr. Brown's Letters* and some earlier works of his. In this preface he apologizes for the American editor's having reprinted some of his early "careless papers" which he would never have reprinted himself and which he would like to forget. He is not so much concerned about his *Novels by Eminent Hands,* which he even in these years characterizes as "not malicious, ... nor unamusing",[95] but first and foremost about the pamphlet "Mr. Yellowplush's Ajew" and his review of Bulwer's drama *The Sea-Captain* (to be yet discussed) which he is very sorry to see reproduced. He asks pardon of Bulwer "for a lampoon, which I know he himself has forgiven, and which I wish I could recall", and proceeds:

> "I had never seen that eminent writer but once in public when this satire was penned, and wonder at the recklessness of the young man who could fancy such personality was harmless jocularity, and never calculate that it might give pain. The best experiences of my life have been gained since that time of youth and gaiety and careless laughter. I allude to them, perhaps, because I would not have any kind and friendly American reader judge of me by the wild performances of early years" (*Works* X, 605).

On his first reading *My Novel,* Thackeray was not very enthusiastic, characterizing it as "very dexterously brewed & bottled small beer", but soon afterwards he evaluated it positively as "fresher & richer" than any of Bulwer's preceding works (in which he was of course not mistaken), placing this novelist, as far as the fecundity of his imagination is concerned, even above Dickens (in which he was certainly quite wrong).[96] In the same year he even used one of Bulwer's artistic procedures as his model: *The Caxtons,* which he much admired,

[91] Melville, op. cit., II, 79.
[92] See *Letters* III, 12, 13.
[93] For the quotations see *Letters* II, 553–554.
[94] See Melville, op. cit., II, 74.
[95] For the quotations see *Works* X, 605, 604.
[96] For the quotations see *Letters* III, 248, 288; see also ibid., pp. 253, 407, 409.

inspired him to use a fictitious narrator in *The Newcomes.*[97] In his last years he was much attracted by Bulwer's *Strange Story* which was, along with Collins's *Woman in White,* his avowed source of inspiration when he wrote his late burlesque *The Notch on the Axe — a Story à la Mode* (*The Cornhill Magazine,* April—June 1862),[98] meant as a parody of the sensational novels which had become so popular in the 1850s, but essentially differing from his earlier works of this kind in being written without a polemical purpose and in a mild and kind-hearted tone.

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In attempting to assess Thackeray's criticism of novels *à la thèse* as a whole, I should in the first place point out that from his concrete analysis of individual works of this type his own position is more obvious than it is from his theoretical argument. There can be no doubt that he acutely felt the necessity that contemporary social and political life should find its reflection in literature: at that time he was attaining the heights of the novelist's art himself and in *Vanity Fair* presented a remarkable embodiment of his own outlook upon the place of political and social manners in fiction. He could not help protesting, however, whenever he met this broad theme handled as the writers discussed in this sub-chapter treated it, he could not help rebelling whenever he saw the novel as a literary form maltreated at the hands of the novelists who were unable to find such media for expressing their purpose as would be aesthetically acceptable.

His criticism is not motivated by personal prejudice or spite, for he metes out the same justice to his personal friends as he does to writers whom he either did not know in person at all or at least not intimately. I do think therefore that Forsythe is almost entirely in the wrong when he maintains that Thackeray's criticism of Disraeli was "founded upon Thackeray's anti-Semitic prejudice, personal dislike, intellectual dissimilarity, political differences, and divergent aims in letters, heightened by a degree of jealousy on Thackeray's part of the literary, social and threatening political success of the vivid son of the amiable old Jewish antiquary." In the opinion of this scholar, Thackeray's "allusions to Disraeli were frequently brutal, often unjust, and nearly always offensive", they "ridiculed his race, parodied his style, and disposed of him in the easiest of all ways — by sweepingly pronouncing him a 'humbug' " — and were not concerned with Disraeli's ideas. It is only in pointing to Thackeray's anti-Semitic prejudice that Forsythe is in the right, while he may be excused for his final rebuke, since he of course could not have read Thackeray's *Morning Chronicle* reviews of *Coningsby* and *Sybil* which were not identified until recently. Otherwise his conclusions are in contradiction to the available material (even he admits, however, that Thackeray's *Punch* parody is "brilliantly done", though it is in his opinion in some parts "sadly and cruelly personal").[99] Nor is Thackeray's criticism of Bulwer personally prejudiced, but with this I shall deal in more detail later.

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[97] See *Letters* II, 298; for his admiration of *The Caxtons* see Melville, op. cit., I, 173.
[98] See *Works* XVII, 569; for his admiration of Collins's novel see also ibid., p. 594.
[99] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 194, 195.

Thackeray of course does in my opinion sometimes err, especially in his theoretical argument: he is unjust to Dickens, for example, when he places him on the same level as Disraeli, Lever and Jerrold and when he protests against his attacks on the rich, the artistic value of which is surely essentially different from that of similar critical depictions by Lever and Jerrold and surpasses even Disraeli. A fundamental mistake, from my point of view, is Thackeray's assertion that the novelist should be a non-combatant, an uncommitted and neutral observer of social struggles. In this respect he commits an injustice towards his own works in which, especially in his great novels, he does very clearly express, through the medium of his depictions and images, his own very definite moral, social and even political standpoint. His arguments as a whole, however, and especially his concrete evaluations of "political" novelists, contain much truth which remains valid up to the present day. Their main merit is that they so remarkably display his firm and unchanging insistence upon realism in literature, which in this case, and notably in the second period, penetrates far more deeply below the superficial aspects of the novelist's craft than it ever did before. His criticism itself is partly based on criteria founded upon extra-aesthetic considerations, but these do not play a decisive role in his final judgments, for they always appear in close combination with the aesthetic, which are in this case undoubtedly the determining factor. Thackeray does not reject the novel *à la thèse* predominantly on moral grounds (in the second period he does not even apply the moral criterion at all) or on social and political, but on aesthetic grounds, as a fashionable mode exploiting the topical social and political problems mostly for the sake of their popularity and depicting them in a way which the great novelist rightly felt to be unacceptable for the novel.

VI. "CHRISTMAS" LITERATURE

Another fashionable mode to which Thackeray paid much attention especially as literary, but also as art critic, was the literature produced in great quantities in England at Christmas time, the explicit purpose of which was to amuse the reader and keep him in a good temper during this festive period, and which became enormously popular especially after Dickens's success in the *genre*, being cultivated by a great number of second-rate imitators. Thackeray began his criticism of this type of literature with his review of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (in the summary review "A Box of Novels", *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844), continued in the review of *The Cricket on the Hearth* (*The Morning Chronicle*, December 24, 1845) and in the following two years reviewed a fairly large number of other publications of this sort, fairy-tale books and collections of poems.[1] Even his earlier reviews of illustrated annuals, which were the most

[1] Besides his three reviews of Dickens's stories (the third of which is mentioned in the text after this note) Thackeray published the following reviews: "Christmas Books — No. 2", *The Morning Chronicle*, December 26, 1845 (a review of Douglas Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* and of the English translation of the fairy tales by the brothers Grimm, *The Fairy Ring*, by John Edward Taylor); "Christmas Books — No. 3", *The Morning Chronicle*, December 31, 1845 (a review of *The Comic Blackstone* by Gilbert Abbott A Beckett and *The Snow Storm, a Tale of Christmas* by Mrs. Gore); "About a Christmas Book", *Fraser's Magazine*, December 1845 (a review of *Poems and Pictures; a Collection of Ballads, Songs, and other Poems, Ancient and Modern, including both Originals and Selections*); "On Some Illustrated Children's Books", *Fraser's Magazine*, April 1846 (a review of *Felix Summerly's*

popular Christmas publications before Dickens occupied the field, might be included in his criticism of this sort of literature, if he were not concerned more with their pictorial than literary aspect. His last summary review devoted to Christmas literature, "A Grumble about the Christmas Books" (*Fraser's Magazine*, January 1847), contains his last review of Dickens's Christmas stories, that of *The Battle of Life*.

Thackeray's first reaction to the new literary fashion was very positive, for his review of *A Christmas Carol* is an almost pure eulogy. In his prefatory words he bestows warm praise upon Dickens's preceding works (I shall return to this in the next chapter) and then gives ungrudging tribute to his new story. The critic obviously realizes that it is not an absolutely perfect work of art, but refuses to state his objections, for the story has already been reviewed by the public (with whose verdict he agrees) and no critic can circumvent its triumphant success:

> "I do not mean that the *Christmas Carol* is quite as brilliant or self-evident as the sun at noonday: but it is so spread over England by this time that no sceptic, no *Fraser's Magazine*. — no, not even the godlike and ancient *Quarterly* itself (venerable, Saturnian, big-wigged dynasty!), could review it down" (*Works* VI, 414).

He even goes so far as to defend Dickens against the criticism of bad taste, lack of education, sudden transitions from "low humours" to "the sublime" and his "deplorable propensity to write blank verse", which may be expected from such magazines as the *Quarterly Review*. Of all these possible rebukes he finds only the last substantiated and protests, "with the classics, against the use of blank verse in prose", adding another reservation of his own, or at least a doubt, as to whether the allegory of Scrooge's Christmas conversion "is a very complete one" (not specifying, however, what exactly he had in mind). But here, as he says, all objections stop, for who "can listen to objections regarding such a book as this?"[2] He then warmly appreciates the beneficial influence the story cannot fail to exercise upon the stony hearts of misanthropes and upon the whole reading public, among whom it cannot but sow good will and love. Of the characters in the story it is especially Tiny Tim who is singled out for affectionate comment:

> "There is not a reader in England but that little creature will be a bond of union between the author and him; and he will say of Charles Dickens, as the woman just now, 'GOD BLESS HIM!' What a feeling is this for a writer to be able to inspire, and what a reward to reap!" (*Works* VI, 416.)

Home Treasury: Gammer Gurton's Story-books and *Stories for the Season: The Good-natured Bear*); "A Grumble about the Christmas Books", *Fraser's Magazine*, January 1847 (a review of *A Christmas in the Seventeenth Century*, by Mrs. Percy Sinnett, *New Year's Day; a Winter's Tale*, by Mrs. Gore, *January Eve; a Tale of the Times*, by G. Soane, *The Good Genius that Turned Everything into Gold; or, the Queen Bee and the Magic Dress. A Christmas Fairy Tale*, by the Brothers Mayhew, *The Yule Log, for Everybody's Christmas Hearth*, by the Author of *The Chronicles of the Bastille* [i.e. A. Chamerovzow], *Fisher's Drawing-room Scrap-book*, by the Hon. Mrs. Norton, *Wonderful Stories for Children*, by Hans Christian Andersen, trans. by Mary Howitt, *The Battle of Life; a Love Story*, by Charles Dickens, *Mrs. Perkins's Ball*, by M. A. Titmarsh).

[2] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 415.

His general evaluation of the story is summed up in the following statement, which has become classic:

"It seems to me a national benefit, and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness" (*Works* VI, 415).

As we may see, in his review Thackeray applies almost exclusively extra-aesthetic criteria, evaluating in particular Dickens's "Christmas message", the contradictory political programme of social criticism and class compromise with which Dickens was so conspicuous in the period of Chartism, and finding it — unlike other progressive critics of his time, notably Belinski[3] — highly commendable. It is worth noticing, however, that his attitude is surprisingly near to that of the Chartists themselves, at least to their literary critics. The reviewer who assessed the story in the *Northern Star* on 21 December 1844 warmly praised it as a work "which, could it be read by all — would that it were in the hands of all — would do more to promote 'peace on earth, and good will to men', than all the sermons and homilies ever uttered or penned", and appreciated its moral in the following words:

"The moral of the book, that *any Christian Spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness*, is a gem of priceless worth. Were these words written on the hearts of all men; was their spirit felt and acted up to; what an Elysium might this earth be, instead of the 'vale of tears' which so many find it."[4]

Whereas in his review of *A Christmas Carol* Thackeray almost entirely avoids applying purely aesthetic criteria to Dickens's story (not, however, because of lack of objections to the author's art, as we have seen), he begins to do so in his very next review, that of *The Cricket on the Hearth*. In this piece of his criticism he for the first time begins to sound an alarm against some aspects of Dickens's creative approach (though finding excuses for them and writing in a very conciliatory tone), and also to express his views upon "Christmas" literature in general. The main target of his criticism is, as Ivasheva also points out,[5] the false idyllism of Dickens's story, its deliberate Christmas idealization. In contradistinction to the case of *A Christmas Carol*, the great popularity of *The Cricket on the Hearth* aroused in Thackeray a feeling of urgent responsibility to the public, and he considers it to be his duty as a critic to ask whether it is really "a good book which so excites you and all the public with emotion" (in the case of *A Christmas Carol* he had no such doubts, as we have seen, and was certainly in the right, for Dickens's first story is undoubtedly a better work of art than the second). His answer is not positive: though he does not say it in so many words, the story is in his opinion not a good work of art, but a "good *Christmas* book, illuminated with extra gas, crammed with extra bonbons, French plums and sweetnesses". In the first place, and to his great regret, the characters of this story cannot be classed among Dickens's best creations — they do not seem actual persons, "we don't *believe* in them":[6]

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[3] For Belinski's views see *Otechestvenniye zapiski*, 1845, vol. XXXVIII, p. 37.
[4] *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*, p. 306.
[5] See op. cit., p. 60.
[6] For the quotations see *Contributions*, 88, 87, 95.

"To our fancy, the dialogue and characters of the 'Cricket on the Hearth' are no more like nature than the talk of Tityrus and Meliboeus is like the real talk of Bumpkin and Hodge over a stile, or than Florian's pastoral *petits maîtres*, in red heels and powder, are like French peasants, with wooden shoes and a pitchfork, or than Pierrot and Carlotta in a ballet, smiling charmingly, jumping and dancing astonishingly, amidst wreaths of calico roses and fragrant pasteboard bouquets, are like a real spotless nymph, fresh from Ida, and a young demigod lately descended from Olympus. This story is no more a real story than Peerybingle is a real name. It is like one — made, as the calico-roses before-mentioned, much redder and bigger than the common plant. The 'Cricket on the Hearth' has the effect of a beautiful theatrical piece: It interests you as such — charms you with its grace, picturesqueness, and variety — tickles you with its admirable grotesque; but you cannot help seeing that Carlotta is not a goddess (dancing as she does divinely), and that that is rouge, not blushes, on her cheeks."[7]

In his opinion the author's aim was to startle the reader and "ply him with brisk sentences, rapid conceits, dazzling pictures, adroit interchanges of pathos and extravaganza", and he proves this by quoting the introduction of the story ("Kettle began it!") and pointing out that the whole scene is more like a "brilliant ballet-pantomime" than "like nature", is distorted into caricature, the main causes for this deviation from nature being Dickens's propensity to animate inanimate objects and the "determined jocularity" with which he is writing. Even if Thackeray is not inclined to retreat from the principles of realistic aesthetics in matters of essential importance (as we have already seen from the analysis of Dickens's characters), he is willing to make some concessions in Dickens's case. He ranks him among those providers who produce "extra jovialities in compliment to the season" (among whom he counts meat and sweet providers, theatres and booksellers) and calls him the "chief literary master of the ceremonies for Christmas", who best understands the "kindness and joviality and withal the pathos of the season" and who wrote his story with the sole aim in mind of cheering and amusing his readers. Thus he created a work with a special purpose, pervaded by the festive and hilarious atmosphere of the season, "a Christmas frolic", and the critic reconciles himself to looking at it from this Christmas point of view. If the book is viewed from this angle, writes Thackeray, we may accept, as we do in fairy tales and Christmas pantomimes, all the impossibilities, absurdities and surprise effects of the plot, and find them "pleasant, almost credible", and may regard the pretty and pleasant, but unnatural characters as "a sort of half-recognised realities", closely akin to the charming inhabitants of fairy land, to Mother Bunch's princesses, "dwarfs and ogres, singing trees, and conversational animals":[8]

"As a Christmas pageant which you witness in the armchair — your private box by the fireside — the piece is excellent, incomparably brilliant and dexterous. It opens with broad pantomime, but the interest deepens as it proceeds. The little rural scenery is delightfully painted. Each pretty, pleasant, impossible character has his *entrée* and his *pas*. The music is gay or plaintive, always fresh and agreeable. The piece ends with a grand *pas d'ensemble*, where the whole *dramatis personae* figure high and low, toe and heel, to a full orchestral crash, and a brilliant illumination of blue and pink fire."[9]

As we may see, in this review Thackeray for the first time begins to treat "Christmas" literature as a special literary *genre* based upon specific aesthetic

[7] Ibid., p. 88.
[8] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 88–89, 90, 87, 91.
[9] Ibid., p. 91.

principles, identical with those valid in a fairy tale or pantomime, but essentially different from those which lie at the basis of the novel, as he himself conceived it. He does realize, however, that a story which is not pure fairy tale, in which there appear not fairies and witches but characters taken from actual life, should in fact follow the same "rules" as those valid for the novel — realistic depiction of life should not be combined with fairy-tale fantasy. He therefore cannot help regretting that such a subtle painter of "nature" as Dickens, who on occasions not so festive as Christmas depicts reality with such an acute perception and so thoughtfully and delicately, nevertheless, in his *Cricket on the Hearth,* paints with such a coarse brush. As Thackeray saw it, Dickens's fantastic creations turn literature away from its true role of faithfully depicting reality:

"If we think that nature and quiet are still better, it is because Mr. Dickens, with other great English humorists have used us to them, O, for the artist's early and simple manner!"[10]

On the other hand he gladly gives ungrudging tribute to such brilliant examples of Dickens's genius as the story does contain, to "those touches of nature for which Mr. Dickens's hand is unrivalled". These he finds especially in the characters of Mrs. Fielding and Miss Slowboy, "who having been once introduced to the reader can never be forgotten by him, and remain to be admired and laughed at for ever".[11]

The characters of Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* seemed to have disturbed Thackeray a great deal, for he returned to them in his review of Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures,* as we shall see, as well as in two other later reviews. In his review "On Some Illustrated Children's Books" he takes to task the character of the toy-maker Tackleton as "a great and painful blot upon that otherwise charming performance" and as an impossible figure, untruthful to life. No toy-maker could ever be, as he explains in a perfectly logical, though perhaps a somewhat idealistic argument, "a child-hater by nature", for, if nothing else, he could not have succeeded in his trade — the "practice of it would be enough to break that black heart of his outright".[12] He returns to the characters of this story for the last time in his review of *The Battle of Life,* written at the close of his critical campaign against "Christmas" literature, when, as we shall see, he had read and reviewed several of its specimens produced by Dickens's imitators, and when he was more willing than in his earlier *Morning Chronicle* review to forgive the initiator of this literary fashion for his deviations from nature. By that time he had realized that Dickens stood incomparably higher than his followers, for his works bore the "sacred press mark" of Lowe for mankind, by which the novelist had earned his highest place among his English contemporaries, as well as among the greatest literary geniuses of world literature. His followers have taken his method from him, but cannot produce his wonderful "music":

"That is why we lose patience or affect to have no respect for minor performers. Numbers of unknown fiddlers, hearing of the success of Mr. Dickens's opera, rush forward, fiddle in hand, of the very same shape by the very same maker. 'Come and hear *our* partition', they say; 'see how we have set the Barber to music, and what tunes *we* make Papageno sing!'

[10] Ibid.; see also p. 90.
[11] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 91—92.
[12] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 567.

Away with your miserable fiddlesticks, misguided people! *You* play after such a master! You take a bad moment. We may have heard some indifferent music from this composer, and some very weak and bad music from him too; but we have had, likewise, strains so delightful and noble, specimens of skill so unapproachable by others, that we protest against all followers" (*Works* VI, 608—609).

On the characters of *The Cricket on the Hearth* he wrote, referring to his own earlier criticism:

"Last year the critics were specially outraged by the famous clock-and-kettle overture of the Christmas piece. 'Is this truth, is this nature?' cries the Cynic, growling from his tub. You might say, Is it the multiplication table, or is it the *pons asinorum?* It is not intended to be true or natural, as I hold; it is intended to be a brisk, dashing, startling caricature. The poet does not want you to believe him, he wants to provoke your mirth and wonder. He is appealing, not to your reason and feelings as in a prose narrative, but to your fancy and feelings. He peoples the familiar hearth with sprites, and the church-tower with goblins: all the commonest objects swarm with preternatural life. The haymaker has convulsions, the warming-pan is vivified, the chairs are ambulatory, and the poker writhes with life. In the midst of these wonders goes on a little, common, kind-hearted, tender, everyday story of poverty averted, true hearts rewarded, the poor loving one another, a tyrant grotesquely punished. It is not much. But in these performances the music is everything. The *Zauberflöte* or the *Barbiere* are not like life; *mais* ——!" (*Works* VI, 608).

In Thackeray's opinion such a writer, whose humanity "has mastered the sympathy of almost all", "in whom all the world is putting faith — who has the ear of all England" and who has done so much for the poor, is surely not "to be railed at by his literary brethren", and he himself does not intend to do so and in fact does not. He expresses his conviction that Dickens's aim in his Christmas stories was not "to produce a prose tale of mingled fun and sadness, and a close imitation of life, but a prose poem, designed to awaken emotions tender, mirthful, pastoral, wonderful". His characters are therefore "modified — prettified, so to speak":[13]

"The action of the piece you see clearly enough, but the actors speak and move to measure and music. The drolls are more violently funny; the serious heroes and heroines more gracefully and faultlessly beautiful. Such figures are never seen among real country people. No more are Tityrus and Meliboeus like, or Hermann and Dorothea like, or Taglioni, bounding through air in gauze, like a Scotch peasant girl. *Tityre tu patule,* is a ballet in hexameters; the *Sylphide,* a poem performed on the toes; these charming little books of Mr. Dickens's are chorals for Christmas executed in prose" (*Works* VI, 608).

Whereas Thackeray's assessment of the basic qualities of Dickens's art is just, his evaluation of the social function of Dickens's Christmas stories is, from my point of view, not so clear-sighted. It is true that in the prefatory words to his review he quite correctly assesses the subjective meaning Dickens himself embodied in his "Christmas message", but, as in his review of *A Christmas Carol*, he positively evaluates, too, what was in Dickens's stories objectively not at all progressive: he ranks Dickens (with Andersen) among the "sweet Christian messengers of peace and goodwill" and praises him for having done very much "to make the poor known to the rich, and reconcile each to the other".[14] In contradistinction to the progressive critics of his time and later, who perfectly

[13] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 607—608. That Thackeray did not intend to be too severe in his review of *The Battle of Life* is also proved by his stating, in a letter of his, that he loved "Pickwick and Crummles too well to abuse this great man" (*Letters* II, 262).

[14] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 607.

realized this weak point of Dickens's stories, he also failed to see what they took special notice of, namely that the lower artistic value of *The Cricket on the Hearth* and of all the following Christmas stories is rooted in Dickens's gradual retreat from social problematics.[15]

In his reviews of the Christmas stories produced by Dickens's imitators, Thackeray assumes a very interesting attitude: he is determined to treat these productions as a special literary *genre* which obeys and should obey different laws than the novel, but his patience is tried so much that he does not always find it easy to remember his determination. As he sees it, the Christmas story should in the first place obey different "rules" than does the novel in the matter of incident — it must have a happy end, the good characters must be rewarded and the evil punished. In the second place, it should not imitate nature — it should comfort the reader, and not make him miserable "by being called upon to sympathize with the sickness, the premature demise, or otherwise undeserved misfortune, of certain honest personages with whose adventures we are made acquainted"[16] — the authors of Christmas stories should not present too gloomy pictures of human misery and poverty. In the third place (but this is a "rule" he also applies to the novel), the authors of this type of literature should not attempt to present any explicit moral instruction. He sums up all these basic "rules" (though he does not use this word) in his review of Mrs. Gore's story *New Year's Day*, in which he rebukes the authoress for not providing the necessary happy end and for the consequent lachrymose sentimentality of her story:

"And as in pantomimes, so I say in Christmas stories, those fireside Christmas pantomimes, which are no more natural than *Mother Goose* or *Harlequin Gulliver*. Kill your people off as much as you like, but always bring 'em to life again. Belabour your villains as you please. As they are more hideous than mortals, punish them more severely than mortals can bear. But they must always amend, and you must always be reconciled to them in the last scene, when the spangled fairy comes out of the revolving star, and uttering the music octosyllabic incantations of reconcilement, vanishes into an elysium of blue fire. Sweet, kindly eight-syllabled incantations, pleasant fantastic fairy follies, charming mystery, wherein the soul is plunged, as the gentle curtain descends, and covers those scenes of beloved and absurd glory! Do you suppose the people who invented such were fools, and wanted to imitate great blundering realities to inculcate great, stupid, moral apophthegms? Anybody can do that — anybody can say that 'Evil communications corrupt good manners', or that 'Procrastination is the thief of time', or what not: but a poet does not take his inspirations from the copybook or his pictures from the police-office. Is there any moralizing in *Titania, Ariosto,* or *Undine*?" (*Works* VI, 590).

This reflection is a sort of prelude to his review of perhaps the only Christmas book that fulfils all his expectations and does not violate any of the "rules" — George Soane's *January Eve; a Tale of the Times.* This book has in his opinion great merits, which he sums up with much humour as follows:

"First, it is improbable; secondly, it is pretty and graceful; thirdly, it has many pleasant pastoral descriptions and kindly ballet groups and dances; fourthly, the criminals are reformed, the dead come to life again, and the devil is not the devil — to which, by the way, I take objection" (*Works* VI, 590).

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[15] For the views of the Chartist reviewers, of Belinski, Nekrasov, Lenin and Stanislavski see *Istoriya angliyskoy literaturi,* Tom II, Vipusk vtoroy, Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, Moskva, 1955, pp. 217–218.

[16] *Works* VI, 588–589.

He then sums up the conventional plot of this idyllic story, quotes a likewise idyllic and sentimental episode, the celebration of the blind old schoolmaster's birthday, and adds:

"This is as it should be: your proper, pleasant, rouged, grinning, junketing, pantomimic business. It is not intended to be natural — only pretty and kind-hearted — pleasing to the eye — cheerfully ticklesome to the senses — mildly festive, benevolent, and brisk" (*Works* VI, 593).

Also the end of the story comes up to his expectations:

"The only person who dies is old Elias Rodwell, the schoolmaster; but then he is so old, so very old, and his hair so very cottony, that his death is rather a pleasure than otherwise; and you fancy his life was only a sort of make-believe. And so everybody is happy, and the light-blue entertainment of Mr. Soane [the book had a sky-blue cover — *LP*] closes. It is a good, cheap, easy, and profitable Christmas pastime" (*Works* VI, 594).

In some cases, however, the reviewer's patience is tried too much. Thus in his review of another Christmas story by Mrs. Gore, *The Snow Storm*, he starts making sarcastic comments upon the authoress's depiction of life in the country as a happy idyll of the rustics fondly attached to their aristocratic masters, and only then recollects that it is a Christmas story, and adds:

"They are happy on the stage, where they grin in *tableaux* before the footlights, and scatter calico garlands before their lord, who pledges them in a bumper of sparkling pasteboard, and, happy in the Christmas-books that are constructed upon the theatrical model: let this pass as one of the jokes of Christmas — to live at the very least until Twelfth-day."[17]

In summing up the conventional plot of Chamerovzow's tale *The Yule Log* Thackeray's tolerance has obviously been tried to its utmost limits and he gives free vent to the indignation of a realist forced to read this sort of literature:

"Isn't this a novelty? Isn't this a piece of ingenuity? Take your rustic, your fairies, your nightmare, finish off with a plum-pudding and a dance under the holly-bush, and a benign invocation to Christmas, kind hearts, and what not. Are we to have this sort of business for ever? *Mon Dieu!* will people never get tired of reading what they know, and authors weary of inventing what everybody has been going on inventing for ages past?" (*Works* VI, 600).

Thackeray's indignation was especially aroused, however, when he read the story *The Good Genius that Turned Everything into Gold* by the brothers Mayhew, which he found unsatisfactory in every respect. As he sees it, these authors violate one "rule" valid in his opinion for all imaginative literature, for they replace genuine fancy and humour by "stupendous moralization", make their fairy discuss "a prodigious deal of political ethics" with the hero, who is thus made acquainted with the macro-universe of the stars as well as the micro-universe in every atom, with the Wondrous Tale of Creation, chemistry, herbs and minerals, and the mechanism of his body, in a very finely written discourse, but "out of place, and little to be understood by children".[18] Thackeray points out that the story was rightly treated in a review entitled "Fairy Politics", and adds:

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[17] *Contributions*, 106.
[18] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 594, 597, 599.

"If any fairy presumes to talk any such nonsense to me, I will do my best from my place in the pit to hiss him off the stage. Had it been any the best known and dearest author — had it been Dickens himself, we would assume the privilege of replying to him with the cat-call, or other Protestant instrument, until the policeman ordered us off the premises" (*Works* VI, 597).

His anger is most thoroughly aroused, however, not by the fact that the authors moralize, but above all because they preach a very unsatisfactory doctrine which Thackeray denotes, by reversing the title of their story so as to correspond better to its contents, as "gold is a good genius". This makes him so angry (and not unexpectedly, for we know his view of the baneful influence of money in society and his conception of success in this fair of vanities) that he cannot in this case tolerate the conventional disentanglement of the plot by the rewarding of the good characters and the punishment of the evil. According to his opinion, if a writer wants to write a mere fantastic tale, he need not be too correct in his logic, but if "he wants to moralize, his proposition should be neat and clear, as his argument is correct". He then addresses to the brothers Mayhew the following interesting comment:

"If there were really your sort of good geniuses in the world, Socrates ought to have driven off from his trial in a coach-and-six to Xantippe, the loveliest and best-natured of women; yet we know to the contrary. She was a shrew, and her husband was hanged. A banker's account is a fine thing when properly organized, and the balance agreeably preponderating upon your side; but there are other accounts we have to settle, and if they look at this sublunary sphere, *mes frères,* and the misfortunes of the good and the prosperity of their opposites, — at Genius and Virtue in neglect and penury, and Dullness blundering into success, and Knavery filching Reputation, how can sublime moralists talk of goodness and gold together? Whatever we may do privately as individuals, let us sublime moralists never publicly worship twopence-halfpenny. I, for my part, as one of the aforesaid, will always make an uproar when I meet with any apologue conveying such a foolish signification; and I wish that some Christmas storytellers would make us a few tales in which all the rogues should prosper, and all the honest men go to jail, just to correct the present odious tendency of the guides of public taste" (*Works* VI, 596—597).

Although Thackeray admits that the story has much merit and is often written with brilliancy and wisdom, in view of its faulty moral he regards it as his duty as a critic

"to abuse and deny it altogether, — the which I cordially do; and I warn the public, firstly, that under pretence of giving him a fairy story, the authors of the *Good Genius that turned Everything into, &c.,* inveigle the reader into a sermon, — that the sermon is quite unsatisfactory, but that the preachers have a plenty of brains to supply their abundance of doctrine" (*Works* VI, 597).

Thackeray has another objection to the brothers Mayhew, however, and that is their "personification mania", their propensity to animate inanimate objects, in which they badly imitate their master Dickens:

"'To see the faults of a great master, look at his imitators', Reynolds says in his *Discourses;* and the sins of Mr. Dickens's followers must frighten that gentleman not a little. Almost every one of the Christmas carollers are exaggerating the master's own exaggerations, and caricaturing the face of nature most shamelessly. Every object in the world is brought to life, and invested with a vulgar knowingness and outrageous jocularity. Winds used to whistle in former days, and oaks to toss their arms in the storm. Winds are now made to laugh, to howl, to scream, to triumph, to sing choruses; trees to squint, to shiver, to leer, to grin, to smoke pipes, dance hornpipes, and smoke those of tobacco" (*Works* VI, 597).

These imitators of Dickens, however, lack his genius and by copying this aspect of his creative approach produce only "clumsy joking" and "dreary buffooning".[19] Even a greater culprit than the brothers Mayhew in this respect is, in Thackeray's opinion, A. Chamerovzow in his story *The Yule Log,* as the reviewer demonstrates by a specimen of his style and an enumeration of all the metaphors this author uses in describing an old hollow beech, which he personifies as an old being suffering from all sorts of human diseases. Thackeray declares that this "animated landscape nuisance [is] becoming most intolerable, and no longer to be endured", characterizes it as neither ingenious, nor poetical, but "merely foolish", pointing out that in his opinion it is "the easiest and silliest kind of composition in which any poetaster can indulge" and adding this remarkable reflection, in which he sums up his own conception of humour:

"I will engage to vivify my tailor's bill; to make a romance of the heart out of my boot-jack; to get up a tender interest for mashed turnips and boiled mutton; to invest my breeches with pathos; to communicate an air of mystery to my coat (dash its buttons!); to make my waistcoat split its sides with jocularity; or so to treat and degrade, with clumsy joking, anything natural or supernatural; to make a farce of a thunderstorm, or a tragedy of a teapot; but shall we do so? No! in the name of honest humour, no! ... A comic artist, as I take it, has almost the entire range of thought to play upon; the maddest foolery at times becomes him perfectly as the deepest pathos; but this systematic fooling, this dreary cut-and-dry fancy, this grinning without fun, makes my gorge rise, my dear Mr. YORKE; and I protest, for the honour of the trade. Mr. Merryman in the ring is not a humourist, but a poor half-witted impostor: I have my own opinion of a fellow who deliberately cuts sham jokes. They should come from a humourist's heart, or they are but acts of dishonesty on his part and forgeries on the public" (*Works* VI, 601—602).

Indeed, almost the whole of Thackeray's summary review "A Grumble about the Christmas Books", from which the above quotation is taken, is, as the title suggests, the expression of his exasperation at this new "branch" of English literature, the productions of which were flooding the book market. In the introduction he writes to Mr. Yorke that he undertook the task, sharing the editor's idea that

"the occupation would be exceedingly easy, jovial, and pleasant; that we should be able to make an agreeable lecture upon an amusing subject; that critics, authors, and readers would be brought together in the most enticing and amiable manner possible; and that we should finish off an article with kind hearts, friendly greetings, merry Christmas, and that sort of thing, — a perfect prize-paper, streaky with benevolence, and larded with the most unctuous human kindness, with an appropriate bit of holly placed in its hinder quarter" (*Works* VI, 581).

But he informs his editor that they both "made a most dismal mistake", for he finds himself in a wretched state of mind instead, surfeited with Christmas stories:

"I have read Christmas books until I have reached a state of mind the most deplorable. 'Curses on all fairies!' I gasp out; 'I will never swallow another one as long as I live. Perdition seize all Benevolence! Be hanged to the Good and the True! Fling me every drop of the milk of human kindness out of the window! — horrible, curdling slops, away with them! Kick old Father Christmas out of doors, the abominable old impostor! Next year I'll go to the Turks, the Scotch, or other heathens who don't keep Christmas. Is all the street to come for a Christmas-box? Are the waits to be invading us by millions, and yelling all night? By my soul, if anybody offers me plum-pudding again this season, I'll fling it in his face!'" (*Works* VI, 581—582).

[19] *Works* VI, 598.

A little further on he openly declares that "the Christmas-book system" in England is bidding fair to become a nuisance, and adds:

"Sir, it was wisely regulated that Christmas should come only once a year, but that does not mean that it is to stay all the year round. Do you suppose that any man could read through all these books and retain his senses? I have swallowed eight or nine out of the twenty-five or thirty volumes. I am in a pitiable condition. I speak with difficulty out of my fullness" (*Works* VI, 582).

That Thackeray in spite of all his determination to be tolerant to Christmas books and treat them as a special literary *genre* clearly saw their basic limitations from the point of view of art, is also confirmed by his positively evaluating only pure fairy tales, which do not draw upon nature, but upon "Mother Bunch's delightful super-nature", or realistic, satirical or humorous stories. From the fairy-tale books he warmly praises *The Fairy Ring*, "a set of new stories delightfully translated from Grimm's various collections by J. E. Taylor, and charmingly illustrated by Mr. R. Doyle", reserving much space in his review to a very positive assessment of Doyle as illustrator of fairy tales, with an almost uncanny knowledge of fairyland and its inhabitants, and as contributor to *Punch*. The tales themselves are highly appreciated by him because they are written in the old form of the fairy tale, possessing "the child-like simplicity and wonder of narration which constitute its main charm" and being unspoilt by "that knowing modern slang and *goguenard* air with which later authors have polluted that sacred fairy ground". He also has nothing but praise for the fairy-tale books he considers in his review "On Some Illustrated Children's Books". He is mainly concerned with the pictorial side of the works he assesses, but pays some attention, too, to the text, finding much to praise especially in the *History of Tom Hickathrift the Conqueror*, the vigorous style of which reminds him of "Fielding's cudgel-style by the force and simplicity of the blow", in *The Babes in the Wood* and *The Good-natured Bear*. His warmest eulogy is bestowed, however, upon Hans Christian Andersen, whose *Wonderful Stories for Children* fully recompensed him for the suffering he had undergone when reading the other Christmas books he "grumbled about" in his summary review, for "what man can go on grumbling in the presence of such an angelical spirit as Hans Christian Andersen"?[20] After having been "perfectly bored with the beef-fed English fairies, their hob-nailed gambols, and elephantine friskiness", he finds Andersen's stories a real blessing and pays to him the following generous tribute:

"Heaven bless Hans Christian! Here *are* fairies! Here *is* fancy, and graceful wit, and delicate humour, and sweet, naïve kindness, flowing from the heart! Here is frolic without any labour! Here is admirable feeling without any consciousness or degradation! Though we have no sort of respect for a great, hulking, whiskered, red-faced, middle-aged man, who dresses himself in a pinafore and affects to frolic like a baby, may we not be charmed by the play and prattle of a child? And Hans Christian Andersen so affects me" (*Works* VI, 606).

Of the Christmas books which were not fairy tales, Thackeray took a positive view of the collection *Poems and Pictures*, because it contained, besides bad poems and pictures, also several good ones, of Mrs. Sinnett's "pretty" though

[20] For the quotations in this paragraph see *Works* II, 626, *Contributions*, 98 and *Works* VI, 576.

not original book *A Christmas in the Seventeenth Century,* and of two humorous works — Jerrold's *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* and *The Comic Blackstone* by Gilbert Abbott A Beckett. His criticism of Jerrold's little book is convincing proof of his unprejudiced approach to literary criticism. Although he had many controversies with Jerrold, who irritated him by his extreme radicalism and his sharp attacks upon the Church, the clergy and the rich,[21] his review does not bear any traces of this. With great respect and warm praise he evaluates Jerrold's book as a work of permanent value, which differs from the other Christmas books by its truthfulness to life. He discusses at some length the impression Jerrold's characters made upon contemporary readers,[22] but points out that the social significance of the book is even wider than its contemporary appeal, for Jerrold depicted the life of an English middle-class family so faithfully that future generations may get out of it "as accurate pictures of London life as we can out of the pictures of Hogarth".[23] The power of Jerrold's satire, as he believes, reaches even the level of the satirical mastery of Swift:

"It is quite as keen as the satirical book of the Dean before alluded to [i.e. *Directions to Servants — LP*], contains wit and sarcasm quite as brilliant, and gives (in caricature) the most queer, minute, and amusing picture of English middle-class life."[24]

Special words of praise are reserved by him for Jerrold's power of creating lifelike characters whom the reader is disposed to accept as actual people, which in his opinion places this book above Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth* in respect of truth and reality. The greatest charm of the book is the "credibility of Mr. and Mrs. Caudle", writes Thackeray, and proceeds:

"The couple have become real living personages in history, like Queen Elizabeth, or Sancho Panza, or Parson Adams, or any other past character, who, false or real once, is only imaginary now, and for whose existence we have only the word of a book. And surely to create these realities is the greatest triumph of a fictitious writer — a serious or humorous *poet.* Mr. Dickens has created a whole gallery of these: our quarrel with his last book, and with Dot and Peerybingle, is because we don't *believe* in them."[25]

There is one character of Dickens, however, though not from the *Cricket on the Hearth,* which Thackeray does use as his standard for measuring the credibility of Mrs. Caudle — his favourite Mrs. Nickleby:

"They are both types of English matrons so excellent, that it is hard to say which of the two should have the *pas.*"[26]

The vitality of Jerrold's characters is in Thackeray's opinion a greater merit of the book than its wit and humour, though he praises even these, quoting some witty puns and aphorisms, and comparing Jerrold's humour with that

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[21] For an analysis of his attitude to Jerrold see *The Uses of Adversity,* pp. 363ff. and 491, note 41, Melville, op. cit., I, 296, Wilson, op. cit., I, 350, II, 100; for the attitude itself see *Works* II, 712—713, *Letters* II, 281—282, 681, 823—824, III, 432.

[22] For another interesting remark on the contemporary appeal of Jerrold's characters see "Letters from a Club Arm-Chair" (*The Calcutta Star,* August 21, 1845, reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* vol. 18, December 1963, No. 3, p. 233). For Thackeray's other references to this book see *Works* VI. 451, 460, VIII, 49 (all 1845).

[23] *Contributions,* 94.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., pp. 94—95.

[26] Ibid., p. 94.

of Fielding and Smollett. The general truth of Thackeray's evaluation of Jerrold's book may pass unchallenged, for the work does possess certain undoubtable qualities — the characters are indeed lively and convincing (though they cannot be placed on the same level as the immortal creations of Cervantes, Fielding and Dickens) and the humour irresistible. In auguring for it an everlasting popularity, however, Thackeray was not a reliable prophet, for the book, once so widely popular in its country, is scarcely read nowadays, especially outside England, where it is practically unknown.

As far as A Beckett's work is concerned, Thackeray praises it in the first place for not breaking the "rule" that writers of Christmas books, writers of fiction in general and "comic" writers in particular should not pretend to instruct the reader in moral and political sermons or have other pretensions exceeding their field and possibilities. A Beckett wins his commendation for occupying himself "steadily and modestly with his joking, and with nothing else", for not making "one single attempt to be sublime", pretending "to regenerate the world" or preaching sermons on ethics, hydrostatics or geology.[27] In his opinion, which is in full harmony with his conception of beauty in art, there is nothing to be ashamed of in cultivating merely the ridiculous, even if it is generally regarded as a lower sphere of art than the sublime and even if writers cultivating it "must live in the world and go out of it with this woeful conviction, that there is a kind of art incomparably higher than theirs, and which is not to be reached by any straining or endeavour":

"But theirs is no bad position after all. It is something to be *Mercutio* if you can't be *Romeo* — to be a gentleman, if not a hero — to have a shrewd, kindly, wit without the least claim to be a sublime genius or a profound philosopher — to have kind affections and warm feelings, but to be very cautious and diffident in parading them; — in fine, though a man can't produce Paradise Lost or Newton's Principia, it is by no means disagreeable to be able to write the 'Comic Blackstone'."[28]

The book as a whole is evaluated by Thackeray as a splendid humorous commentary on English laws, which is, "from beginning to end, of the most happy and ingenious absurdity", full of "queerness and folly", of hilarious and absurd humour:

"If laughter, without the least malice — laughter springing out of the sheer absurd — laughter the most unrestrainable be worth cultivating for Christmas-holidays, this should be the Christmas book of the season."[29]

As we are already used to in his criticism, Thackeray not only sharply criticizes what he regards as deviations from reality in the works of the producers of "Christmas" literature, including those of the initiator of this literary fashion, but also juxtaposes against their works his own productions of this type, in which he shows what sort of literature should be produced in this season as well as in all the others. His own Christmas books are predominantly realistic or satirical stories or sketches (*Mrs. Perkins's Ball,* 1847, *Our Street,* 1848, *Dr. Birch and his Young Friends,* 1849 and *The Kickleburys on the Rhine,* 1850) with a single exception — *The Rose and the Ring* (1855) is a fairy tale, but a burlesque one, one shaft of its satire being aimed, as we have already

[27] For the quotations see ibid., pp. 102, 101.
[28] Ibid., pp. 101—102.
[29] Ibid., p. 102.

seen, against chivalric romances, another, but a very blunt one, against pantomimes (as Ray has pointed out, the story, called by Thackeray a fireside pantomime, has a pantomime plot and contains many pantomime characters).[30] A secondary purpose of *Mrs. Perkins's Ball* was, as the same scholar has shown, "to underline the blatant snobbery of the annuals":

"It was satirically advertised in the magazines as 'containing twenty-three gorgeous plates of beauty, rank, and fashion, seventy or eighty select portraits of the friends of Mrs. Perkins. To illustrate the truly festive volume, for the express use of the aristocracy there will be an illuminated edition, in which the plates will be coloured'."[31]

This is also the Christmas book which Thackeray himself "reviews" as the last of those productions about which he "grumbles", and he treats it very ruthlessly (though only its pictorial part), being so exasperated by Dickens's imitators that he longs "for some one to devour":

"Ha! What have we here? — *M. A. Titmarsh's Christmas Book* — MRS. PERKINS'S BALL. Dedicated to the Mulligan of Ballymulligan. Ballymulligan! Ballyfiddlestick! What, *you*, too, Mr. Titmarsh? You, you sneering wretch, setting up a Christmas-book of your own? This then, is the meaning of your savage feeling towards 'the minor fiddlers'! Is your kit, sirrah, any bigger than theirs? You, who in the columns of this very Magazine have sneered at the works of so many painters, look at your own performances! Some of your folks have scarcely more legs than Miss Biffin; they have fins instead of hands — they squint almost every one of them!" (*Works* VI, 609.)

As follows from our investigation in this sub-chapter, Thackeray's criticism of "Christmas" literature represents a very remarkable part of his critical legacy, so remarkable indeed that it is a matter of surprise that it has so far not been assessed as a whole by any Thackerayan scholar. What should be particularly emphasized is that the critic has more to say in it than in most of his other critical contributions on the art of fiction in general, though most of what he says is rather implied in his evaluation of "Christmas" literature as a specific literary *genre* than explicitly formulated. What also deserves mentioning is the fact that Thackeray's judgments are in this case predominantly based upon purely aesthetic criteria, derived from his own conception of the creation of literary character, of the conduct and arrangement of the plot, of the aesthetic relationship of the literary artist to his materials, his choice of metaphors, his usage of language, etc. And what deserves praise, too, is the essential justness of Thackeray's criticism and his capacity for dispensing praise and blame in correct proportion and in due place. He is not an entirely infallible judge, however. but the mistakes he makes are not in this case unpardonable blunders. As we have seen, he does not prove to be a very penetrating critic, at least in my opinion, in evaluating the social function of Dickens's Christmas stories, and he bestows more praise than was due to Jerrold's Christmas book. These mistakes do not, however, substantially detract from the considerable value of this part of his criticism which has so far been so surprisingly and in my opinion undeservedly neglected.

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[30] See *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 230.

[31] Lady Ritchie's *Biographical Introductions* to *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, London, 1898—1899, IX, xlviii; quoted by Ray in *The Age of Wisdom*, pp. 448—449, note 6.

3. Thackeray as a Critic of Realistic Fiction

As I have pointed out in the prefatory words to this whole lengthy chapter, Thackeray's criticism of fiction of a realistic type represents a relatively very small part in his critical legacy. During his professional critical career, when his critical interest was predominantly concentrated on literature produced in his own time, he paid considerable attention to the work of Charles Dickens. In a longer *exposé* in his review "Horae Catnachianae", in his polemically pointed commentary to *Catherine* and in marginal remarks he critically commented upon the "Newgate" part of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and, in the review quoted above, also on *Nicholas Nickleby,* devoted a whole critical contribution ("Dickens in France", *Fraser's Magazine,* March 1842) to severe condemnation of the French dramatization of the last-named novel, reviewed three of Dickens's Christmas stories, assessed his contemporary's art in his later lecture *Charity and Humour,* and fairly copiously commented upon all Dickens's novels published during his lifetime. Some scholars (as far as I have been able to ascertain, van Duzer and Malcolm Elwin) attribute to him, too, an early review of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz, Pickwick Papers, Bentley's Miscellany* and *Oliver Twist,* published in the *London and Westminster Review* in July 1837, but his authorship has not been, as far as I know, definitely ascertained (neither Melville nor Gulliver include this review among Thackeray's works and Charles Mauskopf, who recently published a study on "Thackeray's Attitude Towards Dickens's Writings",[1] does not mention it) and I do not therefore take this review into account. An additional reason which made me exclude it was that when I studied it, I found several things which do not in my opinion sound like Thackeray, not in style (of which as a foreigner I cannot be a good judge) but in critical assessment, though the general critical approach does in many of its aspects resemble that of Thackeray. The reviewer for instance rebukes Dickens, though with admiration and good will, for employing his powers on a very limited sphere of the "lower orders" in London, while Thackeray praised him for it; the reviewer maintains that Dickens depicts the same class of persons and circumstances as Hook does, while Thackeray pointed out that they concentrated upon two opposite extremes of society; the reviewer places Dickens below Irving, while Thackeray's attitude to the American writer was in this period not yet so positive as it was in his later years;[2] the reviewer has a very critical attitude to Dickens's art in drawing characters, while Thackeray always highly appreciated it except for the representatives of the criminal underworld in *Oliver Twist.*

Of the contemporary French realistic novelists Thackeray paid formal critical attention to Charles de Bernard in his summary review "On Some French Fashionable Novels" (*The Paris Sketch Book,* 1840), in which he briefly reviewed Bernard's novel *Les Ailes d'Icare,* assessed one character from *Un Acte de Vertu* and provided brief summaries of the plots of the latter novel, as well as of two others, *Gerfaut* and *La Femme de Quarante Ans.* In his review "Jérôme Paturot" (*Fraser's Magazine,* September 1843) he paid detailed attention to the novel of the same title by M.R.L. Reybaud.

[1] *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* vol. 21, No. 1, June 1966, pp. 21—33.

[2] For Thackeray's earlier not entirely positive comment on Irving see *Letters* I, 288; for his later praises see *Works* X, 613, XVII, 620, *Letters* III, 511—512, and especially "Nil Nisi Bonum", *The Cornhill Magazine,* February 1860.

The only exception to the general direction of his critical interest, in the 1830s and 1840s, to contemporary literature, is his review "Fielding's Works" (*The Times,* September 2, 1840). In the 1850s the focus of his interest shifted to the English literature of the 18th century and he paid relatively much attention especially to the lives but also to the works of the novelists and other prose writers of that period, in his *Lectures on the English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* (read for the first time in 1851 and published in 1853) and in his later lecture *Charity and Humour* (read and published in 1853). I shall not keep, however, to a chronological arrangement and shall consider, in the first sub-chapter, his criticism of the French and English realistic novel of his own time (paying attention, too, to some of his later judgments which he pronounced as reader) and, in the second, his criticism of the 18th-century English realistic fiction, both in the earlier and later period.

I. THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH REALISTIC NOVEL OF HIS OWN TIME

In his evaluation of the French and English realistic novel of his time Thackeray applies, as usual, criteria based both on extra-aesthetic and aesthetic considerations. As far as the French novelists are concerned, one of the criteria he uses with particular emphasis is his usual concern about the possible harmful influence of the assessed novel on the morals of its readers. In the case of the two novelists we are discussing, however, Thackeray does not use this criterion as one of his instruments for condemning the objects of his criticism. On the contrary, he places Bernard, a definitely second-rate novelist from the point of view of his art, above all his contemporaries as a writer whose works wound the English sense of propriety only occasionally, and whose characters are "men and women of genteel society — rascals enough, but living in no state of convulsive crimes", so that the English reader can follow the novelist "in his lively, malicious account of their manners, without risk of lighting upon any such horrors as Balzac and Dumas have provided for us". Thackeray is not entirely uncritical, however, and has some reservations regarding the moral notions of his favourite, as follows especially from his brief summaries of the plots of several of Bernard's novels, all of which deal almost exclusively with adultery. As I have pointed out in my study on his criticism of French literature, Thackeray is inclined to forgive Bernard even this weak point, which is a very grave offence in his eyes, because this author writes "like a gentleman".[1] Thackeray evaluates Bernard in the same spirit in his review of Reybaud's novel, confessing in a marginal comment to his indebtedness to the former novelist, pointing out that he was the first English critic who paid any attention to his works, dissociating himself from the opinion of English critics who found Bernard's novel *Gerfaut* to be immoral, and adding:

> "It may be so in certain details, but it is not immoral in tendency" (*Works* VI, 320).

Also Reybaud is separated by Thackeray from the rest of the French novelists and his novel is treated as one of the very rare honorary exceptions to the

[1] For the quotations see *Works* II, 98—99, 109.

general taste for immoralities and horrors in France, as "a good, cheerful, clear, kind-hearted, merry, smart, bitter, sparkling romance".[2]

Another criterion which he applies to the works of these two novelists is the degree and quality of their instructive value. In the introduction to his article "On Some French Fashionable Novels" he argues with those critics who persist in underestimating the novel and in reprehending it for alleged "frivolity", underlines the instructive value of this literary art which is in his opinion the same as (if not higher than) that of regular historical works and emphasizes that from the contemporary French novel the English reader can gain a great deal more knowledge of French society than he could get from his own personal observation as a foreigner. Not all the French novelists, however, are according to Thackeray such safe guides, for few of them in his opinion paint actual manners truthfully, "without those monstrous and terrible exaggerations in which late French writers [i.e. Balzac, Soulié, and Dumas, whom he mentions earlier-*LP*] have indulged".[3] Bernard and Reybaud, however, provide in Thackeray's opinion "safe" instruction, that is safe especially from the moral point of view and, moreover, truthful in relation to the depicted reality, devoid of any exaggerations. He singles out for appreciation Bernard's delightful depiction of a French dandy in *Les Ailes d'Icare,* sketched in a sparkling and gentlemanlike way, and his lifelike picture of a Paris student in *Un Acte de Vertu.* This novelist is praised by Thackeray even for something he did not intend — for his unconscious, but very truthful representation of the immorality and lack of religious faith prevailing in contemporary French society. Reybaud's novel is evaluated by Thackeray as "a little manual of French quackery" and its author praised for giving in it "a curious insight into some of the social and political humbugs of the great nation"[4] and for creating lively and convincing sketches from Parisian life. These contain, in Thackeray's opinion, also a wholesome moral — that it is better to live in poverty than to participate in the life of fashionable society. The only improbable part of the novel Thackeray considers to be the temporary salvation of the hero by his rich uncle. The review bears also traces of Thackeray's gradual dissociation from the satire of the highest degree in which humorous elements completely disappear and laughter is ousted by savage anger, a dissociation on which I commented in my study of his aesthetics. The most positive aspect of Reybaud's approach to the depicted society seems to him to be that it is not motivated by indignation, but by kind-heartedness and good humour.

As I have suggested in the introduction to this whole chapter, in his reviews of Bernard and Reybaud, Thackeray takes notice, too, of those specific traits of their works which lead him to discuss Bernard in his article on French *fashionable* novels and to argue in the conclusion of his review of Reybaud's novel with those critics who denoted this work as a "political" novel. But these traits do not stand in the foreground of his interest, as I pointed out; he does not see any connection between Bernard's works and the productions of the Silver-Fork School and answers the critics aforesaid by saying that Reybaud's novel *is* perhaps a political novel and contains a great deal of sound thinking, but

[2] *Works* VI, 323.
[3] *Works* II, 98.
[4] For the quotations see *Works* VI, 330, 323.

that it is first and foremost an entertaining story, in which there is not a trace of bad blood and malice. He recommends it to all readers who want to add to their knowledge of the world, as well as to enjoy a hearty laugh, and expresses his hope that the author, whose main business is political economy, Fourierism, "and other severe sciences", will follow the example of his great predecessor, the police-magistrate Fielding, and find some spare time to write other novels of this kind "for the benefit of the lazy, novel-reading, unscientific world".[5]

Thackeray's critical judgment in the two reviews is to a certain extent coloured by his national prejudice against the French, though not to such a degree as to make him condemn the two writers, as he did for instance Balzac. The validity of his critical judgments is, however, not very great, for he greatly overestimated Bernard, as all scholars agree, and also placed Reybaud as a novelist on a higher level than this serious student of social philosophy, who excelled rather in the latter field of his activities than in his fiction, really deserved. In both cases, however, even if Thackeray failed to see the demerits of the two novelists, he praised them for the positive qualities which their art really possessed and which were appreciated in Bernard by such critics as Sainte-Beuve and Zola, and in Reybaud by Saintsbury.[6]

As far as Dickens is concerned, Thackeray began to refer to his works at first in marginal comments and appreciated his art in the earliest of them (1836 to 1838) very positively, praising "the admirable Boz" for concentrating his creative interest upon the depiction of the lower social classes so far entirely neglected by fiction, and his depictions for not being so fanciful as those of Bulwer (in a comment in his "Half-a-Crown's Worth of Cheap Knowledge", quoted in one of the preceding sub-chapters). In the same review he also characterized *Oliver Twist* as "Boz's admirable tale"[7] and sharply criticized a silly plagiarism of this novel published under the title *Oliver Twiss,* by "Bos". Beginning with his review "Horae Catnachianae", however, his attitude to Dickens changes and he begins to address quite sharp critical rebukes to some aspects of Dickens's creative method, as they revealed themselves in his depiction of the London underworld in the above-quoted novel. As we have seen, he applied to Dickens's criminal characters the same criteria as he did to the absurd figures created by the Newgate novelists and used against them the same critical weapons (except the parody — although he originally intended to include also Dickens among his *Punch's Prize Novelists,* he wisely decided to exclude him, though obviously not quickly enough to avoid rousing the anger of Dickens's

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[5] For the quotations see *Works,* VI, 340, 341.

[6] See the views of Sainte-Beuve and Zola quoted by Maître in "Balzac, Thackeray et Charles de Bernard", pp. 290—291 and the opinion of Sainte-Beuve quoted by Praz, op. cit., p. 396, note 84. For Saintsbury's view on Reybaud see *A Consideration of Thackeray,* p. 100; see also *A History of the French Novel,* II, 306—307. The last-named scholar also believes (and Maître with him) that Bernard has been rather belittled by official French criticism and that he is not so slight a novelist as he has been thought. See also my analysis of Thackeray's criticism of Bernard and Reybaud in "Thackeray as a Reader and Critic of French Literature", pp. 111—115. In the same study I have also paid detailed attention to Thackeray's criticism, in "Caricatures and Lithography in Paris" (1840), of the work of the satirist Charles Philipon and his collaborator, the designer Honoré Daumier, authors of the Macaire caricatures, *Les cent et un Robert Macaire,* published in 1837—1838 in *Le Charivari* (see ibid., pp. 109—111).

[7] *Works* I, 143.

friend Forster[8]). I have already quoted comments in which he confronted Dickens's characters with Fielding's Jonathan Wild and with the characters from Gay's *Beggar's Opera;* to this I shall add two further remarks, in the first of which he confronts them with the authentic information about "low" life to be found in cheap periodicals, characterizes Dickens as one of the "poetical travellers, who talk wildly and cleverly, exaggerate much, and know very little of the scenes which they pretend to describe", and addresses the following appeal to the reader who is curious about such matters:

"Let him try, for instance, three numbers of the — twopenny newspaper: there is more information about thieves, ruffians, swindlers of both sexes, more real vulgarity, more tremendous slang, more unconscious, honest, blackguard NATURE, in fact, than Mr. Dickens will ever give to the public. There sits Blackguardism, calm, simple, at ease, uttering her own thoughts in her own language; not having a gentleman for a mouthpiece, not decked out with any artificial flowers of wit, nor trammelled by any notions of politeness or decorum. She has her own jokes, words, ways, as different from those that our popular writers choose to give to her, as their habits are from hers: and when we say that neither Mr. Dickens, nor Mr. Ainsworth, nor Sir Lytton Bulwer, can write about what they know not, we presume that not one of those three gentlemen will be insulted at an imputation of ignorance on a subject where knowledge is not, after all, very desirable."[9]

In the second comment Thackeray confronts Dickens's Nancy with actual reality. In 1840, when he found himself in the midst of the crowd assembled to see the execution of Courvoisier, he observed two girls belonging to the "low" orders of society, one of whom, "a young thief's mistress", might have been, as he insists, a prototype for Boz's Nancy:

"I was curious to look at them, having, in late fashionable novels, read many accounts of such personages. Bah! What figments these novelists tell us! Boz, who knows life well, knows that his Miss Nancy is the most unreal fantastical personage possible; no more like a thief's mistress than one of Gessner's shepherdesses resembles a real country wench. He dare not tell the truth concerning such young ladies. They have, no doubt, virtues like other human creatures; nay, their position engenders virtues that are not called into exercise among other women. But on these an honest painter of human nature has no right to dwell; not being able to paint the whole portrait, he has no right to present one or two favourable points as characterizing the whole; and therefore, in fact, had better leave the picture alone altogether" (*Works* III, 198).

As we may see, Thackeray is again in the first place concerned with the faithfulness of these characters to life and with their creator's failure to depict them as whole human beings (in "Horae" he characterizes them as "startling, pleasing, unnatural caricatures"[10]), but in the case of Nancy he is not entirely just to Dickens, for he knew perfectly well from his own experience (when

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[8] Dickens maintained that he should not have been excluded from the series, but he believed that Thackeray wasted his talent in the publications of this kind and very much disliked the latter's *Punch* parodies, insisting that they "did no honour to literature or literary men, and should be left to very inferior and miserable hands" (*The Letters of Charles Dickens,* ed. Walter Dexter, Bloomsbury, 1938, II, 29). Forster, however, accused Thackeray of being as "false as hell". For Thackeray's reaction to this controversy see *Letters* II, 294—304, 308—309, 336—337; for a detailed account of the whole affair see *The Age of Wisdom,* pp. 135—136. According to Gulliver, however, Thackeray most probably did write a parody of Dickens, *The Pseudo-Graphic, or Weak Boz-and-Water,* included in the *Hints to Novelists, for 1846, The Comic Almanack,* November 18, 1846 (see op. cit., pp. 128—129).

[9] "Horae Catnachianae", p. 408.

[10] Ibid., p. 407.

creating Catherine, for instance) that Dickens could not have told the whole truth about his prostitute, even if he had wanted to do so. As Kathleen Tillotson has pointed out,

"Dickens does not and could not answer Thackeray's objection [i.e. in his preface to the 1841 edition of the novel, from which I shall quote below and which was a defence of Dickens's approach as well as a reaction against Thackeray's attacks — *LP*] that it makes an unbalanced picture, since so much of the rest of the truth about a prostitute's feelings was necessarily suppressed."[11]

In the second place, Thackeray is again much disturbed about the possible harmful influence of Dickens's "mixed" criminal characters upon the morals of the reader, for Dickens's propensity to endow them with virtues (Nancy) or humour (Fagin and the Artful Dodger) or to present harrowing accounts of their last moments (Fagin and Sikes) produces in his opinion a similar reaction in the reader as do the glorified ruffians of Ainsworth and Bulwer — breathless interest, tender feelings and sympathy.

As is obvious from the preceding, Thackeray failed to see that in creating his *Oliver Twist* Dickens followed (as the author himself pointed out in the 1841 preface to the novel) the same models which the critic used as his standards when assessing this work and those of the Newgate novelists, namely Fielding in particular (but also Defoe, Smollett, Hogarth and Cervantes), and that the "aim and object" he had in view was the same as that followed by Thackeray in *Catherine* — to protest against the glorified criminals created by the Newgate novelists, "to dim the false glitter surrounding something which really did exist, by showing it in its unattractive and repulsive truth". As Dickens explained in the 1841 preface, his sole original intention was "to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last". When he sought in contemporary reality for the "vilest evil", the darkest vice which could serve as a contrast to the Good and Virtue embodied in his hero, he naturally found it in the most morally degraded members of society — the criminals and prostitutes. Only on more mature consideration did he realize what a splendid opportunity such characters and milieu offered for a protest against the idealized depictions of the same reality in the Newgate novels:

"When I came to discuss the subject more maturely with myself, I saw many strong reasons for pursuing the course to which I was inclined. I had read of thieves by scores — seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in pocket, choice in horseflesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at a song, a bottle, pack of cards or dice-box, and fit companions for the bravest. But I had never met (except in HOGARTH) with the miserable reality. It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really do exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives; to show them as they really are, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great, black, ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they may; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was greatly needed, and which would be a service to society. And therefore I did it as I best could."[12]

As I have shown at greater detail in my study on the Newgate novel, however, Dickens's picture of the London underworld failed to convince all af

[11] "Oliver Twist", *Essays and Studies*, 1959, p. 98.

[12] Preface to *Oliver Twist*, pp. xvii—xviii; for the preceding quotations see ibid., pp. xvii, xx, xvii.

his readers of his intention to show up the faults of the Newgate novels. The contrast between his work and *Jack Sheppard* was not perceived, either, by the majority of his critics (as Dickens himself complained[13]), and he was accused of being himself tainted, as Kathleen Tillotson has it, "with the sham romance that he claimed to be reacting against". As the same scholar has shown, these rebukes were to a certain extent justified:

"Dickens must have had Ainsworth in mind as one of the glamorisers of thieves; but he was discreet in not naming him, for he used more than one hint from *Rookwood*, such as the comic use of 'flash' language (Jerry Juniper) and the description of Conkey Jem's hut in Thorne Waste where Turpin takes refuge. These borrowings, though superficial, complicate Dickens's picture of himself as a reformer, and gave an edge to some of the attacks on him."[14]

Those censures of Thackeray that are aimed at Dickens's use of "flash" language and slang are therefore justifiable; yet he failed to see that the general contrast of Dickens's criminal characters with "the 'heroes' of both Ainsworth and Bulwer" was "emphatic", as Mrs. Tillotson points out, for "Dickens's thieves are contemporary not historical, 'low' not aristocratic, their surroundings are squalid and their end miserable".[15] Nor is Thackeray in the right in his evaluation of Dickens's depiction of the last moments of Fagin and especially of Sikes, which made a very strong impression upon him,[16] but which he wrongly interpreted as a shift of moral sympathy on the part of the author: in his opinion Bill Sikes in his last moments arouses in the reader such a feeling as this sort of character should never do — "a kind of pity and admiration".[17] As Mrs. Tillotson points out, Dickens "perceived and penetrated, both in Sikes and Fagin, the 'strong truth' of the horrible, deserved yet pitiable, isolation of the criminal; and indeed this was the natural fulfilment of his intention to show criminals 'as they really are' ". In the last scenes of Sikes and Fagin

"there is added to the reality of their evil natures, brutish and violent, mean and cringing, the reality of the lonely and terrified human being. The imaginative force with which Dickens conveys that loneliness and terror, in compelling detail, is ill interpreted if it is seen as a shift of moral sympathy or in any way divergent from his stated purpose.[18] His imagination was more strongly stimulated by the 'dregs of life' and by 'adverse circumstance' than by the triumphing 'principle of Good'; in this he resembles other great writers. Dickens concluded his retrospect of how his aim 'appeared' to him with the simple words 'And therefore I did it as I best could'; the ring of satisfaction is surely justified."[19]

And, moreover, Thackeray underestimated the power of Dickens's art, for this novelist's depictions not only roused the readers' interest in the fortunes of Fagin's gang and sympathy with their hard lot, as the critic complained, but told at least some of them more than the author himself intended to say. Dickens's view of criminality as a social phenomenon was considerably limited owing to

[13] See *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter, I, 240.
[14] Op. cit., p. 97. For the preceding quotation see ibid., p. 98.
[15] Ibid.
[16] See e.g. *Works* VI, 322, II, 488—489.
[17] *Works* III, 185.
[18] As Mrs. Tillotson points out in a footnote to this, it was so interpreted in Thackeray's day for instance by R. H. Horne and has been in ours by Humphry House.
[19] Op. cit., p. 105; see also ibid., p. 104.

the contradictions inherent in his outlook upon contemporary reality: he saw in criminality an inevitable social evil, which he placed, in his novel, in contrast with the Good which was to triumph at last. But his criminal characters set in the wide canvas of his novel, including the paupers in the workhouses and the poor in the slums, assumed a wider meaning: they showed, at least to some of the contemporary readers, the very social roots of criminality. This objective meaning of Dickens's pictures of Fagin's gang of thieves was obviously not understood by Thackeray, for he does not comment upon it at all, but it was highly appreciated as early as 1844 by Belinski:

"As a true artist Dickens truthfully represents criminal and evil characters as the victims of a bad social order; but as a true-born Englishman he never admits it even to himself."[20]

Thackeray's failure to appreciate this aspect of Dickens's depiction is really curious, for his views upon criminality were obviously more mature than those of Dickens, even if not entirely devoid of similar contradictions. As Colby has pointed out, Thackeray regarded "crime and sin as rooted in human instincts", rather than in social conditions, as we should add, and, like Dickens, saw in criminality a necessary and irremovable social phenomenon; yet in *Catherine* he conceived crime, as Colby has also shown, "as a gross image of the evil that corrupts all society", set "rascality as the norm of society",[21] and in several of his comments sought for the roots of criminality in what are in my opinion the right places — in poverty and hunger at any time, as well as in "the brutality and the inefficiency of the criminal jurisprudence of England"[22] in the time of Sheppard and Jonathan Wild.

Thus from my point of view Thackeray's critical attacks upon Dickens's criminal characters are justifiable only in some of their points; in general, however, as I have pointed out before, he is unjust to Dickens when he places his convincing characters (whose immortality has been sufficiently proved by the readers' unabated interest in their adventures) on the same level as the absurd figures created by Ainsworth and Bulwer, now safely dead in spite of their previous enormous popularity. As I have suggested in the chapter dealing with Thackeray's criticism of the Newgate novelists, however, these attacks are quite justifiable from the critic's own point of view. He was convinced that the only possible creative approach to criminal characters was a strictly objective, harshly realistic or satirical depiction (such as he himself used in depicting Catherine and Barry Lyndon, or his later and much subtler rogues), devoid of any romantic trappings (such as he found especially in Bulwer's and in Ainsworth's romances) and of any other attempts to make the unpleasant reality acceptable to the reader (as for example Dickens's propensity to endow his criminal characters with virtues or use in their depiction humorous circumlocution).

It is necessary to point out, however, that in his attacks Thackeray limits himself to Dickens's creative approach to the criminal characters in *Oliver Twist* and only very exceptionally extends his censure to include the novelist's

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[20] V. G. Belinski, *Sobr. soch. v trekh tomakh*, vol. II, 645 (1848).

[21] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 391, 390, 389. Colby bases his conclusions, however, also upon the views expressed in the review "Hints for a History of Highwaymen", *Fraser's Magazine*, March 1834, included by White among disallowed attributions.

[22] "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard", p. 242. For the other comments see ibid., pp. 237–238, 242, 243; *Works* XI, 532–533, XIII, 16.

depiction of the lower social classes in general (we may instance his criticism of *Nicholas Nickleby* in the conclusion of "Horae", where he points out that Dickens's depiction of the quarrel and reconciliation between Mr. Lilyvick and Mr. Kenwigs in this novel does not depict the life of the lower social classes as faithfully as the street ballads do). He does not evaluate *Oliver Twist* as a whole, and finds some positive values in it, notably Dickens's pictures of the workhouse, which he appreciates as "genuine and pure", in the comment I have already quoted in the chapter dealing with his criticism of the Newgate novelists. Moreover, he also confesses to having read, in private, not only *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, but also *Jack Sheppard, Paul Clifford* and *Rookwood* with great enjoyment:

"All these opinions are, to be sure, delivered *ex cathedra,* from the solemn critical chair; but when out of it, and in private, we humbly acknowledge that we have read every one of Mr. Dickens's tales with the most eager delight, that we watch for *Nicholas Nickleby* as the month comes round, and have the strongest curiosity and admiration for Mr. Ainsworth's new work, *Jack Sheppard*. Mr. Long Ned, Mr. Paul Clifford, Mr. William Sykes, Mr. Fagin, Mr. John Sheppard (just mentioned), and Mr. Richard Turpin, whose portraits are the most striking in the modern and fashionable Thief's Gallery, are gentlemen whom we must all admire. We could 'hug the rogues and love them', and do — *in private.* In public it is, however, quite wrong to avow such likings, and to be seen in such company."[23]

As Ivasheva has rightly pointed out, Thackeray's attacks on Dickens's depiction of the London underworld in this novel cannot be therefore interpreted as any programmatic campaign against his great contemporary.[24] This is also confirmed by his later comments on the novel. In his article on Cruikshank, for instance, published only four months after *Catherine,* he refers to the characters from this novel as to figures which remain impressed on the memory of the reader (though, to be sure, he weakens this tribute by laying too much stress on "the wonderful assistance" Dickens "has derived from the artist"[25]). In *The Newcomes* he recalls with sympathy the enormous popularity of *Oliver Twist* in its heyday, making Lady Walham so intensely interested "in the parish boy's progress" as to read the novel in her bedroom by stealth, and Kew laugh at Mr. Bumble the Beadle so immensely "as to endanger the reopening of his wound".[26]

The same might be said about Thackeray's attack on *Nicholas Nickleby.* Although in "Horae Catnachianae" he criticized Dickens's depictions of the life of the lower classes as "artificial" when compared to the "nature" to be found in street ballads[27] and showed, as Mauskopf formulated it, "how in *Nicholas Nickleby* Dickens uses slang and bad grammar, not the characters or the situations themselves, to bind the story to a particular social class",[28] he obviously thought much of Dickens's depiction of Dotheboys Hall, as his later references suggest,[29] and had two great favourites among Dickens's characters

[23] "Horae Catnachianae", p. 408.
[24] See op. cit., pp. 77—78.
[25] *Works* II, 482.
[26] *Works* XIV, 496; see also ibid., p. 502.
[27] "Horae Catnachianae", p. 424; for his whole criticism see ibid., pp. 420—424.
[28] Op. cit., p. 24.
[29] See *Works* X, 551, V, 290, Melville, op. cit., II, 107; for a reference to Squeers see *Works* IX, 270.

(Mrs. Nickleby and Crummles[30]). His positive attitude to this novel is best expressed, however, in his article "Dickens in France", in which he highly praises several episodes and characters from the novel, especially again "the famous Mrs. Nickleby, who has lain undescribed until Boz seized upon her and brought that great truth to light, and whom yet every man possesses in the bosom of his own family",[31] positively appreciates the English dramatic version of the novel, but sharply condemns the French dramatization, along with the critic of this dramatization, Jules Janin, who made it the basis for "a most stern and ferocious criticism upon the piece in question, and upon poor Monsieur Dickens, its supposed author".[32] As Mauskopf aptly summed it up, Thackeray describes the French production "as being heavily plotted and excessively melodramatic and having little in common with Dickens's novel".[33] The article was written at a time when Thackeray and Dickens had become good friends, but the criticism, even if it may be characterized as a spirited defence of Dickens by the critic, is in no way influenced by this change of their former friendly relationships into personal friendship. For even in those of the preceding years, when Thackeray was most critical of Dickens and the Newgate controversy was at its whitest heat (1839—1840), his attitude to his great contemporary was not prejudiced, as is further confirmed by his ranking Dickens (in 1840) among the greatest humorists of world literature (beside Shakespeare and Fielding) whose humour "has been eagerly received by the public as by the most delicate connoisseur":

"There is hardly a man in England who can read but will laugh at Falstaff and the humour of Joseph Andrews; and honest Mr. Pickwick's story can be felt and loved by any person above the age of six" (*Works* II, 420).

In the same year he also highly appreciated the great instructive value of *Pickwick Papers* in the following comment:

"I am sure that a man who, a hundred years hence, should sit down to write the history of our time, would do wrong to put that great contemporary history of Pickwick aside, as a frivolous work. It contains true character under false names; and, like Roderick Random, an inferior work, and Tom Jones (one that is immeasurably superior), gives us a better idea of the state and ways of the people, than one could gather from any more pompous or authentic histories" (*Works* II, 98).

The following warm tribute to Dickens was also written in 1840:

"There seems no flagging as yet in it [i.e. in Dickens's countenance in Maclise's portrait — *LP*], no sense of fatigue, or consciousness of decaying power. Long mayest thou, O Boz! reign over thy comic kingdom; long may we pay tribute, whether of threepence weekly or of a shilling monthly, it matters not. Mighty prince! at thy imperial feet, Titmarsh, humblest of thy servants, offers his vows of loyalty and his humble tribute of praise" (*Works* II, 518).[34]

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[30] For his reference to Crummles see *Works* III, 175; for his declaration of love for this character see note 13 in the preceding sub-chapter, and *Works* X, 627, XVII, 598. For his later praises of the novel see *Works* X, 627 (where he reproduces the opinions of his daughter Anne, a passionate reader of *Nicholas Nickleby*).

[31] *Works* IV, 162. For a later praise of this character see *Works* X, 628.

[32] *Works* IV, 161.

[33] Op. cit., p. 28.

[34] See also the following comment in one of Thackeray's letters of 1840: "The new Boz [i.e. the first number of *Master Humphrey's Clock* — *LP*] is dull but somehow gives one a very pleasing impression of the man: a noble tender-hearted creature, who sympathizes with all the human race" (*Letters* I, 438).

That Thackeray's attacks upon Dickens in the years 1839 and 1840 were an exceptional phase in his attitude to his great contemporary and not the beginning of a deliberate campaign is, after all, most convincingly proved by the fact that when he had had his say in the Newgate controversy, he stored the sharp critical weapons he had used against Dickens in his armory and never took them out again. Although in his own words he "quarrelled" with Dickens's art, protested in his reviews of Dickens's Christmas stories against the novelist's propensity to exaggeration, to "animate inanimate objects, and make nature bear witness to the ludicrous or the tragical moral in the author's mind",[35] as he expressed it in his review of Horne's *A New Spirit of the Age,* rebuked him for not faithfully depicting nature (in the same reviews and in his letter to David Masson) and for assuming the office of a social reformer (in his review of Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve*), he recognized Dickens's genius and paid to it many grateful tributes, as for instance the following from *Charity and Humour:*

"I may quarrel with Mr. Dickens's art a thousand and a thousand times; I delight and wonder at his genius; I recognize in it — I speak with awe and reverence — a commission from that Divine Beneficence, whose blessed task we know it will one day be to wipe every tear from every eye. Thankfully I take my share of the feast of love and kindness, which this gentle, and generous, and charitable soul has contributed to the happiness of the world. I take and enjoy my share and say a Benediction for the meal" (*Works* X, 628).[36]

He also several times wrote of the affectionate hold Dickens's novels have taken of the English public, of the continual and confidential communion between the novelist and his readers, which is, as he points out, "something like personal affection", gratefully acknowledged that Dickens's books "have made millions of rich and poor happy" and thanked the novelist, for himself and for all his readers, for "the store of happy hours that he has made us pass, the kindly and pleasant companions whom he has introduced to us; the harmless laughter, the generous wit, the frank, manly, human love which he has taught us to feel". Increasingly with the advance of time he accepts with appreciation what was objectively not progressive in Dickens's art — the author's programme of class compromise — paying at the same time, however, warm tribute to the novelist's humanism. This is most clearly obvious in his lecture *Charity and Humour,* where he assesses Dickens exclusively as a tender humorist (ignoring, except for a short comment on the good influence of the critical depiction of Dotheboys Hall, Dickens's social criticism as well as his masterly satire which was at that time reaching its maturity), ranking him among those great writers (characteristically selecting Addison, Steele, Goldsmith, Hood, but also Fielding) who had done much in support of the holy cause "of love and charity, the cause of the poor, the weak, and the unhappy; the sweet mission of love and tenderness, and peace and good will towards men", again praising *A Christmas Carol* as the best "charity-sermon" ever preached in the world, thanking his great contemporary for the "multiplied kindnesses which he has conferred upon us all" and calling him a "kind friend, who soothed and charmed so many hours, brought pleasure and sweet laughter to so many homes; made such

[35] *Works* VI, 423.

[36] For similar tributes to Dickens's genius see *Letters* III, 407, 409, *Works* VI, 412, X, 464 (in the last reference he does not mention Dickens by name, but it is clear whom he has in mind).

multitudes of children happy; endowed us with such a sweet store of gracious thoughts, fair fancies, soft sympathies, hearty enjoyments".[37] He also emphasized that a novelist of so enormous a popularity should feel a great responsibility to his public, expressing this perhaps most convincingly in the following passage from *Mr. Brown's Letters to his Nephew:*

"Have you read *David Copperfield,* by the way? How beautiful it is — how charmingly fresh and simple! In those admirable touches of tender humour — and I should call humour, Bob, a mixture of love and wit — who can equal this great genius? There are little words and phrases in his books which are like personal benefits to the reader. What a place it is to hold in the affections of men! What an awful responsibility hanging over a writer! What man holding such a place, and knowing that his words go forth to vast congregations of mankind, — to grown folks — to their children, and perhaps to their children's children, — but must think of his calling with a solemn and humble heart! May love and truth guide such a man always! It is an awful prayer; may Heaven further its fulfilment!" (*Works* VIII, 290).

Thackeray wrote in warm words, too, of the specific quality of Dickens's art which in his opinion overweighed all the defects — "that wonderful sweetness & freshness" which none of the other novelists of his time possessed[38] — and of the fecundity of his imagination in which, as Thackeray sincerely confessed, his great contemporary greatly surpassed him.[39] One of the aspects of Dickens's art which Thackeray also greatly admired was the novelist's pathos. Thus for instance in 1847, after having read the chapter depicting the death of little Paul in *Dombey and Son,* he declared:

"There's no writing against such power as this — one has no chance! Read that chapter describing young Paul's death: it is unsurpassed — it is stupendous!"[40]

In one instance Thackeray applied even in his later years the ethical criterion to Dickens's art, but only to find the novelist's depictions irreproachable from the moral point of view; and to place them, in direct contradiction to his previous practice, high above those of the great realists of the 18th century, especially of Sterne:

"I think of these past writers and of one who lives amongst us now, and am grateful for the innocent laughter and the sweet and unsullied page which the author of *David Copperfield* gives to my children" (*Works* XIII, 671).

Throughout his whole life Thackeray also appreciated Dickens's capacity for creating lifelike characters, on which he wrote in 1844:

"What a noble, divine power this of genius is, which, passing from the poet into his reader's soul, mingles with it, and there engenders, as it were, real creatures, which is as strong as history, which creates beings that take their place by nature's own!" (*Works* VI, 413).

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[37] For the quotations in this paragraph see *Works* VI, 412—413 and X, 614, 626.

[38] *Letters* II, 773 (in the above-quoted letter to David Masson).

[39] See especially *Letters* III, 288.

[40] George Hodder, *Memoirs of my Time,* London, 1870, p. 277; quoted in *Letters* II, 267n. See also Dickens's reminiscence in his obituary article "In Memoriam", *The Cornhill Magazine,* IX, February 1864, p. 129, of how Thackeray once presented himself unexpectedly in his room "announcing how that some passage in a certain book [probably *Dombey and Son*] had made him cry yesterday, and how that he had come to dinner, 'because he couldn't help it', and must talk such passage over" (quoted by Ray in *The Age of Wisdom,* p. 138).

In his *Charity and Humour* he paid Dickens's characters in general the following tribute, strongly coloured by his moral point of view:

"There are creations of Mr. Dickens's which seem to me to rank as personal benefits; figures so delightful, that one feels happier and better for knowing them, as one does for being brought into the society of very good men and women. The atmosphere in which these people live is wholesome to breathe in; you feel that to be allowed to speak to them is a personal kindness; you come away better for your contact with them; your hands seem cleaner from having the privillege of shaking theirs" (*Works* X, 626).

As we have seen, Thackeray had among Dickens's characters several great favourites, to whom he remained faithful throughout his whole life. Besides Mrs. Nickleby and Crummles, among them were especially Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, of whom he wrote in 1844 in a reflection concerned with the question of Dickens's claims to immortal fame (denied to him by some critics), which he settles "by the ordinary historic method":

"Did not your great-great-grandfather love and delight in Don Quixote and Sancho Panza? Have they lost their vitality by their age? Don't they move laughter and awaken affection now as three hundred years ago? And so with Don Pickwick and Sancho Weller, if their gentle humours, and kindly wit, and hearty benevolent natures, touch us and convince us, as it were, now, why should they not exist for our children as well as for us, and make the twenty-fifth century happy as they have the nineteenth?" (*Works* VI, 414).[41]

Besides these characters he highly appreciated those of Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Harris from *Martin Chuzzlewit,* Mr. Peggotty, Mrs. Steerforth (hinting to Dickens that her relationship to her son was not unlike Thackeray's own mother's to him), Stiggins, Pecksniff and Chadband (whom he considered equally convincing types of hypocrites as Tartuffe and Joseph Surface),[42] and in *Charity and Humour,* besides his early favourites the Marchioness and Richard Swiveller, including also Oliver Twist and two characters he had formerly criticized, the Artful Dodger and "the chief of that illustrious family", "the accomplished, the Epicurean, the dirty, the delightful Micawber".[43] Even after 1858, when in consequence of the so-called Garrick Club Affair the friendly relationships between Thackeray and Dickens were for a few years replaced by enmity and when Thackeray transferred his attention from Dickens's work to his person and family life, he was still able to defend Dickens against the assaults of the *Saturday Review*[44] and to appreciate the novelist's marvellous art of creating characters to the detriment of his own:

"I am played out. All I can do now is to bring out my old puppets ... But, if he live to be ninety, Dickens will still be creating new characters. In his art that man is marvellous."[45]

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[41] For his other references to the two figures (or to one of them) see *Works* II, 423, 516, IV, 320—321, III, 257, VI, 322, 550, XI, 86, 885, XIII, 635; for a reference to Bob Sawyer see *Works* VI, 593.

[42] For his references to Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Harris see *Works* IX, 356, 345—346, X, 628; to Mr. Peggotty see *Letters* IV, 380n.; to Mrs. Steerforth see John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens,* London, 1928, p. 556, quoted in *The Uses of Adversity,* p. 111; to Stiggins see especially "Stiggins in New Zealand" (*Punch,* 1845) and *Works* X, 587, 615; to Pecksniff see *Punch,* vol. VII, 1844, No. 157, p. 32; to Chadband see *Works* X, 615 and *Punch,* vol. XXVII, 1854, p. 111.

[43] *Works* X, 628.

[44] See especially *Works* XVII, 423; see also note 28, Chapter III, part 1.

[45] Quoted by Hugh Kingsmill, *The Sentimental Journey,* Bristol, 1934, p. 169.

Only in one instance did he compare one of Dickens's characters with similar types created by himself and hinted that his own style was better:

"There's a bit from 'Hard Times' quoted in the Examiner to day; representing such a character [he has obviously in mind Mr. Bounderby, as Ray suggests[46] — *LP*] as I have drawn in several varieties [in Ray's opinion he is thinking of old Osborne — *LP*]: but I think I know whose the best English is of the 2 writers — I wonder there is not some young fellow come up to knock us both off the stage" (*Letters* III, 363).

Thackeray had also several favourites among Dickens's novels, as partly follows from the preceding. He especially liked *Pickwick Papers* (and always highly appreciated the Fleet Prison scenes as truthful to life and expressing the author's deep sympathy for the poor and unhappy[47]), loved *David Copperfield*, greatly estimated *Bleak House*, especially for its author's sharp attacks upon the Court of Chancery,[48] praised the story *The Holly-Tree* in the Christmas number of *Household Words* in 1855, characterized the third and fourth chapters of *Little Dorrit* as "a famous preface" and the whole novel as "capital", though the first two chapters seemed to him to be "dead stupid", praised *Pictures from Italy* and the poem "Ivy Green" from the sixth chapter of the *Pickwick Papers*.[49] The only work of Dickens which he assessed entirely negatively after 1840 were the *American Notes* which, both in his earlier opinion (before his visit to the United States) and in his later, from my viewpoint not entirely justifiable opinion, presented an entirely false and onesided depiction of the country and revealed Dickens's insufficient familiarity with it.[50] He was so generous to Dickens, however, that when he was asked to review the book for the *Edinburgh Review* (during that period of his life when his relationships with Dickens were very friendly), he refused the offer in the following words:

"I cannot praise it and I will not cut it up ... It is like the worst part of *Humphrey's Clock*, what is meant to be easy and sprightly is vulgar and flippant ... the book is at once frivolous and dull."[51]

As the analysis in this chapter and those parts of the preceding sub-chapters concerned with Thackeray's criticism of Dickens's Christmas stories and of Dickens as social reformer show, Thackeray's critical attitude to the work of his great contemporary went through a remarkable development. He was most sharply critical of his literary rival at the time of his critical campaign against the Newgate novelists and the producers of other fashionable works, when basic literary problems were at stake and when he was much concerned about the way in which his contemporaries handled the novel as a literary form. His

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[46] See *Letters* III, 363n.

[47] See *Works* I, 281, III, 187, IV, 132.

[48] See Melville, op. cit., II, 78; see also his positive evaluation of the character of Mr. Turveydrop in *Letters* III, 238, 251n. Mauskopf is then not in the right when he maintains that Thackeray's "only comment upon *Bleak House* concerns the popularity of that novel", i. e. the comment (quoted by Wilson, op. cit., I, 277) on the sale of the novel in the United States as compared with that of *The Newcomes* (see Mauskopf, op. cit., p. 32).

[49] For his comments on the works mentioned see *Letters* III, 537, 572; Una Pope-Hennessy, *Charles Dickens*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1946, p. 357; *Letters* III, 518—519, "Letters from a Club Arm-Chair", August 21, 1845, p. 233, *Letters* III, 10. For his reference to the Merdles see *Letters* III, 623.

[50] For his references to the *American Notes* see *Contributions*, 172, *Letters* III, 226.

[51] Quoted by Una Pope-Hennessy, op. cit., p. 182.

critical approach remained firm and principled throughout the following period to 1848, during which he disagreed with Dickens, in his reviews of the latter's Christmas stories, on some basic problems of the creation of literary character, but his critical weapons were not so sharp as they had been before. After this year, however, except for a short period of silence in consequence of the Garrick Club Affair, admiration and praise predominate over censure in his assessments of Dickens's art, these being of course this time predominantly informal. Our analysis also enables us to come to the conclusion that in all its stages it was a just criticism, though not always so clear-sighted (notably in his criticism of the "Newgate" part of *Oliver Twist*, of Dickens's "Christmas message" and of this novelist as social reformer) as to be fully acceptable at the present day. And it was also generous criticism, not motivated by Thackeray's jealousy of Dickens's popularity, as some Dickensian scholars in particular maintain[52] (though he was naturally not indifferent to the fact that his works never achieved such an enormous success as Dickens's did, as we know from his correspondence[53]). His sharp critical assaults were always more or less counterbalanced by words of sincere praise addressed to the great genius and talent of his contemporary, which were many a time pronounced to the detriment of his own art. Even the regrettable Garrick Club Affair and the ensuing feud between the two novelists, on which so much has been written by Dickensian and Thackerayan scholars detrimental to both sides in the conflict,[54] did not make him substantially change his views upon Dickens's art, as we have seen, even if it did make him look differently upon this novelist's personal character. I find myself therefore in agreement with Dr. Thrall who has pointed out that

> "The generosity of Thackeray toward his great rival has been almost a phenomenon in literary criticism, persisting as it did in spite of the bitter personal quarrel of the two men and the hot rivalry of their followers which divided England into hostile camps."[55]

As we have seen, Thackeray's judgments of Dickens's art are not based on any personal emotions, but on the basic principles of his aesthetics familiar to us from the preceding analysis of his criticism. He differed with Dickens especially, as Mauskopf expressed it, "in his fundamental conception of the nature of fiction", "believing that the function of the novelist was to attempt to record with the accuracy of an historian and from a moral view-point a balanced picture of society",[56] and therefore being unable to accept those depictions of Dickens in which this writer's presentation of moral values deviated from his own notions or those in which Dickens's exuberant imagination overstepped the boundaries within which, in the opinion of Thackeray, a novelist should keep. And we should also duly emphasize that even if he accused Dickens of exaggeration, he never went so far as some other critics of his time and of our own, who

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[52] See for instance the view of Edgar Johnson in the article quoted in note 54 below.

[53] For Thackeray's references to Dickens's greater popularity see especially *Letters* II, 258, 262, III, 119, 341; see also Wilson, op. cit., I, 277.

[54] See especially the articles in *PMLA:* Gordon N. Ray, "Dickens *versus* Thackeray, The Garrick Club Affair", vol. 69, 1954; Edgar Johnson, "The Garrick Club Affair", vol. 71, 1956; Gordon N. Ray, "Dickens *versus* Thackeray, The Garrick Club Affair", vol. 71, 1956. See also *Letters* I, cxx—cxxiii, *The Uses of Adversity*, pp. 285ff., *The Age of Wisdom*, pp. 276ff. (the last modified after Johnson's criticism).

[55] Op. cit., p. 75.

[56] Op. cit., p. 33.

have regarded Dickens's marvellous vividness of imagination "as almost akin to the hallucinations of madness" (Lewes, echoing Taine's essay on Dickens and, expressing this in similar but even stronger words, Praz) and consequently have condemned Dickens's personages as being rather puppets than characters (Lewes) or mere "mechanical playthings" (Praz) which in the opinion of the last-named scholar "lose all contact with reality and assume the sinister fixed, exasperated expressions of wax dolls", thus giving us "a foretaste of the Grand Guignol".[57]

II. THE ENGLISH REALISTIC FICTION OF THE 18TH CENTURY

Thackeray's critical opinions of the English realistic fiction of the 18th century in general and the novel in particular are worth special interest for several reasons. In the first place, it was a literature which he had been reading since his childhood and with which he was therefore intimately familiar, from the most famous classic novels and essays to the works of the second-rate imitators of the great classics, as well as the journalism and history of the period. He knew it so thoroughly, indeed, that he was able to imitate with remarkable success the literary style of the Queen Anne period in his *Esmond,* including a contribution to *The Spectator* in the same novel written in the style of Steele and, in *The Virginians,* a letter of Horace Walpole. And he was not only familiar with it, he also loved it (disagreeing here for instance with Jeffrey and in particular with Carlyle, but agreeing with Scott, Hazlitt, Hunt, and Dickens, among others). As a novelist, he was largely indebted to it, even if his mature art went beyond its influence, as we have seen before; an influence which nevertheless remained an integral part of his narrative mode. His first model undoubtedly was, as Loofbourow points out,[1] Fielding's heroic burlesque, and this Thackeray himself later confessed in a letter to James Hain Friswell, in which he pointed out some parallels between this writer's *Houses with the Fronts Off* and his own *Dr. Birch and his Young Friends* or other depictions of his school experiences in his works, and added:

> "I daresay you are no more aware of the resemblance, than I was, years ago, that I imitated Fielding: but on looking back lately at some of those early papers I saw whose the original manner was" (*Letters* III, 402).

As we have also seen, Fielding was his chief model when he wrote *Catherine* and *Barry Lyndon,* while Miss Touster and Professor Ernest A. Baker have shown[2] that many traces of Fieldingesque realism may be found in his *Yellowplush Papers,* and Miss Touster again and Loofbourow have found its traces in his great novels as well.[3] Fielding was not, of course, his only teacher in realism, satirical craftsmanship and ironic humour: though he obviously did not fully realize it himself, his creative approach had much in common with that of

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[57] For Lewes's views see "Dickens in Relation to Criticism", *The Fortnightly Review,* XI, n. s. (1872), pp. 144—149; see also Stang, op. cit., pp. 84—85; for the opinions of Mario Praz see op. cit., pp. 172—173, 155—156.

[1] See op. cit., p. 94.

[2] See Eva Beach Touster, op. cit., p. 389 (quoting, too, Ernest A. Baker).

[3] For the opinions of E. B. Touster see op. cit., pp. 389—394; for the analysis of Loofbourow see Chapter VI of op. cit.

Swift, however much he disliked the latter. This was pointed out by Taine, James Hannay, Bagehot, Percival Leigh and John W. Dodds.[4] Also the influence of Sterne played a very significant role in "the complex processes that prefigured the prose of *Vanity Fair*", as Loofbourow has shown, for Thackeray learned from Sterne, among other things, how to conduct his authorial commentary, a fact to which Mrs. Tillotson has drawn particular attention,[5] while the "conversational flexibility" and "rhythmic resources" of Sterne's narrative style enabled him, as Loofbourow has it, "to integrate diverse expressive textures in *Vanity Fair*".[6] A far from negligible factor in this process was, too, the elegant and refined diction of Addison and Steele, on which Thackeray modelled his style, learning from the essayists at the same time how to address the readers unobtrusively in the form of "informal chatting" and "roundabout" talking. Furthermore, not only did Thackeray love and find inspiration in the works of the 18th-century realists, he also used their art, as we have seen, as his critical standard for measuring the value of the productions of his own contemporaries.

Thackeray's criticism of the realistic fiction of the 18th century is worth separate treatment for yet another reason. It is the only literary *genre* to which he paid considerable critical attention even in the 1850s, when he had stopped working as a professional literary critic, and we may therefore demonstrate much better by his criticism in this particular sphere than by the criticism concerned with the fiction produced in his own time how his critical principles and opinions developed in this later period of his life and especially what changes they underwent.

When we survey his criticism as a whole, what strikes us in the first place is a decided change in the criteria which he applies in his assessments of the individual authors and works. Worth noticing are especially the changes in his conception of humour and satire which were gradually leading to his eventual dissociation from the satire of the highest degree. The first tentative signal of this development may be discerned even in some of the comments he made, as a reader, in the 1830s and 1840s, but only in the isolated case of one author — in his informal pronouncements on Jonathan Swift. The earliest evidence is his severe condemnation, in 1838, of Swift's "scandalously mean" strictures upon the Duke of Marlborough, in which in Thackeray's opinion the power of Swift's satire is displayed in the most disgusting form of lies and diabolical sneers, all the more condemnable in the critic's opinion on account of Swift's entertaining "the highest admiration"[7] for this military hero. The attitude Thackeray assumes in this early contribution of his is very remarkable, for his own view of Marl-

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[4] For the views of Taine see *History of English Literature*, trans. by H. Van Laun, 2 vols., A New Edition, Chatto & Windus, London, n. d., II, 374—375; for those of Hannay see "Thackeray on Swift", *Temple Bar*, 1867 (quoted by Dodds, op. cit., p. 185); for Bagehot's see *The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot*, 10 vols., Longmans, Green, and Co., London, IV, 265 ("Sterne and Thackeray", 1864); Leigh's views are quoted by Greig, op. cit., p. 46; for Dodds's views see op. cit., p. 185.

[5] For Mrs. Tillotson's analysis see *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, pp. 150, 252, 254; for the parallels pointed out by Bagehot (to whom Mrs. Tillotson also refers) see op. cit., IV, 257 and for those noticed by Ennis, see Lambert Ennis, *Thackeray: the Sentimental Cynic*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., 1950, pp. 15, 139.

[6] Op. cit., pp. 78—79.

[7] *Works* I, 83.

borough was far from enthusiastic, a fact to which I drew attention in my second chapter and which is clear from *Esmond*. It is not wholly inexplicable, however, for Thackeray especially resents Swift's attempts to attribute to this "hero of fifty battles" such negative traits of which he really could not be accused (cowardice and incompetency) and which are not to be found, either, among those attributed to him by Thackeray in his later novel. In Thackeray's other earlier contributions and works we find fairly copious marginal comments concerning the art of the great satirist, which prove that with the progress of time he came to look at Swift's satire with mixed feelings of distaste and admiration, with the former increasingly predominating over the latter. His comments show that he was able to feel and appreciate the great power of Swift's satire (for he used it more than once as his critical standard when measuring the satirical depictions created by his contemporaries, and characterized its creator, in his lecture of 1851, as "a vast genius, a magnificent genius, a genius wonderfully bright, and dazzling, and strong, — to seize, to know, to see, to flash upon falsehood and scorch it into perdition, to penetrate into the hidden motives, and expose the black thoughts of men"[8]), but that he found it too intense and venomous and therefore in his opinion not explicable otherwise than by being motivated by personal spite and reflecting the negative traits of the satirist's own personal character. In several of these comments Thackeray explicitly condemns Swift's satire as foul and morbid and denounces the satirist as a wicked old cynic, whose jokes are "like the fun of a demon".[9] His attitude is perhaps best expressed in the following remark, in which he commits a real injustice against the great writer, all the more glaring as he speaks in one breath of Swift's great satire and the ephemeral productions of Churchill, in which genuine satire is replaced by personal invectives:

> "One is apt to suspect the moralist whose indignation makes his verse or points his wit; one cannot tell how much of personal pique mars the truth of his descriptions, or how many vices or passions are painted after the happy ever-present model himself; and while we read Swift's satires of a sordid, brutal, and wicked age, or Churchill's truculent descriptions of the daring profligates of his time, we know the first to be black-hearted, wicked, and envious as any monster he represents, and have good reason to suspect the latter to be the dissolute ruffian whom he describes as a characteristic of his times. But the world *could* never be what the Dean painted as he looked at it with his furious, mad, glaring eyes; nor was it the wild drunken place which Churchill, reeling from a tavern, fancied he saw reeling round about him. We might as well take the word of a sot who sees four candles on the table where the sober man can only perceive two; or of a madman who peoples a room with devils that are quite invisible to the doctor" (*Works* V, 505—506).

In his informal critical judgments on other prose writers, however, as well as in his formal and informal criticism of Fielding of the 1830s and 1840s, these modifications of his conception of humour and satire cannot yet be discerned. As we have seen before, during his campaign against the Newgate novelists, Thackeray several times expressed his great admiration for Fielding's satirical mastery, especially as it is manifested in *Jonathan Wild*, used this novel as his critical standard, and imitated Fielding's approach in *Catherine* and *Barry Lyndon*. Also in several marginal comments in his other contributions published

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[8] *Works* XIII, 489; see also *Stray Papers*, pp. 125, 137n.

[9] *Works* VI, 570; see also ibid., pp. 329—330, *Works* V, 19, 505—506, IX, 162, *Letters* II, 553n.

in these two decades he highly assessed the power and sharpness of Fielding's satire. Thus for instance in his article on the Queen's *bal poudré* (*Punch*, 1845) he expresses his regret that Fielding and Hogarth cannot rise from their graves, for only they, he is convinced, could write an effective satire on the frivolity of the royal court of his time.[10] On the other hand, however, he also paid generous tribute to Fielding's sterling humour, pervaded with a warm sympathy for mankind, and ranked him among the few great "humourists" in world literature (alongside Shakespeare, Cervantes, Addison and Steele, Jean Paul, Sterne, Scott, and Dickens).[11] Thackeray's conception of humour is in this period still sufficiently wide to include, besides the humour of the writers mentioned in brackets, also the racy humour of Smollett, whose *Peregrine Pickle* was appreciated by him as "excellent for its liveliness and spirit and wonderful for its atrocious vulgarity",[12] and the simple, charming humour of Goldsmith.

The second of the above-mentioned changes concerns the mutual relationship between the ethical criterion and the other standards on which Thackeray bases his judgments. In the 1830s and 1840s he is more concerned with the relationship of the depictions of the 18th-century writers to reality itself than in the moral content and effect of their works. The moral evaluation is not wanting, but it is not in the foreground of his interest: he uses it only in his formal criticism of Fielding's works and, moreover, in a way markedly different from that characteristic of his later assessment of this novelist. The writers other than Swift and Fielding to whom he pays informal critical attention in this period (notably Smollett, Goldsmith, Addison and Steele, and Sterne[13]) are appreciated by him either as writers presenting in their works a truer and more instructive picture of human life than official historians (Smollett), or as great humorists (as we have seen above), or as great masters in creating lifelike characters (Smollett, Addison,[14] Steele and Goldsmith). Of the characters created by these writers he in this period mentions as his favourites, or as lifelike creations, Smollett's Humphrey Clinker and Roderick Random, Goldsmith's Beau Tibbs, Dr. Primrose and Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs,[15] and Addison's and Steele's Sir Roger de Coverley. Sterne in this period, apart from the references quoted, is scarcely mentioned at all and never significantly.[16]

Worthy of at least brief comment is Thackeray's attitude to Richardson at this time, for it essentially differs from his relationship to all the other writers so far mentioned. Except for using the name "Lovelace" as a common generic name for a rake and that of Charles Grandison for a correct gentleman, Thack-

[10] See Spielmann, op. cit., p. 121; see also *Stray Papers*, p. 125.

[11] See especially *Works* VI, 606—607; see also *Works* III, 383, *Letters* II, 249.

[12] *Letters* II, 144.

[13] Most of Thackeray's references to Defoe are insignificant and concern for the most part only the titular hero of *Robinson Crusoe*, often used by Thackeray as a symbol of solitariness. His references to Richardson will be considered below.

[14] Two of his comments (positive) concern Addison's quiet and refined sentiment and his style (see *Works* II, 648, I, 67).

[15] He even borrowed the name of the last-named personage for one of his pseudonyms in *Punch;* the surname is used to characterize a snobbish lady in the *Book of Snobs*. For his references to Goldsmith's characters in this period see *Works* II, 180, 340, III, 397, 542—543, V, 249, 511, VIII, 154, 298, IX, 373, XII, 105, *Stray Papers*, p. 293, Melville, op. cit., II, 69.

[16] For his references see *Works* II, 402, IV, 174, 179, V, 266, VI, 607, *Letters* II, 53, 584, Garnett, op. cit., p. 177, *The Cornhill Magazine*, July 1911, p. 11 ("Cockney Travels", written at the beginning of the 1840s).

eray refers to Richardson in the 1830s and 1840s very rarely and mostly negatively. He expresses, for instance, his resentment at the "painful accuracy" with which the novelist depicts "all the struggles and woes" of Clarissa and "all the wicked arts and triumphs of such scoundrels as Lovelace"[17] and refers scornfully to the novelist's art also in the following comment in his assessment of Lauder's picture:

"It is entirely unnatural, theatrical, of the Davidgian, nay, Richardsonian drama, and all such attempts at effect must be reprehended by the stern critic" (*Works* II, 624).

In his review of Fielding's works he dissociates himself from Richardson's disdainful attitude to *Amelia,* his own great favourite, and places himself on the side of Fielding in the notorious feud between the two novelists:

"It is a wonder how old Richardson, girded at as he had been by the reckless satirist — how Richardson, the author of *Pamela,* could have been so blinded by anger and pique as not to have seen the merits of his rival's exquisite performance" (*Works* III, 387).

On the other hand, however, he admitted, according to Melville, that *Clarissa* "had one of the best-managed surprises he had read".[18] His early critical judgments on Richardson are so scanty and general that Professor Greig might indeed be in the right in maintaining that they "were mainly, and perhaps completely, based on hearsay" and that Thackeray had not read Richardson's novels before he pronounced them.[19] This is partly confirmed by his own later confession that he did not read *Clarissa* until Macaulay expressed surprise at his ignorance,[20] which must have been sometime after 1849, for it was from that year that he was on excellent terms with the historian.

I have already pointed out that in his review of Fielding's works Thackeray does apply the ethical criterion, and I shall return to this point, but he pays considerable attention, too, to several other qualities of Fielding's art, though his evaluation is by no means exhaustive (he devotes too much space to *Amelia,* too little to *Tom Jones* and almost none to *Joseph Andrews*). He highly appreciates the novels of his predecessor for presenting to the reader "a strong, real picture of human life" and "the whole truth about human nature",[21] that is, the very things which he most sorely missed in the productions of the Newgate novelists. Referring to the evaluation of Dr. Beattie, he devotes much attention, too, to Fielding's masterly composition, characterizing the author of *Tom Jones* as "one of the most minute and careful artists that ever lived" and this novel "as the most astonishing production of human ingenuity".[22] I can find myself in agreement with Clapp, in whose opinion this early paper on Fielding is not inspired, but "is soundly appreciative and for Thackeray an unusually pure piece of criticism, in this respect at least superior to the later lecture in the *English Humourists*".[23] Also Thackeray's informal judgments on Fielding, pronounced in the indicated period, are predominantly concerned with other

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[17] *Works* III, 359.
[18] Op. cit., I, 179.
[19] Op. cit., p. 134.
[20] See *Works* XVII, 364.
[21] For the quotations see *Works* III, 385, 386.
[22] For the quotations see *Works* III, 389.
[23] "Critic on Horseback", p. 289.

aspects of the novelist's works than their moral content and effect. In several of his remarks Thackeray highly appreciates the faithfulness of Fielding's picture of life and society and includes him among those great literary masters whose works possess a very great instructive value, greater than regular history.[24] Some of his comments are also devoted to the appreciation of Fielding's remarkable art of characterization — Thackeray compares Fielding's characters to historical personages and expresses his conviction that the former are more real than the latter, very often using Fielding's personages (other than Jonathan Wild) as his critical standard for measuring characters created by other novelists, as we have seen *passim* in the preceding chapters.

An inseparable part of Thackeray's evaluation of Fielding in his review of this novelist's works is moral assessment, as we have seen, but the ethical criterion is not used by him as an instrument for condemning the author or his novels. On the contrary, he highly appreciates the "philosophy" of *Amelia,* quoting the words of Dr. Harrison to the effect that the nature of man is essentially good, abounding with "benevolence and charity, and pity, coveting praise and honour, and shunning shame and disgrace", and that it is only bad education and bad habits that "drive it headlong into vice". In his opinion those readers who "have a mind to forgive a little coarseness, for the sake of one of the honestest, manliest, kindest companions in the world, cannot, as we fancy, find a better than Fielding, or get so much true wit and shrewdness from any other writer of our language". He finds in Fielding's novels many "wise and practical" virtues, which "shine out by their contrasts with the vices which he paints so faithfully, as they never could have done if the latter had not been depicted as well as the former", so that the reader "cannot read it and imitate it too much".[25]

In his review Thackeray clearly still adhered to Fielding's own conception of the literary character as a "mixed" human being, for he finds nothing amiss in Fielding's heroes from the moral point of view, realizing that they are full-blooded people with both human foibles and good qualities, who occasionally err, but seek their way to amendment. Of Captain Booth he for instance writes:

"His vices, even, if we may say so, are those of a man; there is nothing morbid or mawkish in any of Fielding's heroes; no passionate pleas in extenuation, such as one finds in the pseudo-moral romances of the sentimental character; no flashy excuses like those which Sheridan puts forward (unconsciously, most likely) for those brilliant blackguards who are the chief characters of his comedies. Vice is never to be mistaken for virtue in Fielding's honest downright books; it goes by its name, and invariably gets its punishment" (*Works* III, 390).

At this time of life he had no serious reservations, either, as to the character type of Tom Jones, in whom, as in Booth, the negative traits of character (mostly concerning sexual behaviour) stand out more conspicuously than in the other "mixed" characters created by Fielding:

"He tries to give you, as far as he knows it, the whole truth about human nature: the good and the evil of his characters are both practical. Tom Jones sins, and his faults are described with a curious accuracy, but then follows the repentance which comes out of his very sins, and that surely is moral and touching. Booth goes astray (we do verily believe that many persons even in these days are not altogether pure), but how good his remorse is! Are persons who profess to take the likeness of human nature to make an accurate

[24] See *Works* II, 98, 182, VI, 340—341.
[25] For the quotations see *Works* III, 390, 384, 385—386.

portrait? This is such a hard question, that, think as we will, we will not venture to say what we think. Perhaps it is better to do as Hannibal's painter did, and draw only that side of the face which has not the blind eye. Fielding attacked it in full. Let the reader, according to his taste, select the artist who shall give a likeness of him, or only half a likeness" (*Works* III, 386).

As this quotation confirms, in this earlier piece of criticism Thackeray does not apply to Tom Jones the principle that virtue and vice should not be mingled in one character, the principle on which he based his criticism of the "heroes" of the Newgate romances and of the criminal characters in *Oliver Twist,* nor does he insist, as he did in his attacks upon Bulwer and the rest, that such creations exercise a harmful influence upon the morals of the readers. Worth noticing in this connection is also his evaluation of the subsidiary characters in *Amelia,* not so "beautiful" as the heroine, as he says, "but not less admirably true to nature" — Mrs. James, Mrs. Matthews, Mr. James and Mr. Bath. According to Thackeray all these characters display their creator's "admirable knowledge of the world" and those who take the trouble to think may draw from them a very wholesome moral. Of especial interest is the following comment on Fielding's approach to these "mixed" characters:

"But what is especially worthy of remark is the masterly manner in which the author paints the good part of those equivocal characters that he brings upon his stage: James has his generosity, and his silly wife her good nature; Matthews her starts of kindness; and old Bath, in his sister's dressing-gown, cooking possets for her, is really an amiable object, whom we like while we laugh at him. A great deal of tenderness and love goes along with this kind of laughter, and it was this mixed feeling that our author liked so to indulge himself, and knew so well how to excite in others. Whenever he has to relate an action of benevolence, honest Fielding kindles as he writes it: some writers of fiction have been accused of falling in a passion with their bad characters; these our author treats with a philosophic calmness; it is when he comes to the good that he grows enthusiastic; you fancy that you see the tears in his manly eyes, nor does he care to disguise any of the affectionate sympathies of his great simple heart. This is a defect in art, perhaps, but a very charming one" (*Works* III, 391—392).

As follows from the above, in this period of his life Thackeray had much sympathy for all the "mixed" beings created by Fielding, whether their role in the novel was decisive or less significant. Worth noticing, too, is the way in which he grapples with the accusations of immorality levelled at Fielding's novels by Victorian society, shifting the blame to the society of the novelist's time. In the often quoted long passage "The world does not tolerate now such satire as that of Hogarth and Fielding . . ." he accuses the Victorian reading public of hypocrisy, and though he partly identifies himself with this society by praising the wisdom of its prudery, his identification is at this time of his life by no means complete, as the conclusion of the passage suggests:

"It is wise that the public modesty should be as prudish as it is; that writers should be forced to chasten their humour, and when it would play with points of life and character which are essentially immoral, that they should be compelled, by the general outcry of incensed public propriety, to be silent altogether. But an impartial observer, who gets some little of his knowledge of men from books, and some more from personal examination of them, knows pretty well that Fielding's men and Hogarth's are Dickens's and Cruikshank's, drawn with ten times more skill and force, only the latter humourists dare not talk of what the elder discussed honestly" (*Works* III, 385).

We may see then that Thackeray's attitude to Fielding in the 1830s and 1840s substantially differs in all points from that of Johnson, the originator of the

doctrine of the "unmixed" literary character and the critic who looked upon the novel first and foremost in terms of its effect on young people. Johnson's doctrine was in the first place directed against the "mixed" character of Tom Jones, as I have mentioned before, and he used it as his main argument in his attempt, as Mayo formulates it, "to establish Richardson's higher claim to truth" in the realm of character and to defend *Clarissa* against its detractors.[26] Mayo has also demonstrated that it was the post-Johnsonian school of purely didactic critics who saw in the novel of their time (with the single exception of the productions of Richardson) a public disaster and an "instrument of debauchery", and who sharply criticized Fielding and Sterne in the name of youth. Their critical practice thus entirely diverged from the literary theory and practice of Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, and it was they who were guilty of the gradual dimming of Fielding's reputation by accusations of "lowness", immorality and indecency. In one respect so far not mentioned, however, Thackeray's standpoint does approach that of the post-Johnsonian critics even in the period we are dealing with. Much space in his review of Fielding's works is devoted to the assessment of the personal character of the novelist and in this respect — though not deliberately — Thackeray is not entirely just to his great predecessor. As Cross points out,[27] he allowed himself to be influenced by the biographical introduction to the edition he reviewed, written by the editor Thomas Roscoe, accepting it as genuine authority, and painted a fictitious portrait of Fielding as a young man with "very loose morals indeed", who "led a sad, riotous life, and mixed with many a bad woman in his time". On the other hand, however, he dissociates himself from Walpole's criticism of Fielding for indulging in low company, pointing out that Walpole's letters are "not a whit more moral" than Fielding's novels and that "Lord Chesterfield's model of a man" might have been perhaps more polite, but was not so honest as Tom Jones and Will Booth.[28] Thackeray was also generous enough to find many positive traits in Fielding's character which amply redeem these alleged weaknesses in his eyes: especially Fielding's personal honesty, his sincere and manful philosophy, his devotion to his family and the courage with which he fought against adverse circumstances. Upon the whole, Thackeray's early attitude to Fielding seems to me to be very near to that of Hazlitt and not far either from the views of Scott and Coleridge, especially with regard to his admiration of the masterly composition of *Tom Jones.*

In the 1850s the modifications in Thackeray's conception of humour and satire reach their final stage of development (though only in his theory and criticism, not yet in his imaginative works) and a decided shift takes place in the relationship of his ethical criterion to the other critical standards. Thackeray's modified conception of humour and satire is for the first time consistently applied in his *Lectures on the English Humourists,* where the author also presents his new conception of the role of the humorous writer, a conception which indicates, as Loomis has pointed out, "how moral 'humor' had become".[29] For the second time he applies it consistently in his lecture *Charity and Humour,*

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[26] See op. cit., p. 99.
[27] See Wilbur Cross, *The History of Henry Fielding,* 3 vols., New Haven 1918, III, 213.
[28] For the quotations see *Works* III, 386, 387, 384.
[29] Op. cit., p. 14.

where he presents his new definition of humour as "love and wit" (used by him once before, as we have seen, in *Mr. Brown's Letters to his Nephew*), characterizing the best humour as "that which contains most humanity, that which is flavoured throughout with tenderness and kindness".[30] Both this conception and definition, as well as his selection of the authors he assesses in these lectures and his critical evaluation of them clearly show that at this period of his life Thackeray came to a complete identification of satire with humour. I have touched upon this problem in my study of his aesthetics (referring in particular to the conclusions of G. N. Ray and V. V. Ivasheva) and since that time it has in my opinion been very penetratingly treated by Loomis, especially in the following passage:

"Gordon Ray believes that Thackeray redefined the word 'humorous' in his lectures on the so-called humorists of the eighteenth century, but Tave's *The Amiable Humorist* shows that Thackeray was not original in these lectures; rather he crystallized the contemporary sentimental, anti-satiric attitude towards the comic modes. The word 'humor' is the key to Thackeray's lectures. By the middle of the century it was almost generic and denoted virtually all forms of comedy, but it connoted only tender-hearted 'amiable' humor, and around it were clustered a complex of positive moral values ... Thus the very title of Thackeray's lectures, although apparently a neutral statement of subject, actually contains latent judgments in the word 'humourists'. It is obvious that some will pay when such various writers as Congreve, Swift, Steele, Sterne, and Goldsmith are all linked together under one term."[31]

As Loomis also rightly points out, it is naturally Swift in particular who suffers — "he is roped into the lectures as a humorist, then is berated because he does not fulfill the requirements of humor as Thackeray had defined it."[32] Thackeray is guilty of several grave injustices towards the great satirist, with most of which we are already acquainted from his earlier informal judgments, but which are all the more glaring here, where he devotes to Swift much more detailed attention. In the first place, in harmony with the general purpose of his lectures (which he formulates most clearly in his lecture on Gay[33]), Thackeray devotes much space to the satirist's life and his personal character, and though in this particular case he is not entirely in the wrong as to individual points, the general picture of Swift the man which emerges from his lecture is painted in too sombre colours, which fail to do full justice to the original. Influenced to a great extent by Johnson and Walpole, Thackeray measures not only Swift's personal character, but unfortunately also his genius, by an entirely erroneous standard for which he was sharply criticized by Carlyle,[34] namely whether he would like to live with the satirist and be his friend. His answer is negative: he presents Swift as a man who bullied, scorned and insulted his friends, who was immensely revengeful, never forgot an insult and paid it

[30] *Works* X, 616.
[31] Op. cit., p. 14.
[32] Ibid.
[33] "Our object in these lectures is rather to describe the men than their works; or to deal with the latter only in as far as they seem to illustrate the character of their writers" (*Works* XIII, 590—591).
[34] Carlyle, after a conversation between him and Thackeray on the character of Swift, made the following pronouncement, recorded by George Venables: "I wish I could persuade Thackeray that the test of greatness in a man is not whether he (Thackeray) would like to meet him at a tea-party" ("Carlyle's Life in London", *The Fortnightly Review*, XLII, 1884, 605; quoted in *Letters* I, cix).

back "with a coward's blow and a dirty bludgeon", who servilely fawned upon people from whom he could expect some profit, his servility being so boisterous "that it looked like independence".[35] In the last point he goes beyond even Johnson, who for all his intense dislike of Swift positively evaluated the position of equality, independence and disinterestedness which he preserved in his intercourse with high political personages.[36] The key to Swift's personality is seen by Thackeray in his morbid and unsatiated ambition, and though he finds some apologies for Swift's desire to excel in society and in the Church in the generally disordered condition of the times he lived in, he is less than just to the great master of satire when he compares him to a highwayman who waits in vain for the "coach with the mitre and crosier in it" and when told that it has taken a different road, "he fires his pistols into the air with a curse, and rides away into his own country", and even more so by expressing his satisfaction that fate wrested the prize out of the talons of this bird of prey, who was enchained and whose mighty wings were clipped (though he does not gaze "at the lonely eagle chained behind the bars" "without awe and pity").[37]

Thackeray is even less just to Swift than was Johnson in his evaluation of him as a clergyman. Although on the one hand he points out that Swift was a reverent and pious spirit and adored Heaven with "real wonder, humility, and reverence", on the other hand he lays great stress upon his scepticism and apostasy, characterizing his professional life as "a lifelong hypocrisy" before Heaven and describing Swift as a man who was stifled in his cassock, strangled in his bands and went "through life, tearing, like a man possessed with a devil". Of his evaluation of Swift's life and personal character I can accept without reservations only his assessments of the years spent in Sir William Temple's house, of the personality of Swift's patron and their mutual relationship, of Swift's love for Stella, which in Thackeray's eyes redeems many of the satirist's personal defects, and his account of the last years of Swift's life, an account pervaded by genuine emotion and deep sympathy, though losing much of its value by the additional comment that Swift "deserved so to suffer".[38]

Thackeray's views on Swift's personal character unfortunately exercised a very baneful influence upon his evaluation of the satirist's work, which is consequently biased and almost entirely unjust. It is based on Thackeray's conviction that the key to Swift's savage indignation is not to be found in "a deliberate conviction of mankind's unworthiness, and a desire to amend them by castigating",[39] but in his desire for power and his predatory instincts. It is interesting, however, that he himself obviously does not find this interpretation entirely satisfactory and that he is disturbed by the whole problem, as the following comment suggests:

"What had this man done? what secret remorse was rankling at his heart? what fever was boiling in him, that he should see all the world bloodshot? We view the world with

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[35] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 474.

[36] See Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets.* With Critical Observations on Their Works, 2 vols., Glasgow, London, Edinburgh, MDCCCXXXIX, II, 170, 188—189.

[37] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 475, 478.

[38] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 489—490; see also *Letters* II, 800.

[39] *Works* XIII, 477.

our own eyes, each of us; and we make from within us the world we see. A weary heart gets no gladness out of sunshine; a selfish man is sceptical about friendship, as a man with no ear doesn't care for music. A frightful self-consciousness it must have been, which looked on mankind so darkly through those keen eyes of Swift" (*Works* XIII, 496).

Seeking for an explanation of Swift's satiric achievement exclusively in the satirist's personal psychology, Thackeray is naturally unable to do justice to the writer's individual works. *A Tale of a Tub,* one of the most masterly compositions in English literature, as Hazlitt evaluated it,[40] is in his opinion a "wild" book, the famous *Drapier's Letters* cannot according to him be called patriotic, for even if they are "masterpieces of dreadful humour and invective" and are "reasoned logically enough too", their proposition "is as monstrous and fabulous as the Lilliputian island" — "one admires not the cause so much as the strength, the anger, the fury of the champion". Thackeray entirely misunderstood, too, Swift's cruel and mordant satire in the *Modest Proposal:* in his opinion it was motivated by the satirist's hatred of children and exposes, by the sarcastic method, "the unreasonableness of loving and having children". He therefore absolutely failed to see or appreciate the wide social range of this satire and accused Swift of entering "the nursery with the tread and gaiety of an ogre".[41] The very thing which makes this satire so telling — the consistency of Swift's irony — is denounced by him in the following words:

"And taking up this pretty joke, as his way is, he argues it with perfect gravity and logic. He turns and twists this subject in a score of different ways: he hashes it; and he serves it up cold; and he garnishes it; and relishes it always ... Amiable humourist! laughing castigator of morals!" (*Works* XIII, 491—492).

Thackeray does find some positive qualities in *Gulliver's Travels,* notably the "grave and logical conduct" of the proposition, the outcome of which is the occasional marvellous strokes of humour, just, honest and noble satire and perfect images, and yet he utterly rejects the moral of the book as "horrible, shameful, unmanly, blasphemous", going so far as to say that "giant and great as this Dean is, I say we should hoot him".[42] It is true that he comprehends that Swift's satire is directed against pettiness, cruelty, pride, vanity, foolish pretension, mock greatness, pompous dullness, mean aims and base successes, but he fails to see that the assaults of the satirist are aimed at the society in which he lived and not upon the whole of mankind. In his opinion, very near for instance to that of Scott and essentially different from that of Hazlitt,[43] the meaning of Swift's "dreadful allegory" is that the whole of mankind is worthless, that man in general is "utterly wicked, desperate, and imbecile, and his passions are so monstrous, and his boasted powers so mean, that he is and deserves to be the slave of brutes, and ignorance is better than his vaunted reason". As this statement suggests, Thackeray's deepest indignation was aroused by the last book of Swift's work, which he utterly rejects as filthy, obscene, and absolutely immoral. He is especially horrified at the thought "that Swift knew the tendency of his creed — the fatal rocks towards which his logic desperately drifted" and

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[40] See *English Poets,* p. 146.
[41] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 491, 492, 491.
[42] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 492, 496.
[43] For Scott's views see Margaret Ball, op. cit., pp. 69—70; for Hazlitt's see especially *English Poets,* pp. 148, 150.

that the "last part of Gulliver is only a consequence of what has gone before".[44] Unable to penetrate beneath the surface of Swift's Yahoos, and to understand that these figures not only reflect the satirist's distaste for the normal functions of the human organism, but at the same time caricature the vices of the social organism of Swift's time, as Anikst has suggested,[45] he identified them entirely with their creator:

"It is Yahoo language; a monster gibbering shrieks, and gnashing imprecations against mankind — tearing down all shreds of modesty, past all sense of manliness and shame; filthy in word, filthy in thought, furious, raging, obscene" (*Works* XIII, 496).

Of Swift's works Thackeray accepts without any reservations only the *Journal to Stella,* as a monument of "the brightest part of Swift's story", declaring that he has read a great deal of "sentimental reading" in his time, but that he knows of "nothing more manly, more tender, more exquisitely touching, than some of these brief notes, written in what Swift calls 'his little language' in his journal to Stella". Apart from his lecture he refers with approbation to Swift's *Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation,* as an interesting document of "the amusements and occupations of persons of fashion in London"[46] in Swift's time, and also the *Directions to Servants,* which he uses, as we have seen, as his critical standard in evaluating Jerrold's Christmas book.

In spite of all his serious critical reservations and prejudiced assaults on Swift, however, Thackeray was able to do justice to other positive qualities of the satirist's art besides those mentioned above: to the elaborate and grave simplicity, wise thrift and economy, and perfect neatness of Swift's style. The following tribute is often quoted as proof of Thackeray's capacity for appreciating genius even in writers whom he did not personally like:

"An immense genius: an awful downfall and ruin. So great a man he seems to me, that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling. We have other great names to mention — none, I think, however, so great or so gloomy" (*Works* XIII, 505).

Thackeray continued to assess Swift along the lines indicated and in the same spirit in his later years, whether in marginal comments, through the medium of his depiction of the satirist as one of the subsidiary characters in *Esmond,* or in his lecture *Charity and Humour.* The analysis of his critical attitude to Swift enables me to come to the conclusion that at no stage of his critical and literary career was he an entirely unprejudiced and objective critic of his great predecessor. Although both his early and late judgments are in fact based upon objective criteria — the basic principles of a realistic aesthetics — they are too strongly coloured by subjective feelings, especially by his distaste for the satirist's personal character and for those aspects of his art which in Thackeray's opinion reflected Swift's individual psychology. In the 1830s and 1840s, however, this distaste did not reveal itself in such strength as it did in the following decade, for in this later period Thackeray not only paid more detailed attention to Swift's work, but also applied to it a definitively crystallized conception of humour and satire. Because of the undoubted parallels between his

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[44] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 496.

[45] See A. Anikst, *Istoriya angliyskoy literaturi,* Gosudarstvennoye uchebno-pedagogicheskoye izdatel'stvo Ministerstva prosveshcheniya RSFSR, Moskva 1956, p. 156.

[46] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 498, 573.

own aesthetic relationship to reality, especially in the works of the 1830s and 1840s, and that of Swift, the injustice he commits to his predecessor, among whose successors he was the most gloomy and among whose disciples he was the first, as Taine has it,[47] presents a striking paradox which has always attracted the attention of Thackerayan scholars, who have tried to explain it in various ways. Of the explanations offered, those of Dodds and Ivasheva seem to me most adequate. The former scholar (obviously partly inspired by the earlier evaluation of Saintsbury[48]) finds the cause of Thackeray's negative attitude to Swift in his being frightened (as the novelist himself declared in his lecture on Addison[49]) by the truth presented by his predecessor:

"'Frightens one!' Is this the reason Thackeray was so hard on Swift? In his early years Thackeray had done his share of cutting and slashing, penetrating the follies and hypocrisies of men less mordantly than Swift but with a similar disillusion. Now he had mellowed, and the native benignity and the relish for life which had never been Swift's portion had softened the satirist. But it is possible that he had a dim, almost unacknowledged recognition of at least a potential kinship with Swift and that the latter led him to brinks towards which his own inclination had drawn him in dark hours, but of which what was mild and healthy in his nature did not approve."[50]

In my opinion, however, Dodds does not present an adequate explanation of the causes which brought about the eventual change of Thackeray from the slashing to the milder satirist, for these should be sought, as I have pointed out in my study on Thackeray's aesthetic ideas, in a much wider context than that which Dodds investigates — namely in the general development of Thackeray's philosophy of life and aesthetic creed during the later period of his literary career, determined and conditioned not only by the improved circumstances of his private and professional life, but also by the changing political and social climate in his country, a development which eventually resulted in his entering into a compromise with the social milieu which he formerly so sharply indicted in his satirical depictions. As a critic who identified himself in his lectures, as Loomis has shown, with "the Victorian anti-satiric spirit",[51] and as a novelist who precisely now took the first steps towards reconciliation with society by gradually retreating from sharp social satire in his fiction, Thackeray must have found Swift's satire too cruel and uncompromising, though he could not have remained entirely indifferent, as Ivasheva emphasizes, to the immense genius of the greatest master in satire who had appeared in English literature before him and whose art shared many common traits with that he himself had produced in the preceding years of his literary career.[52]

There is yet another novelist who suffers, as Swift does, when forced into the narrow limits of Thackeray's modified conception of humour and satire — Henry Fielding — though this has so far been noticed only by Professor Ivasheva. Whereas in the earlier decades, as we have seen, Thackeray paid much attention to Fielding's satirical skill and evaluated it highly, the Fielding who emerges from his lectures and individual statements of the 1850s and 1860s

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[47] See op. cit., II, 374—375.
[48] See *A Consideration of Thackeray*, p. 203.
[49] See *Works* XIII, 523.
[50] Op. cit., pp. 185—186.
[51] Op. cit., p. 14.
[52] See op. cit., 296.

is predominantly a genial humorist, in whom he admires, above all, the qualities of mercifulness, pity, kindness and benevolence.[53] It is true that in his lecture Thackeray does appreciate Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* as a "wonderful satire" and praises his "admirable natural love of truth, the keenest instinctive antipathy to hypocrisy, the happiest satirical gift of laughing it to scorn".[54] But these rare remarks cannot substantially correct his general portrait of Fielding as a kind-hearted, humane, even if dissipated novelist, a portrait, behind which, as Ivasheva points out, the satirist Fielding, from whom Thackeray learned his craft, disappears.[55]

There are, however, some writers who do not suffer by being roped into the lectures as humorists and even some who gain the doubtful prize of being praised beyond their merits because they fulfil Thackeray's requirements. One of those who do not suffer is Smollett, to whose novels Thackeray devotes only a few lines, for in harmony with the conception of his lectures he pays much more attention to the novelist's life and personal character (describing both with great sympathy). Even within this limited space, however, Thackeray evaluates Smollett's art justly. He rightly sees Smollett's works as being firmly rooted in the novelist's personal experiences and recollections, and positively assesses the keen perceptive faculty and the "wonderful relish and delightful broad humour" with which this writer, who "did not invent much",[56] described what he saw and experienced. Of Smollett's characters he most highly appreciates that of Tom Bowling, who is indeed a delightful humorous portrait, and of his novels, *Humphrey Clinker*, which is by common consent Smollett's best work:

"The novel of *Humphry Clinker* is, I do think, the most laughable story that has ever been written since the goodly art of novel-writing began. Winifred Jenkins and Tabitha Bramble must keep Englishmen on the grin for ages to come; and in their letters and the story of their loves there is a perpetual fount of sparkling laughter, as inexhaustible as Bladud's well' (*Works* XIII, 643).[57]

In his evaluation of Goldsmith, too, Thackeray shows himself to be predominantly a just critic. He reveals even greater sympathy for this writer's personal character and hard life than he did for those of Smollett and pays generous tribute to the art of "the most beloved of English writers",[58] appreciating those positive qualities which it did possess and which at the same time remarkably well fulfilled the demands Thackeray made on humorous writing in this period of his life — its pastoral simplicity and sentimental idyllism, its charm and tenderness:

"What is the charm of his verse, of his style, and humour? His sweet regrets, his delicate compassion, his soft smile, his tremulous sympathy, the weakness which he owns? Your love for him is half pity. You come hot and tired from the day's battle, and this sweet minstrel sings to you. Who could harm the kind vagrant harper? Whom did he ever hurt? He carries no weapon — save the harp on which he plays to you; and with which he delights great and humble, young and old, the captains in the tents, or the soldiers round

[53] See *Works* XIII, 646, 653, X, 615, XVII, 457, XV, 288.
[54] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 621, 646; see also X, 622, XIII, 737.
[55] See op. cit., p. 298.
[56] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 643.
[57] For some of his later comments on Smollett, written in the same spirit and tone, see *Works* XVII, 471, *Letters* IV, 186; for references to Smollett's characters see *Works* XV, 906, XVII, 450, 620, XIV, 171, XVII, 487, XIII, 628.
[58] *Works* XIII, 671.

the fire, or the women and children in the villages, at whose porches he stops and sings his simple songs of love and beauty. With that sweet story of the *Vicar of Wakefield,* he has found entry into every castle and every hamlet in Europe. Not one of us, however busy or hard, but once or twice in our lives has passed an evening with him, and undergone the charm of his delightful music" (*Works* XIII, 672—674).

Although in this passage Thackeray to a certain extent succumbs to the influence of the traditional way of regarding Goldsmith as a writer who for his impracticality and lack of strength needed the protection of the critic and the reader, and treats him rather condescendingly (for which he is reprehended by Louis I. Bredvold[59]), he never shared the views of such adverse critics as were Boswell and Walpole, who characterized Goldsmith as a blockhead or even idiot, and underestimated his work, dissociating himself from Boswell's depreciatory references to him[60] and being to a large degree able to discern in Goldsmith's art even some positive values other than sensibility and humour — its humanitarian and democratic spirit. As the following comment adjoined to his quotation from "The Deserted Village" shows, he realized that Goldsmith's ideas about the ideal organization of society were utopian, yet he writes about them with sympathy:

"In these verses, I need not say with what melody, with what touching truth, with what exquisite beauty of comparison — as indeed in hundreds more pages of the writings of this honest soul — the whole character of the man is told — his humble confession of faults and weakness; his pleasant little vanity, and desire that his village should admire him; his simple scheme of good in which everybody was to be happy — no beggar was to be refused his dinner — nobody in fact was to work much, and he to be the harmless chief of the Utopia, and the monarch of the Irish Yvetôt" (*Works* XIII, 684—685).

In the conclusion of his lecture Thackeray speaks with deep feeling about "the wonderful and unanimous response of affection with which the world has paid back the love he gave it" and ends his evaluation with the following words:

"His humour delighting us still: his song fresh and beautiful as when first he charmed with it: his words in all our mouths: his very weaknesses beloved and familiar — his benevolent spirit seems still to smile upon us: to do gentle kindnesses: to succour with sweet charity: to soothe, caress, and forgive: to plead with the fortunate for the unhappy and the poor" (*Works* XIII, 688).

Thackeray's evaluation of Goldsmith is in its essential points near to that of Hazlitt, though it is not so penetrating (in one instance we might even speak of direct derivation[61]); nor is it far from that of Carlyle.

Addison gains much by being included in the lectures as a humorist, for Thackeray places him above Swift and Fielding as a "gentle satirist" whose humour does not frighten him but arouses in him the feelings of contentment and calm happiness:

"It is as a Tatler of small talk and a Spectator of mankind, that we cherish and love him, and owe as much pleasure to him as to any human being that ever wrote. He came

[59] See *Dějiny anglické literatury* (*A History of English Literature,* ed. Hardin Craig, Oxford University Press, New York, 1950), 2 vols., trans. Eva Masnerová and Zdeněk Stříbrný, ed. Zdeněk Vančura, SNKLU Praha, 1963, II, 95.

[60] See *Works* XIII, 685n. (the footnote is by Hannay, but Thackeray would certainly not have included it in his lectures, if he had not agreed with the opinion expressed).

[61] See Hazlitt's statement that Goldsmith "could copy nothing that he did not adorn with the graces of his own mind" (*English Poets,* p. 160), and a similar comment of Thackeray in *Works* XIII, 682.

in that artificial age, and began to speak with his noble, natural voice. He came, the gentle satirist, who hit no unfair blow; the kind judge who castigated only in smiling. While Swift went about, hanging and ruthless — a literary Jeffries — in Addison's kind court only minor cases were tried: only peccadilloes and small sins against society: only a dangerous libertinism in tuckers and hoops; or a nuisance in the abuse of beaux' canes and snuff-boxes" (*Works* XIII, 534—536).

It is obvious that Addison's (and Steele's) mild and benignant satire, which did not probe any deeper than to petty offences in social manners and ignored the flagrant social abuses lying underneath, better fitted Thackeray's modified conception of humour and satire than Swift's more deeply penetrating satirical lancet. It is therefore not surprising that he evaluates Addison as "one of the kindest benefactors that society has ever had", a great genius and most distinguished wit and scholar, "the most delightful talker in the world".[62] He also compares Addison as a man to Swift, to the detriment of the great satirist. While he hates Swift (and Sterne) as renegades and traitors to their profession as clergymen, as he expressed it in one of his letters,[63] he extols Addison as "one of the finest gentlemen the world ever saw" and a genuine Christian, and it is especially the Christian virtues which redeem in his eyes all the personal foibles of the essayist. He forgives Addison not only his lack of "insight into or reverence for the love of women"[64] and his reserved attitude to other authors of his time, but even such weaknesses as those for which he sharply reprehends Fielding, as we shall see — for wine and smoking. Indeed, if it were not for these foibles, he could not have admired Addison so much, as he confessed in the following comment:

"If he had not that little weakness for wine — why, we could scarcely have found a fault with him, and could not have liked him as we do" (*Works* XIII, 530).

We know from his other comments, however (one of which is quoted in my third chapter), that for all his admiration he found Addison too cold-hearted and too perfect for his taste. This is further confirmed by his letter to Paul Émile Daurand, in which he protests against the French critic's rebuking him for praising Addison "in order to curry favour with the English aristocracy", and proceeds:

"And now I will give you the history of Addison, whom I don't like personally, but whose humour I admire with all my heart; more than his humour I admire his conduct through life; rich or poor, he was an upright, honest, dignified, gentle man, a worthy man of letters. He underwent bad fortune with admirable serenity, I thought it was right to praise him as one of our profession, and leave the reader to make his own moral from what I said" (*Letters* III, 389—390).

Another proof of this is Thackeray's depiction of Addison's personal character in *Esmond* as a perfect gentleman and model Christian, bearing "poverty and narrow fortune" with "lofty cheerfulness" and courage, upright and conscientious in his later public offices and in all circumstances maintaining his dignity, but too serene and cold, resembling with his pure and cold chiselled features and perfectly regular face rather "a tinted statue" than a living human being and not so dear to his heart as is the much less perfect, but amiable and hearty Steele.

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[62] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 524, 536.
[63] See *Letters* II, 800.
[64] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 528, 536.

The evaluation of Addison is to a large extent based on the then generally accepted assessment by Macaulay in the famous article published in the *Edinburgh Review* in July 1843, to which Thackeray several times refers and which he characterizes as "a magnificent statue of the great writer and moralist of the last age, raised by the love and the marvellous skill and genius of one of the most illustrious artists of our own".[65] His indebtedness to this criticism, however, is not absolute, as Saintsbury and Ray have pointed out, for he does not exalt Addison so much as Macaulay did, while he rather overestimates Steele, who was in Macaulay's evaluation "most unduly depressed".[66] Thackeray is certainly not entirely uncritical of Addison, for he has grave objections to his aesthetic creed and to his poetry, as we have seen in my second chapter, and he discerned some weak points even in the essays, reprehending them for superficiality and lack of deep feeling:

"He does not go very deep: let the gentlemen of a profound genius, critics accustomed to the plunge of the bathos, console themselves by thinking that be *couldn't* go very deep. There are no traces of suffering in his writing. He was so good, so honest, so healthy, so cheerfully selfish, if I must use the word. There is no deep sentiment" (*Works* XIII, 536).[67]

Thackeray's criticism of Addison (to which he returned once again in his lecture *Charity and Humour*) is in some of its points near to the assessments even of some other critics than Macaulay, notably of Johnson and Hazlitt. He approaches both these critics in preferring Steele to Addison and praising both essayists especially as historians of manners; he is near to Johnson in his criticism of Addison's relationship to Steele, and of Addison's works for feebleness of sentiment and superficiality of thought, and to Hazlitt in his great admiration for Sir Roger de Coverley.

As I have suggested above, it is Steele in particular who gains by being assessed according to Thackeray's modified conception of humour, for he is praised beyond his merits, as Loomis has also pointed out.[68] That Thackeray, however, is perfectly aware of what he is doing, the following open confession testifies:

"If Steele is not our friend he is nothing. He is by no means the most brilliant of wits nor the deepest of thinkers: but he is our friend: we love him, as children love their love with an A, because he is amiable ... I own to liking Dick Steele the man, and Dick Steele the author, much better than much better men and much better authors" (*Works* XIII, 572).

This confession is the key to Thackeray's whole evaluation of Steele (as well as to his portrait of the essayist in *Esmond*) and also explains the warm tone in which it is written. In describing Steele's personal character, Thackeray does not hide the essayist's foibles, which again include even such as he found unacceptable in Fielding and which are again, as in Addison's case, forgiven because of Steele's kind heart and his sincere repentance, and apologized for by the different moral standards valid in the society of the writer's time. Thackeray admits that Steele's style, like his life, "is full of faults and careless blunders", but these are redeemed, like the writer's personal weaknesses, "by his sweet

[65] *Works* XIII, 524—525.
[66] *A Consideration of Thackeray*, p. 204; for Ray's opinion see *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 145.
[67] See also *Works* XIII, 525.
[68] See op. cit., p. 14.

and compassionate nature". He finds some weak points even in the essays, but rightly awards them the highest place in Steele's whole achievement, praising them for the pleasant wit, easy frankness and the "gush of good spirits and good humour" with which they are written, appreciating, too, Steele's relish for beauty and goodness and especially the enjoyment of life pervading them which, as we know from the already mentioned quotation in my third chapter (and also from the confrontation and comparison of the approach of the three writers to a similar subject to be found in the lecture), he prefers to Swift's "savage indignation" and Addison's "lonely serenity". In his preference of Steele as a writer who was "in the world and of it" to "those lonely ones of the earth whose greatness obliged them to be solitary",[69] Thackeray approaches the standpoint assumed by Hazlitt in his comparison of Addison and Steele.[70] Thackeray's lecture on Steele, which besides the above-mentioned critical judgments contains, too, a brief evaluation of Steele's comedies, which I shall treat later, and a splendidly written introduction in which the lecturer successfully evokes the atmosphere of the period in which the writer lived, concludes with the following tender words of farewell:

> "Peace be with him! Let us think gently of one who was so gentle: let us speak kindly of one whose own breast exuberated with human kindness" (*Works* XIII, 578).

Thackeray's lecture on Steele has been very highly assessed by Clapp as "the cream of the series" (alongside that on Swift and Goldsmith) and so indeed it is as far as its warmth is concerned, and also its excellent introduction. As for the assessment of Steele, however, I rather find myself in agreement with Greig, who has pointed out that the portrait Thackeray presents in his lecture is not the real man, but "a highly romanticized version of him, a version attractive to the lecturer because, while Steele was not big enough to be frightening, he seemed to possess the same amiable virtues (... and weaknesses) ... as the lecturer himself". Almost the same thing might be said about the portrait of Steele in *Esmond,* though the term "romanticized" is not in my opinion appropriate to Thackeray's approach to this figure, which is drawn with great sympathy, to be sure, but is not made larger than life, for all Steele's foibles are depicted faithfully. It is also worth noticing that this character plays a not insignificant role in the plot: Thackeray brings him upon the scene at all the crucial points in Esmond's life and always as a faithful friend, helper and consoler and, as Loofbourow has shown, uses him, alongside Addison and Swift, "as an emblem of the enigmatic relationship between art and reality".[71]

As I have suggested above, the second characteristic trait of the development in Thackeray's critical approach during the early 1850s is a shift in the relationship of his moral criterion to his other critical standards. As Thackeray progresses along the road leading him to his compromise with society and its moral code, he is developing into an ever severer critic of the moral content and of the effect of fiction on the reading public. Like Johnson and his followers he more and more intensively thinks about novels being read by young people, and these finally become, as they were for these predecessors of his, one of the main criteria in judging the value of his own literary works and of fiction in

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[69] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 561, 556, 568–569.
[70] See *Comic Writers,* p. 129.

general. The organic unity of the ethical and other judgments in his criticism is therefore seriously impaired, but since in this period he devoted himself to criticism only occasionally, only two novelists are made to pay more heavily — Fielding and Sterne.

In Fielding's case this change of Thackeray's attitude is much more conspicuous than in that of Sterne, for he paid formal critical attention to the former novelist in both periods, while to the latter only in the 1850s. The difference between his earlier and later critical approach to Fielding is indeed so glaring that it has not escaped the notice of any Thackerayan scholar and several of them (Frederick S. Dickson, Wilbur Cross, Eva Beach Touster, Ralph Wilson Rader, V. V. Ivasheva and the author of this study[72]) have attempted to provide some explanation for it, as we shall see later (p. 301). I have already dealt with one aspect of this change, ignored by all the scholars mentioned except the two last — Thackeray's endeavour to make Fielding fit into the narrow limits of his modified conception of humour and satire by presenting him almost exclusively as a tender-hearted humorist. In the following I shall be concerned with the suggested second main aspect, which is more conspicuous, and has also been noticed and assessed by all the above-mentioned scholars.

Whereas in his review of Fielding's works and his other early statements Thackeray did not find much amiss with Fielding's depiction of virtue and vice, as we have seen, in his lecture of 1851 he strictly condemns the moral principles embodied in some characters created by his former literary teacher. It is true that throughout the 1850s and even in the following decade he continues to complain of the squeamishness of contemporary society, which, regarding Fielding's novels as immoral and corrupting, forbids the writers of that generation to "lift up Molly Seagrim's curtain" and forces the Comic Muse only to indicate "the presence of some one behind it" and pass on "primly, with expressions of horror, and a fan before her eyes", but he does this outside his literary lectures — sincerely in *The Four Georges* and *The Virginians* and more or less formally in his *Roundabout Papers.* In his lecture on Fielding as well as in his comment on this novelist in *Charity and Humour,* however, he does not vent any such complaint and therefore objectively identifies himself with the society of his time, when he accuses Fielding of a "lax morality in many a vital point".[73] It is especially the character of Tom Jones that irritates him and excites his anger. Whereas in his review of 1840 he was able to appreciate the positive moral values embodied in Fielding's hero and to realize that his foibles were a faithful reproduction of the morality of the author's time and society, in his lecture he condemns both Tom Jones and his creator for their "immorality":

> "I can't say that I think Mr. Jones a virtuous character; I can't say but that I think Fielding's evident liking and admiration for Mr. Jones, shows that the great humourist's moral sense was blunted by his life, and that here in Art and Ethics, there is a great error" (*Works* XIII, 649).

[71] For the quotations see "Critic on Horseback", p. 293; Greig, op. cit., p. 135; Loofbourow, op. cit., p. 126.

[72] See Frederick S. Dickson: "William Makepeace Thackeray and Henry Fielding", *The North American Review*, CXCVII, 1913, pp. 522—537; Wilbur Cross, op. cit., III, 213—225; Eva Beach Touster, op. cit., Ralph Wilson Rader, "Thackeray's Injustice to Fielding", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, LVI, 1957, pp. 203—212; V. V. Ivasheva, op. cit., and my study quoted in note 19, Introduction.

[73] For the quotations see *Works* XV, 206, X, 622.

What is more serious, however, is that Thackeray's irritation leads him to endow this character with many negative traits which are entirely of his own invention. As Cross has demonstrated, Thackeray's portrait of Tom Jones is in fact a composite one, consisting of some traits of the actual hero, enlarged by those of Fielding, Captain Booth and Thackeray himself. By these slight fabrications, as this scholar points out, "Thackeray really did more than any other man has ever done to stain the memory of Fielding".[74] Thackeray's biased and unjust opinion of Tom Jones leads him also to deny him the right of holding the rank of hero and to apply to him the same doctrine of "unmixed" literary character which he formerly used in his evaluation of the common thieves and vulgar ruffians of the Newgate novelists, who were raised by their creators to the pedestal of glamorous heroes. Completely ignoring what he clearly realized in his review of 1840, that Tom Jones for all his foibles and sins does embody a definite and clearly expressed moral theory, namely that a good heart will redeem all sins and that it is especially for this that this character is admirable, he gives vent to this vehement protest:

"If it is right to have a hero whom we may admire, let us at least take care that he is admirable: if, as is the plan of some authors (a plan decidedly against their interests, be it said), it is propounded that there exists in life no such being, and therefore that in novels, the picture of life, there should appear no such character; then Mr. Thomas Jones becomes an admissible person, and we examine his defects and good qualities, as we do those of Parson Thwackum, or Miss Seagrim. But a hero with a flawed reputation; a hero spunging for a guinea; a hero who can't pay his landlady, and is obliged to let his honour out to hire, is absurd, and his claim to heroic rank untenable. I protest against Mr. Thomas Jones holding such rank at all. I protest even against his being considered a more than ordinary young fellow, ruddy-cheeked, broad-shouldered, and fond of wine and pleasure. He would not rob a church, but that is all; and a pretty long argument may be debated, as to which of these old types, the spendthrift, the hypocrite, Jones and Blifil, Charles and Joseph Surface, — is the worst member of society and the most deserving of censure" (*Works* XIII, 649—650).

Thackeray also very much resents that Tom Jones does not repent of "his manifold errors and shortcomings" and that he "is not half punished enough before the great prize of fortune and love falls to his share":

"I am angry with Jones. Too much of the plum-cake and rewards of life fall to that boisterous, swaggering young scapegrace" (*Works* XIII, 652).

As we may see, Thackeray's standpoint approaches in this period very near to that of the stern judges of the morals of fictitious characters (represented in English criticism especially by Collier, Hume, Goldsmith and the whole Johnsonian school, and Horace Walpole), from which he formerly openly dissociated himself in the comment of 1840 on the happy end of the disreputable heroes of Pierce Egan's *Life in London:*

"The artist, it is said, wished to close the career of the three heroes by bringing them all to ruin, but the writer, or publishers, would not allow any such melancholy subjects to dash the merriment of the public, and we believe Tom, Jerry, and Logic were married off at the end of the tale, as if they had been the most moral personages in the world. There is some goodness in this pity which authors and the public are disposed to show towards certain agreeable, disreputable characters of romance. Who would mar the prospect of honest Roderick Random, or Charles Surface, or Tom Jones? only a very stern moralist indeed" (*Works* II, 424).

[74] Op. cit., III, 225.

Although he never identified himself with these moralists absolutely, as we shall yet see, his standpoint perceptibly diverged from that of those critics of Fielding who rejected the rebukes addressed to Tom Jones for his "immorality" and with whom, in his earlier review, he more or less coincided in opinion (for instance Coleridge, Hazlitt and Lamb). Worth special notice is his letter to Robert Bell of 3 September 1848, in which he reacts to Forster's criticism of *Vanity Fair* in the *Examiner* (July 22, 1848) which characterized the atmosphere of the novel as being overloaded with the "exhalations of human folly and wickedness", so that the reader gasps "for a more liberal alternation of refreshing breezes of unsophisticated honesty", as was provided by Fielding, who, "after he has administered a sufficient dose of Blifil's choke-damp, purifies the air by a hearty laugh from Tom Jones". In his answer Thackeray defends himself by pointing out that in his opinion Tom Jones "is as big a rogue as Blifil. Before God he is — I mean the man is selfish according to his nature as Blifil according to his".[75] By rejecting Forster's statement Thackeray in fact dissociates himself from very similar judgments of Lamb and Coleridge. It is worth noticing, however, that in spite of this he allowed Hannay, the author of the footnotes to his lectures, to quote one such statement by Coleridge[76] and that he himself quotes Lamb, though he "improves" upon this critic's judgment by his own amendment, in which he even surpasses the adverse judges of Tom Jones's morals by attributing to Fielding's hero "vices" in which he never indulged (as Cross has pointed out, Tom "has never tasted punch" and "he is never seen in the novel with a pipe"[77]):

> "Charles Lamb says finely of Jones, that a single hearty laugh from him 'clears the air' — but then it is in a certain state of the atmosphere. It might clear the air when such personages as Blifil or Lady Bellaston poison it. But I fear very much that (except until the very last scene of the story), when Mr. Jones enters Sophia's drawing-room, the pure air there is rather tainted with the young gentleman's tobacco-pipe and punch" (*Works* XIII, 649).

It is also symptomatic that in this period of his life Thackeray more emphatically than before places above Tom Jones such characters as are either explicitly positive (Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams, Squire Allworthy, Doctor Harrison, Amelia Booth), or are "mixed" characters like Tom Jones himself and appear, like him, in the leading role, but repent of their vices and are duly punished (Captain Booth).[78] Even the portrait of Fielding the man that emerges from Thackeray's lectures and other writings of this period is considerably darker than that we know from his review of 1840. He depicts his great predecessor as a man who brutalized his life by associating with evil women, undermined his health by heavy drinking bouts, after which he often "reeled home to chambers on the shoulders of the watchman", and was dishonest about money.[79]

As I have suggested, however, we cannot speak about an entire identification of Thackeray's standpoint with that of the post-Johnsonian critics and other

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[75] For the quotations see *Letters* II, 424n. and 424.
[76] See *Works* XIII, 649n.
[77] Op. cit., III, 224.
[78] See *Works* X, 622, XIII, 647, 651, Melville, op. cit., II, 69.
[79] For the quotation see *Works* XIII, 647; see also *Letters* III, 304, IV, 186, *Works* XII, 367, XIII, 646.

hostile judges of Fielding. For all his unjust strictures on Fielding's person he is still able to appreciate the novelist's positive human qualities, and is inclined to forgive him for his "wild life" on account of his Christian repentance, his generous heart, noble spirit, and his respect for "female innocence and infantine tenderness", retaining, too, his former warm sympathy for the courage with which Fielding bore all the hardships that were in store for him.[80] For all his strict moral judgments he did not adopt a negative attitude to the art of his former master, continues to extol Fielding as a great genius and a great master of humour, positively appreciates the truthfulness of his novels to life and his excellent art of characterization and composition, and sometimes does it in very eloquent and enthusiastic words, as for instance in the often-quoted passage from his lecture ("What a wonderful art! . ."[81]). And we do also possess direct evidence that he never fully identified himself with Fielding's most adverse detractors. He never changed, for instance, his early negative attitude to Walpole's criticism of Fielding for keeping low company, never drifted to the side of Richardson in this novelist's feud with Fielding, dissociated himself from such adverse critics of Fielding as were Hawkins, Hurd and, in his own time, the "hypercritic" in *Blackwood's Magazine*,[82] and expressed his reservations even as to Johnson's criticism. In his lecture he for instance said:

"Richardson disliked Fielding's works quite honestly: Walpole quite honestly spoke of them as vulgar and stupid. Their squeamish stomachs sickened at the rough fare and the rough guests assembled at Fielding's jolly revel. Indeed the cloth might have been cleaner: and the dinner and the company were scarce such as suited a dandy. The kind and wise old Johnson would not sit down with him. But a greater scholar than Johnson could afford to admire that astonishing genius of Harry Fielding: and we all know the lofty panegyric which Gibbon wrote of him, and which remains a towering monument to the great novelist's memory" (*Works* XIII, 648).

Deserving at least brief notice is the attitude Thackeray assumes in *The Newcomes*. He makes his Colonel a great admirer of Johnson, believing this critic to be the greatest of men and unconditionally accepting all his critical judgments, including those on Fielding, and puts into his mouth a severe and indignant condemnation of *Tom Jones* as a "low and disgraceful" book "that tells the story of a parcel of servants, of a pack of footmen and ladies' maids fuddling in ale-houses",[83] and the following damaging sentence upon its hero:

"As for that Tom Jones — that fellow that sells himself, sir — by heavens, my blood boils when I think of him! I wouldn't sit down in the same room with such a fellow, sir. If he came in at that door, I would say, 'How dare you, you hireling ruffian, to sully with your presence an apartment where my young friend and I are conversing together? where two gentlemen, I say, are taking their wine after dinner? How dare you, you degraded villain!'" (*Works* XIV, 50–51).

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[80] For the quotation see *Works* XIII, 646; see also ibid., pp. 654, 655, 679, XVII, 471, *Letters* IV, 186.

[81] *Works* XIII, 652–653; for his other later tributes to Fielding see *Works* X, 586, XIII, 14, 374, 643, 646, 651, 731, XV, 271, 906, XVI, 307, XVII, 457, 598, 600, Melville, op. cit., II, 69.

[82] For his attitude to Walpole see Gulliver, op. cit., p. 231, *Contributions*, 115, *Works* XIII, 744, 747, XV, 552, XVII, 471; to Hawkins and Hurd, *Works* XVII, 471; to the critic of *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Works* XVII, 399–400, 471.

[83] For the quotations see *Works* XIV, 49, 50.

Even if the Colonel's judgment in some points reminds us of Thackeray's evaluation in the *English Humourists* (though the tone in which it is expressed is incomparably sharper), I do not think, as Kathleen Tillotson does, that Thackeray fails to dissociate himself from his hero's strictures on *Tom Jones,*[84] for he does express his own standpoint very clearly, though, to be sure, somewhat belatedly, through the mouth of his narrator in the following comment, which almost sounds as a quotation of his earlier argument against the stern moralistic judges of literary characters cited above:

"I know very well that Charles Surface is a sad dog, and Tom Jones no better than he should be; but, in spite of such critics as Dr. Johnson and Colonel Newcome, most of us have a sneaking regard for honest Tom, and hope Sophia will be happy, and Tom will end well at last" (*Works* XIV, 137).

Nor did Thackeray ever come round completely to the standpoint of the post-Johnsonian critics, who, seeing Richardson as the greatest novelist of their time, tended, as Mayo expressed it, "to put so fine a point upon their ethical sensibilities that in the whole canon of eighteenth-century fiction, only *Sir Charles Grandison* could pass muster", though that novel, as "some of them were forced to admit, was dull".[85] It is true that in one point Thackeray almost entirely identifies himself with these critics (and consequently diverges from the opposite standpoint of Hazlitt[86]): in this period of his life he grew enthusiastic about the titular hero of this novel, obviously because this character, as "a code of Christian ethics — a compilation and abstract of all gentlemanly accomplishments",[87] as Hazlitt characterized it, admirably suited his own later ideal of gentlemanliness (he included Grandison among his favourite characters and the most convincing depictions of the English gentleman in the literature of his country, and was avowedly inspired by this character when creating Colonel Newcome and partly, too, Henry Esmond[88]). Yet he was not entirely uncritical even of this novel, as one of his comments shows,[89] and never saw in Richardson the greatest novelist of that writer's time. In his lecture on Fielding he pointed out that "such an athletic and boisterous genius as Fielding's" must have entertained a "hearty contempt and antipathy" for *Pamela*, "couldn't do otherwise than laugh at the puny Cockney bookseller, pouring out endless volumes of sentimental twaddle, and hold him up to scorn as a moll-coddle and a milksop". In *The Virginians* he makes Mr. Lambert declare that Fielding is good company and that "his books are worth a dozen of your milksop *Pamelas* and *Clarissas,* Mrs. Lambert: but what woman ever loved true humour?" The attitude Thackeray assumes to Richardson in this novel (where he places him, along with Dr. Johnson, among his fictitious characters) is most interesting and demands at least brief comment. He puts evaluatory judgments upon this novelist into the mouths of several of his characters, but his own creative approach to the depiction of Richardson shows in my opinion that he identifies himself rather with the opinion of Mr. Lambert, quoted above, than with George Warrington, who sees in Richardson, and in Fielding, "the greatest geniuses

[84] See op. cit., p. 148.
[85] Op. cit., p. 146.
[86] See especially *Sketches and Essays; and Winterslow* (Essays Written There), A New ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt, George Bell & Sons, London, 1890, pp. 182—183 and *Comic Writers,* p. 163.
[87] *Sketches and Essays,* p. 183.

in England", or with the cynical Lord March, who characterizes the novelist as "a fat old printer, who has written a story about a confounded girl and a fellow that ruins her", or the Lambert ladies who cry over Richardson's volumes, or the primitive Harry Warrington who "thought novels were stupid: and, as for the ladies crying their eyes out over Mr. Richardson, he could not imagine how they could be moved by any such nonsense". Thackeray deliberately places Richardson in juxtaposition to Dr. Johnson (the former always appears with a train of admiring ladies and is constantly molested by his fans, whereas the learned doctor always stands unnoticed in the background), yet he does not leave the reader in any doubt as to where his own sympathies are placed and who was the greater of the two writers. The enthusiastic outpourings of Richardson's fans, who extol him as "the supporter of virtue, the preacher of sound morals, the mainstay of religion", as a man "too great and good to live in such a world",[90] are reproduced and Richardson's popularity described with a distinct undertone of irony:

"The great author was accustomed to be adored. A gentler wind never puffed mortal vanity. Enraptured spinsters flung tea-leaves round him, and incensed him with the coffee-pot. Matrons kissed the slippers they had worked for him. There was a halo of virtue round his night-cap. All Europe had thrilled, panted, admired, trembled, wept, over the pages of the immortal, little, kind, honest man with the round paunch" (*Works* XV, 271).

And finally, Thackeray himself never became such an uncritical admirer of the founder of this critical school, Dr. Johnson, as his Colonel Newcome was. In the 1830s and 1840s he referred to Johnson very rarely, most of his references concerning his unprepossessing appearance and objectionable table manners or certain episodes in his life, and only some referring to Johnson's works (especially to his *Dictionary* and *Rasselas*), either without any critical evaluation or with an implied negative judgment (as in the first chapter of *Vanity Fair* in which Becky expresses her contempt for the "Johnsonian principles" on which Miss Pinkerton's academy is based by throwing Johnson's *Dictionary* out of the window of the coach). It is also in two of these earlier comments that Thackeray dissociates himself from the "peevish protest" of the great doctor against Fielding's fame.[91] There is only one exception to this general picture and that occurs in the review of Scribe's play *Une Chaîne* (April 1843) where Thackeray takes up and develops the moralistic standpoint of Dr. Johnson concerning polluted drama.[92] As his comments of the 1850s and 1860s (some of which I have already quoted) show, even in this later period of his life Thackeray never came to any whole-hearted admiration of Johnson as critic, dramatist and novelist. Although he accepted and quoted some of Johnson's judgments in his evaluation of Swift and Goldsmith and approached to his standpoint in the assessment of Addison and (as we shall see) of Sterne, he commented on Johnson's partiality in criticism, dissociated himself not only from his adverse criticism of Fielding, but also from that of Shakespeare, of the

[88] For his references to and especially his comparisons of this character to his own personages see *Works* XIV, 49, 274, 670, *Letters* II, 815, *Works* XVI, 61, 210, 310, XVII, 600.
[89] See *Works* XIII, 755.
[90] For the quotations in this paragraph see *Works* XIII, 647, XV, 333, 271, 272, 637, 272—273, 271.
[91] See *Works* VI, 413 and *Letters* II, 637.
[92] See Garnett, op. cit., p. 169.

"kind anecdotist Spence", and of Prior's poetry, resented Johnson's chuckling over Addison's poverty and the "rather a malicious minuteness" with which Johnson described the personal habits and infirmities of "the great little Pope".[93] He also refers slightingly to the *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* as to "that now unfrequented poets' corner, in which so many forgotten bigwigs have a niche".[94] In his later works Thackeray also assesses *Irene* as a failure and both this drama and *Rasselas* as works no longer read.[95] On the other hand, however, he makes George Warrington set a special value on Johnson's critical opinions of his play *Carpezan.*[96] He seems to have thought more of Johnson the poet, for in this period he twice quotes from "The Vanity of Human Wishes", once echoes a couplet contributed by Johnson to Goldsmith's *Traveller* and especially highly evaluates (and quotes) the poet's "sacred" verses on the death of Mr. Robert Levet (a statement almost identical with that of Scott, as Margaret Ball has also pointed out[97]).

In his relationship to Johnson the man, however, we may observe a distinctly growing enthusiasm on Thackeray's part. He does not include this writer in his lectures on the *English Humourists* (though his modified conception of humour and satire would have made this perfectly possible), but pays much attention to Johnson in *The Four Georges,* extolling him as the great supporter of the monarchy and the Church, who deserved of these institutions better than the great politicians and church dignitaries of his time and was therefore rightly revered "as a sort of oracle" who "declared for Church and King"[98]. (In these eulogies we scarcely recognize the Thackeray of the 1830s and 1840s, the radical republican and convinced anti-monarchist.) He highly assesses Johnson as a man for his humanity, wisdom, and tender heart and expresses his wish that he might have known him in person and enjoyed his company. This later enthusiasm for Johnson finds also its reflection in Thackeray's portrait of the writer in *The Virginians,* where he deliberately places this poor, shabbily dressed, ungenteel literary man of clumsy behaviour in juxtaposition to the showy splendour of the life of the higher social classes, thus expressing his sympathies for spiritual greatness, though accompanied by poverty, as well as his distaste for intellectual barrenness, even if surrounded by wealth. Johnson also plays a certain role in the life of George Warrington, whom he helps at the time of his greatest need, by encouraging him and procuring him work. Thackeray puts into the mouth of his hero words of warm appreciation of Johnson's kindness, as well as words of regret at having formerly assessed this writer so unfavourably (in my opinion here it is also Thackeray himself that speaks). To all this we should also add that in the later period of Thackeray's life Boswell's *Johnson* was among his favourite "bed-books";[99] he was not

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[93] See *Works* XIV, 261–262, XIII, 616, 582, 584–585, 530, 616.
[94] *Works* XIII, 508; for a similar opinion of Pen's father see *Works* XII, 70.
[95] See especially *Works* XVII, 629.
[96] See *Works* XV, 668, 669, 670.
[97] For Thackeray's quotations see *Letters* II, 542, 685, III, 565; for his statement on Levet see *Works* XIII, 762 (see also *Letters* III, 544 for another quotation from this poem); for Scott's opinion see *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott,* ed. by D. Douglas, 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1894, I, 192, quoted by Margaret Ball, op. cit., p. 80.
[98] *Works* XIII, 763.
[99] See especially Wilson, op. cit., I, 217, *Works* XIII, 761, *Letters* IV, 438.

unaware of the biographer's errors and prejudices,[100] but was willing to condone them in view of his "embalming" Johnson for the future generations. Thackeray's later attitude to Johnson the man closely approaches the standpoint of Carlyle, who was not much interested in Johnson the writer, as Wellek points out, but very much cared for the man as reported by Boswell, in whom he saw "one of the greatest heroes" and "one of our great English souls".[101]

Yet even if Thackeray never completely identified himself with the standpoint of the post-Johnsonian school of criticism and with other adverse critics of Fielding, as I have attempted to prove in the preceding analysis, the fact remains that in the later period of his life he was in some essential points of his criticism unjust to his former literary teacher. What remains now is to find out the causes of his altered attitude, for the explanations so far offered do not seem to me entirely adequate. Ralph Wilson Rader, who was the last to write on the problem (if I do not count my own study), also expressed his dissatisfaction with the results of research to date, and pointed out that the scholars who had dealt with this problem before him either ignored the motive of the change altogether (Dickson, Cross), or did not succeed in finding out the correct one (Blanchard), or undervalued the change itself (Touster). But even this scholar does not in my opinion present the final answer to the problem, for he seeks for the cause of Thackeray's changed attitude exclusively in his personal life, in the feelings of personal guilt concerning his way of life in the years preceding his wife's illness, feelings which Thackeray developed after the disaster in his family and which he endeavoured to diminish by condemning similar foibles in Fielding's heroes, in whom he saw "the image of his own youth and his own errors".[102] In my opinion, however, the problem of Thackeray's altered attitude to Fielding should be seen in a much wider perspective and all the existing factors should be taken into account, not only one of them. As follows from the above analysis of Thackeray's criticism of Swift and from the whole preceding account of his criticism of fiction, his new attitude to Fielding is not the only change we may discern in his criticism in his later years and the causes of all these should be sought for, as I suggested in assessing his criticism of Swift, in the whole development of his personality, view of life, art, aesthetic creed and critical principles after the beginning of the 1850s, with which all these alterations are in complete harmony.

The second writer who suffers from Thackeray's later tendency to lay undue stress upon ethical evaluation is, as suggested, Laurence Sterne. Thackeray's critical attitude to this novelist reminds us very much of that he revealed in his criticism of Swift — he has very serious reservations as to the novelist's personal character (aggravated by the fact that Sterne was, like Swift, a clergyman) and these find reflection in his assessment of Sterne's art. When preparing his lecture, Thackeray studied fairly copious biographical material, including Sterne's manuscript *Journal to Eliza,* in which he discovered three warm love letters addressed to three different women and written, as he believed, at the same time. This "evidence" of Sterne's falseness, which is based upon an error in dates (as Ray has pointed out), leads him to condemn Sterne as a false and

[100] See *Works* XIII, 762—763, XVII, 471, V, 249, XIII, 586.
[101] Quoted by Wellek, op. cit., p. 109.
[102] Op. cit., p. 211.

morally corrupt man of impure mind and heart, a liar, coward and weakling, a vain and conceited author, jealous of all his contemporaries, and a bad clergyman (in the last point his assessment is very near to that of Johnson). This evaluation of the personal and professional character of Sterne contains some grains of truth, but in general it goes too far by greatly exaggerating some of the really existing personal foibles of the great novelist and his inadequacies as a clergyman.

Thackeray's distaste for Sterne as a man to a great extent colours his assessment of Sterne as a novelist, but in spite of this the latter is not entirely unjust (in this my opinion diverges from that of Dodds, Clapp and Greig and is near to that of Saintsbury[103]). He does not deny Sterne greatness and genius and positively appreciates those aspects of the novelist's art which express genuine and noble feeling and arouse in the reader love, kindness and pity. Thus for instance he comments upon a passage from *Tristram Shandy,* which he quotes in his lecture, in the following words:

"A critic who refuses to see in this charming description wit, humour, pathos, a kind nature speaking, and a real sentiment, must be hard indeed to move and to please. A page or two farther we come to a description not less beautiful — a landscape and figures, deliciously painted by one who had the keenest enjoyment and the most tremulous sensibility" (*Works* XIII, 669).

But at the very next moment he emphasizes that he finds himself unable to quote the whole description:

"There is not a page in Sterne's writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption — a hint, as of an impure presence" (*Works* XIII, 670).

Thackeray is also able duly to appreciate Sterne's splendid art of characterization and in his evaluation distinguishes those characters through whom the novelist took an honourable place in the tradition of realism and humour in the English novel, especially Uncle Toby, whom he includes, outside his lecture, "among the masterpieces of our English school", paying at the same time generous tribute to Sterne's works which, along with those of Goldsmith, "still form the wonder and delight of the lovers of English art".[104] More critical, however, is Thackeray's attitude to Sterne's humour, in which he finds, as for instance Coleridge and Hazlitt also did, much affectation (though he never goes to such extremes as some of Sterne's adverse critics did, notably Horace Walpole and Goldsmith[105]):

"The humour of Swift and Rabelais, whom he pretended to succeed, poured from them as naturally as song does from a bird; they lose no manly dignity with it, but laugh their hearty great laugh out of their broad chests as nature bade them. But this man — who

[103] See Dodds, op. cit., pp. 183—184, Clapp, op. cit., p. 291, Greig, op. cit., p. 137, Saintsbury, *A Consideration of Thackeray,* p. 203.

[104] For the quotations see *Works* XVII, 453, 452; see also ibid., pp. 598, 602—603.

[105] For Hazlitt's views see especially *Comic Writers,* pp. 163—164; for Coleridge's see *Coleridge's Literary Criticism,* With an Introduction by J. W. Mackail, Humphrey Milford, London, 1921, p. 154; for Walpole's opinions see *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Orford,* ed. by Mrs. Paget Toynbee, 16 vols., Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, MCMIII—MCMV, IV, 369, V, 32; for Goldsmith's see *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith,* ed. Peter Cunningham, 4 vols., John Murray, London, 1854, 1878, II, 263, 266. Goldsmith's assessment is also quoted in Thackeray's lecture on this writer and commented with approval, but in a footnote, the author of which was Hannay.

can make you laugh, who can make you cry, too — never lets his reader alone, or will permit his audience repose: when you are quiet, he fancies he must rouse you, and turns over head and heels, or sidles up and whispers a nasty story. The man is a great jester, not a great humourist. He goes to work systematically and of cold blood; paints his face, puts on his ruff and motley clothes, and lays down his carpet and tumbles on it" (*Works* XIII, 666).

Much pose and affectation is discerned by Thackeray also in Sterne's sentiment which seems to him (with some justification) not to be always sincere and natural. He is especially irritated by the episode concerning the dead donkey in the *Sentimental Journey* (also criticized by Carlyle[106]), to which he reverts several times also outside his lecture, condemning the sentiment expressed in it as false, casting at the novelist such opprobrious terms as "mountebank", "drivelling quack" and "whimpering hypocrite", and accusing him of forcing the reader, by his false grimaces and grief, to become sentimental over trifles which are not worth a tear.[107] On the other hand, however, he finds unaffected feeling in Sterne's private letters and many instances of genuine love and kindness in his published writings, and realizes that the novelist's "deliberate propensity to make points and seek applause"[108] may be to a great extent apologized for by Sterne's being a writer by profession:

"A perilous trade, indeed, is that of a man who has to bring his tears and laughter, his recollections, his personal griefs and joys, his private thoughts and feelings to market, to write them on paper, and sell them for money. Does he exaggerate his grief, so as to get his reader's pity for a false sensibility? feign indignation, so as to establish a character for virtue? elaborate repartees, so that he may pass for a wit? steal from other authors, and put down the theft to the credit side of his own reputation for ingenuity and learning? feign originality? affect benevolence or misanthropy? appeal to the gallery gods with claptraps and vulgar baits to catch applause?

How much of the paint and emphasis is necessary for the fair business of the stage, and how much of the rant and rouge is put on for the vanity of the actor? His audience trusts him: can he trust himself? How much was deliberate calculation and imposture — how much was false sensibility — and how much true feeling? Where did the lie begin, and did he know where? and where did the truth end in the art and scheme of this man of genius, this actor, this quack?" (*Works* XIII, 665—666).

Thackeray illustrates what he has in mind by the case of a French actor who was so moved by his own singing of a sentimental ballad that he was "snivelling and weeping quite genuine tears by the time his own ditty was over", and adds:

"I suppose Sterne had this artistical sensibility; he used to blubber perpetually in his study, and finding his tears infectious, and that they brought him a great popularity, he exercised the lucrative gift of weeping; he utilized it, and cried on every occasion. I own that I don't value or respect much the cheap dribble of those fountains. He fatigues me with his perpetual disquiet and his uneasy appeals to my risible or sentimental faculties. He is always looking in my face, watching his effect, uncertain whether I think him an impostor or not; posture-making, coaxing, and imploring me. 'See what sensibility I have — own now that I'm very clever — do cry now, you can't resist this'" (*Works* XIII, 666).

The sharpest weapons of Thackeray's criticism are turned, however, against the moral tendency and effect of Sterne's novels. This aspect of his criticism of the novelist is another instance of the rapprochement of his critical attitude

[106] See *Essays* III, 127.
[107] See *Works* X, 617, XIII, 667, XVII, 451; for his criticism of another episode of this type see *Works* XIII, 667.
[108] *Works* XIII, 666.

to fiction in this later period to that of the Johnsonian school of criticism, for the representatives of which Sterne was a *bête noire.* As one of the above quotations shows, he found Sterne's works marred by "a latent corruption", saw the "foul Satyr's eyes leer out of the leaves constantly" and, as we have seen in his criticism of Dickens, preferred the morally purer writers of his own time, "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".[109] It is true that he was aware of the historical conditioning of Sterne's "immorality" and admitted that much of it could be ascribed to the more outspoken time in which the novelist lived, but he at the same time emphasized that the context of time could not explain and excuse all the "wickedness" of this writer.[110] Even this part of Thackeray's criticism contains some grains of truth, however, for Sterne did have an excessive predilection for eroticism, and it was not always healthy eroticism. This was noticed by some other critics besides Thackeray, and not only by Goldsmith and the other critics of the Johnsonian school, who were over-prejudiced, but also by Scott and Coleridge.[111] It should also be pointed out that in spite of all Thackeray's moral indignation he never speaks about Sterne in such strong words as for instance Johnson's disciple the Rev. Vicesimus Knox, who called the novelist "the grand promoter of adultery, and every species of illicit commerce" (though Thackeray would probably approve of this critic's seeing in Sterne's novels a threat to "public and private morality"[112]).

Besides the limitations pointed out in the preceding, Thackeray's criticism of Sterne has another serious defect and that is his failure to appreciate the enormous significance of this novelist as a great innovator in the form of fiction. On this, whether he realized Sterne's contribution or not, he has no comment to offer.

Thackeray's criticism of the English novelists and essayists of the 18th century very clearly illustrates the changes which took place in his aesthetic creed and critical principles between the 1830s and the end of his life. These have been noticed also by other scholars (especially Stephenson, Greig, Ivasheva and Loomis) who have pointed out that his cycle of lectures on the *English Humourists* may be regarded as a turning point in his aesthetic and critical standards. Not all of them, however, interpret this change adequately, at least from my point of view, or seek for its motives in the right places. Thus Stephenson sees in this cycle the culmination of the spiritual drama in Thackeray and the beginning of his "second approach" to the depiction of reality, and in the character of Addison, as it emerges from the lecture and *Esmond,* the foreshadowing of the novelist's "noble third way", culminating in *The Newcomes* and in the following novels. Stephenson rightly characterizes this change as a development from sharp satire to a more optimistic approach to the depiction

[109] For the quotations see *Works* XIII, 670, 671 and XVII, 431; see also XVII, 423.
[110] See *Works* XIII, 671.
[111] For Goldsmith's views see the LIII. letter in the *Citizen of the World*; for Scott's see *Prose Works* III, 290 (quoted in *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith,* II, 264n.); for Coleridge's see op. cit., 154; one of Coleridge's statements on this problem is quoted by Hannay in one of the footnotes to Thackeray's lectures (see *Works* XIII, 671n.).
[112] For the quotations see the Rev. Vicesimus Knox, *Moral and Literary Essays,* No. 145, "On the Moral Tendency of the Writings of Sterne", quoted by Mayo, op. cit., p. 155.

of reality, finds its roots in that 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 contrary 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.[113] Greig, on the other hand, dates the change in Thackeray's critical standards to 1852, but characterizes it in my opinion essentially correctly:

"For a number of reasons (popular success being only one of them), he was losing that clarity of vision, that detached, ironical tolerance, that independent judgement on men and affairs, which he had learnt from the men of the eighteenth century and had never quite lost ... in the years up to 1852."[114]

Although he speaks about "a number of reasons", however, this scholar confines his search for the motives of the change to the sphere of Thackeray's personal psychology, which of course cannot be neglected, but does not explain everything. More adequate seems to me the interpretation of Ivasheva, who characterizes the *English Humourists* as Thackeray's farewell to satire[115] and finds the motives determining this development in a much wider sphere, including, *inter alia,* the general social climate of the 1850s. Very remarkable, in my opinion, are also the conclusions of Loomis, who points out that nowhere "in the nineteenth century is there a clearer expression of the Victorian anti-satiric spirit than in *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*" and that what "makes these lectures interesting is not originality but the irony of its being Thackeray who delivered them", for in them "we are treated to the spectacle of a great satirist attacking satire". As this scholar has also rightly emphasized, this change is first to be discerned in Thackeray's criticism and only gradually and later in his fiction:

"For all Thackeray's praise of amiable humor and his condemnation of satire, he still found himself facing charges of cynicism and misanthropy, and the reason is not hard to find. Critically Thackeray may have been an amiable humorist, but creatively, almost in spite of himself, he remained a satirist. In the novels following *Vanity Fair* he deliberately attempted to modify his satire — to soften it by accenting the positive and by minimizing, if not eliminating, the negative. But Thackeray was a realist-satirist both by inclination and training; all he succeeded in doing in his attempts to soften his satire was to cloud and weaken his later fiction. And no matter how hard he tried to avoid it, his reputation for cynicism, far from diminishing, increased."[116]

As far as the evaluation of the quality of Thackeray's criticism in his lectures is concerned, because of the critic's obvious errors and injustices analysed in this sub-chapter, I cannot find myself in agreement with those critics who see in his lectures the summit of his critical achievement and considerably underestimate his early criticism, of which they of course could know only that part identified in their time (Saintsbury, Walker, Compton-Rickett, Enzinger, Cazamian[117]). Nor, however, can I wholly accept the opinions of those critics who

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[113] See Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, *The Spiritual Drama in the Life of Thackeray,* Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1913, especially pp. 38, 143, 160, 177, 185, 190.

[114] Op. cit., p. 138.

[115] See op. cit., p. 299.

[116] Op. cit., p. 15; for the preceding quotation see ibid., p. 14.

[117] See Saintsbury, *A Consideration of Thackeray,* pp. 133, 202—204, 261—262 and *A History of Criticism,* III, 500; Walker, op. cit., pp. 700—701; Compton-Rickett, op. cit.,

see in the lectures "the worst blot upon Thackeray's literary reputation" (Whibley, Greig[118]). Much more judicial, and therefore more acceptable, seems to me the evaluation of the authors of *CHEL,* of Clapp, Ray and Dodds, who present a fair assessment of both the merits and demerits of this particular piece of Thackeray's criticism.[119]

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Since I have already concluded each of the preceding sub-chapters by summing up the results of my research, it will suffice now to give a final assessment of Thackeray's criticism of fiction as a whole, while drawing attention to some points which I have hitherto neglected for reasons of logical presentation. What should be in the first place duly emphasized is that Thackeray's criticism concerned with this particular sphere of literature does represent the most valuable part of his critical legacy, as I suggested in the introduction to this chapter and have hoped to prove by my analysis. What must be added as resulting from this analysis, however, is that it is unequal in quality. As a critic of realistic fiction Thackeray does not come up to our expectations and this part of his criticism, though written by a great master of the art, cannot in my opinion be ranked among the most valuable fruits of his critical work. As suggested in the introduction, its range is too narrow, particularly in the sphere of French realistic fiction, it contains what are perhaps his greatest errors (his failure to recognize the genius of Balzac, his overestimation of Bernard and the injustice he commits against Swift, Fielding and Sterne in his later criticism) and it fails to provide what we should expect from one of the founders of the realistic novel of the 19th century — deeper and more penetrating reflections on the subtler problems connected with the technique of the art of fiction in general and the realistic novel in particular.

If such anticipations have not been fulfilled by Thackeray as a critic of that type of fiction he himself cultivated, however, they are not doomed to entire disappointment by Thackeray as a reviewer and parodist of those various literary fashions of his time which were based upon contrary or at least substantially different aesthetic and moral foundations than were those lying at the basis of his own fiction. It is in this part of his criticism, which may be characterized as a principled and uncompromising critical campaign against literary artifice of any kind and thus implicitly a campaign for realism in fiction, that he does what we expected him to do in his criticism of realistic fiction, even if he naturally does so indirectly rather than explicitly and concentrates his attention more upon clearing the ground and laying the foundations for the new edifice than upon actually building its walls. Although not even in this part of his criticism will he provide any consistent theory of the novel, in some of his reviews he does devote much more attention than elsewhere to most of the

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pp. 514—515; Enzinger, op. cit., vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 159—160; Émile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature,* Translated from the French by Helen Douglas Irvine and W. D. MacInnes, Revised Edition, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., London, 1960, p. 1203.

[118] See Greig, op. cit., pp. 133—135 (identifying himself with Whibley's opinion, from *William Makepeace Thackeray,* 1903, p. 176).

[119] See *CHEL* XIII, 294—295, Clapp, op. cit., pp. 289, 290—291, 293, G. N. Ray, *The Age of Wisdom,* pp. 145—148, Dodds, op. cit., p. 188.

basic problems of the art of fiction, and even to some of the subtler ones, especially in his *Morning Chronicle* reviews of fiction, in those of Mrs. Marsh's novel, of Bulwer's *Godolphin* and of "Christmas" literature (some of these reviews considering writers of fiction whose creative approach was basically realistic) and, indirectly and implicitly in his parodies of all the individual fashionable modes. Technical explanations of a work of fiction and analyses of the *minutiae* of the technique of the novelist's art were alien to his spirit, yet in the parts of his criticism mentioned he did throw out not a few suggestions as to the craft of fiction, as to the equipment a good novelist should possess to achieve the standard of real excellence. As we know from the reactions of the novelists he criticized or parodied, he did make them think more deeply over their craft and there is also no doubt that by contributing to the decrease of the enormous popularity of some of these literary fashions he helped the readers to orientate themselves in the mass production of fiction of their time and thus also contributed to the refinement of literary taste. What should be especially appreciated is that he recognized the independence of the novel as a literary form with its own laws and theory, as well as the necessity for its keeping some standards of craftsmanship. He might of course have done much more, for fiction was the only literary kind in the criticism of which he indeed could stand out as a legislator, since he possessed the advantage of intimately knowing the craft from his own personal experience as novelist and could found his critical judgments on his own splendid achievement in this field. But he was no theoretician and though he was acting on theoretical preconceptions of literary values, he did not examine the theoretical basis of his criticism and his chief mode was therefore the concrete, not the abstract — he excelled rather in the practical criticism of individual books and writers than in the theoretical criticism of literary principles, and his attention was more concentrated upon the matter of fiction than upon its form. In my opinion, however, he should not be too severely reprimanded for this limitation of critical approach, for it was quite general in his time, when the realistic novel and its theory were in process of formation both in England and France and the subtler problems of the craft of fiction had not yet attracted the attention of theorists and critics.

The analysis in this chapter has also shown that even if Thackeray's criticism of fiction is not based upon any complete aesthetic and literary theory, it is founded upon the solid principles of his aesthetic creed, which were his faithful guides during the whole period of his critical career and from which he did not begin to swerve until after its close, these later modifications of his standards being at the same time the cause of most of the erroneous judgments he pronounced after 1847. The most important aspect of his criticism of fiction, which is in my opinion the root of all its merits, is Thackeray's insistence upon realism in literature: how far a novel or story faithfully imitates "nature", depicts the selected sphere of life as it really exists or existed — that is the standard of judgment which he invariably applies to the interpretation of individual writers and their works. Firmly convinced of the great notional value of fiction, he rejects all deviations from the faithful representation of life which nullify this value — any idealization or distortion of the depicted facts, events or people, insisting at the same time that the novelist or story-writer should be intimately acquainted with his material, preferably from his own personal experience. What

he demanded from writers cultivating the art of fiction was truth of life in its entirety and not the exclusive depiction of its beautiful aspects for which, as he was convinced, human nature and the society of his time did not provide suitable material and which was in his opinion at any rate not the proper ground of the novelist. That is why he sharply protested whenever he came across any attempts of novelists or story-writers to beautify and glamorize characters whose shabby souls and degraded moral characters did not possess any particle of grandeur and why he denoted all such attempts as futile striving after the sham sublime. As all his reviews and parodies testify, the question which interested him most was indeed the creation of literary character, though he expressed his views only upon the basic issues of this creative problem. Founding his assessment of the individual characters evaluated upon his own knowledge of human psychology and life in general and his own experiences as a realistic novelist, he rejects all such characters that are absurd caricatures of human beings or the schematic black-and-white portraits common in romantic fiction, and accepts those that are vivid and lifelike. Always deeply interested not only in the truth to life of literary characters, but also in that of depicted events, he never fails to raise objections against any deviation from probability in the depicted episodes or the *dénouement* of the plot, rejecting the conventional patterns of plot exploited by fashionable romances, made to hang upon the usual devices of surprise effects and striking contrasts, as well as the abuse of fortune and chance in the disentanglement of the plot. 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, and expressed his views on this problem very clearly several times, most happily perhaps in his reviews of Mrs. Gore's Christmas story *The Snow Storm,* of Bulwer's *Godolphin* and of Lever's *St. Patrick's Eve,* applying them consistently, however, in his whole criticism. Thackeray paid great attention, too, to the style of all the writers whom he judged from his critical chair, negatively evaluating those who wrote in an ungentlemanly, vulgar and bombastic style, and praising those whose style was natural, fresh, vigorous, not tainted by vulgarity and not "ornamented" by phrases or expressions from foreign languages. The jealous regard which Thackeray the critic had for the purity of his mother tongue is most conspicuously revealed in his reviews of the productions of the Silver-Fork School, as well as in those of all novels by Bulwer and Lever that came under his critical notice, while his concern about the purity and simplicity of literary language in general is especially manifested in his criticism of Hugo's bombastic style.

Thackeray's criticism of fiction is at the same time a concrete embodiment of his awareness of the important social function played by literature in general and prose fiction in particular in their time. One of his main merits as a critic of contemporary fiction is his capacity for grasping the significance a particular novel or story had for the society in which it originated, this capacity being conditioned, in the 1830s and 1840s, by the essentially progressive outlook on the world characteristic of him for that period. At the same time, however, his criticism of fiction also mirrors the contradictions inherent in his philosophy of life, which prevent him from coming to a full understanding of certain works of fiction and their historical and social roots. He makes some serious errors, from my point of view at least, in his conception of the social commitment of fiction

and consequently in his evaluation of some of the novels of purpose. On the other hand, however, in this part of his criticism (as in his whole critical work) he also reveals his ability to grasp the "moral" of the book he reviews and present it to the reader in a few happily worded sentences and he never fails in discerning whenever this "moral" is inartistically handled. In my opinion again, he is not always a good judge as to the objective social effect which the book he has in hand would have on his contemporaries (as for instance in the case of Dickens's Christmas stories), yet in most cases he unfailingly singles out books whose influence could not but be harmful (in the case of most of the literary fashions he evaluated, but especially the Newgate). Although he concentrated his attention on the malign influence works of this type would have on the morals and literary taste of the readers and did not expressly denounce their essentially escapist character, his assaults on the idealized depictions of the past, of the criminal underworld, fashionable or military life, clearly show that he was aware of and rejected even this aspect of the given kind of literature.

This part of Thackeray's critical legacy clearly mirrors, too, his conviction as to the great morally educational role played by literature in the life of human society. He aims his critical weapons especially at those works of fiction which confuse the boundary between virtue and vice, present criminal and vicious characters in an amiable light and thus exercise, as he was convinced, a harmful influence on the morals of the readers. The same considerations (and of course his deeply ingrained humanism) are the main motives, too, of his protests against the depiction of the brutal in literature, against some novelists' undue predilection for and detailed depiction of cruelties and atrocities. In applying this moral point of view, which is in my opinion not wholly to be condemned, he sometimes goes too far even in his professional criticism, notably in his reviews of French literature, which bear strong traces of being influenced by the strict and narrow-minded moral code of the English society of his time. Especially in his later criticism of the 1850s and 1860s, the increasingly strong stress laid upon the moral effect of fiction even played a retrogressive role in the then literary situation (as the similar standpoint of the Johnsonian critics had done in their time, as Mayo has pointed out[120]) — helping to prolong the tyrannic rule of the "young person" in literature. If we accept Stang's statement,[121] supported by much evidence, that the first protests against this "tyranny of the young person" began to appear earlier than is usually supposed, in the 1850s, the more regrettable seems to us Thackeray's eventual complete submission to it. What is no less deplorable is the fact that the soundness of his later critical judgments suffers in consequence of the earlier relative equilibrium of his moral and other judgments having been in most cases seriously impaired to the detriment of the entire evaluation, the outcome of this modification being the injustice he commits especially towards Fielding and Sterne.

Thackeray's criticism of fiction, especially of the productions of the various literary fashions of his time, has also considerable value as criticism. It clearly reveals his critical power, displays the variety of his gifts as a critic and the originality, vigour and freshness of his critical approach, bearing at the same time witness to his sound literary taste, his ability to discern the grain from

[120] See op. cit., p. 157.
[121] See op. cit., pp. 211—215; see also Kathleen Tillotson, op. cit., pp. 54ff.

the chaff and his strong propensity to laugh at dullness and pretension. It is also in this part of his criticism that Thackeray makes full use of all the critical weapons he had at his disposal, writing not only regular book reviews, but frequently having recourse to parody and burlesque, which, by their very nature, enabled him to be more concerned with literary values than he was when exploiting the traditional forms of criticism and to present a compact revelation especially of the weak points of the parodised novelist and, in the best parodies, also of the merits (notably in his parody of Lever). The other forms he used were for instance the satirical recipe for popular romances, the polemical commentary, the ironical tribute, the fictitious dialogue, the pamphlet, the open letter, and so forth. The judgments he pronounced in the period of his professional criticism on the English literature of his own time were for the most part just and most of them have also been confirmed by posterity. His criticism of French literature is not wholly devoid of national bias, but neither this part of his critical legacy nor his criticism of fiction as a whole is motivated by any personal rancour, animosity or vindictive feelings on his part, nor by pure malice.

This may be best demonstrated, as I have already tentatively suggested, in his criticism of Bulwer, to which he devoted much of his energy and time, for he quite justifiably saw in this writer one of the leading representatives of several of the prevalent literary fashions of his day. His criticism was a powerful and effective attack upon all the basic aspects of the creative approach of this fashionable writer (as we shall see further in dealing with his reviews of Bulwer's poetry and drama), an attack which always unerringly hit its target and caused Bulwer many bitter moments. As Ray has demonstrated in detail, that is why critics favourably inclined to Bulwer (especially Sadleir, who recanted, however, after the publication of Thackeray's *Letters*) or those assuming an adverse attitude to Thackeray (especially Greig) evaluated or still evaluate his criticism of Bulwer entirely negatively[122] as brutal and malevolent, motivated by mercenary reasons, personal or political enmity and jealousy of Bulwer's "success as writer, politician, clubman, and dandy", as Greig[123] has it. This critic did not recant even when Thackeray's personal character had become better known after the publication of his correspondence. Even some other scholars, neither favouring Bulwer nor hostile to Thackeray, do not in my opinion interpret Thackeray's criticism of this writer correctly — finding its motives in Thackeray's revenge for corporal punishment at school (Ennis), personal antipathy and envy (Stevenson), political reasons or allegiance to Bulwer's wife (Rosa and Bulwer's grandson, the author of his grandfather's biography[124]). Such interpretations of Thackeray's criticism of Bulwer are in my opinion erroneous and unjust, and that for several reasons. In the first place, it is true that Thackeray indulged in personalities especially in his pamphlet "Mr. Yellowplush's Ajew", but such personal attacks were a common phenomenon in the criticism of his time and, after all, Thackeray's trespasses

[122] See *The Uses of Adversity,* pp. 9, 242—244, 476n.; for Sadleir's views before his recantation (in his review of *Letters* in the *Nineteenth Century,* CXL, July 1946, quoted in *The Uses of Adversity,* p. 9) see *Bulwer and His Wife, A Panorama: 1803—1836* (1933).

[123] Op. cit., p. 34.

[124] *Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton,* by his grandson the Earl of Lytton, 2 vols., London, 1913.

in this respect were in my opinion not so grievous as those committed by some other critics. In the second place, Bulwer, for all his undoubted talent, was a definitely second-rate writer, and even if some critics of his time extolled him as the greatest novelist of the age (for instance Horne), the more clear-sighted among them — Carlyle, Maginn, partly Macaulay, Chernishevski, and others — clearly discerned the weak points of his creative approach. Their judgments, Thackeray's criticism and the following comparison of Thackeray with Bulwer, made by Charlotte Brontë, have been fully confirmed by posterity:

"A hundred years hence, if he only lives to do justice to himself, he will be better known than he is now. A hundred years hence, some thoughtful critic, standing and looking down on the deep waters, will see shining through them the pearl without price of a purely original mind — such a mind as the Bulwers, etc., his contemporaries have *not*, — not acquirements gained from study, but the thing that came into the world with him — his inherent genius".[125]

Upon the whole we may safely conclude that even if Thackeray's assaults on Bulwer's person were not always in harmony with the critical and social precepts, his criticism of Bulwer's works is not prejudiced and is entirely just. Though he attacked sharply, he was also able to appreciate some positive aspects of Bulwer's method, even if he did not succeed in finding many of these. I have already quoted several pieces of evidence confirming this and could supplement them by further testimony, all showing that Thackeray approached Bulwer's work without preconceived opinions, that he did not feel any personal animosity to this writer (even taking his side in his divorce suit) and that he himself regarded his criticisms and parodies as good-natured, at least at the time when he wrote them.[126] He rejected the accusation of personal prejudice against Bulwer very explicitly twice in his letters, in the later instance emphasizing that if he had had any kind of animosity to Bulwer he would never have attacked him,[127] and in the earlier giving reasons for his sharply critical attitude:

"I whish to igsplain what I meant last night with regard to a certain antipathy to a certain great author. I have no sort of personal dislike (not that it matters much whether I have or not) to Sir ELBL on the contrary the only time I met him, at the immortal Ainsworth's years ago, I thought him very pleasant: and I know, from his conduct to my dear little Blanchard, that he can be a most generous and delicate minded friend. BUT there are sentiments in his writing wh always anger me, big words wh make me furious, and a premeditated fine writing against wh I cant help rebelling. My antipathy don't go any farther than this: and it is accompanied by a great deal of admiration" (*Letters* II, 485).

The most convincing proof of Thackeray's criticism of Bulwer not having been motivated by personal spite is, however, his whole criticism of the second-rate fiction produced in his time, which is based on the same principles as his evaluation of Bulwer and in which he metes out the same justice both to his main adversary and to many other trespassers who were in his opinion guilty in particular, as Bulwer was, of not representing reality truthfully and maltreating the novel in various inartistic ways. Although I have never been in doubt about the matter, for the evidence quoted above does not in my opinion leave room for any, the unprejudiced character of Thackeray's criticism of Bulwer has

[125] *The Brontës: Life and Letters*, I, 445; see also II, 85.
[126] See *Letters* I, 95, 398, 412, 438, II, 56, 270—271.
[127] See Manuscript letter, 12—15 December 1858, quoted in *The Age of Wisdom*, p. 286; see also *Letters* II, 779—781.

so far been recognized only by very few Thackerayan scholars, notably by Dr. Thrall, Dodds and Ray, who evaluate it as unbiased, honest, sincere, and based upon sound aesthetic principles.[128]

What should be once again duly emphasized in conclusion and what especially Loofbourow has so ably demonstrated is that Thackeray's criticism of fiction was supremely important for him as a novelist. As the quoted scholar has shown, Thackeray's journalistic experimentation with the literary conventions of his time and the preceding Neoclassicist period "enabled him to develop his parodic verbal textures" and integrate them into "a suggestive, allusive prose that included in its own resources the elements of form and content", thus creating a precedent for all later novelists, "from George Eliot to Vladimir Nabokov", who are, even if mostly indirectly, "indebted to Thackeray's experimentation".[129] The same scholar has also in my opinion very correctly pointed out that this is not the only important bequest Thackeray as critic of fiction and novelist made to posterity, for his critical perceptions, too, are pertinent for our day as they were for his — the literary conventions he satirized are still alive in the popular literature of today, and "a brief acquaintance with the appropriate patterns and rhetoric" (provided by this scholar) "makes Thackeray's satire as relevant now as it was in his own time".[130] Even if the reviewers and critics of fiction of today do penetrate more deeply into the structure of this literary art than Thackeray did, few of them bring to their task the trenchant wit and firm aesthetic principles of Thackeray's mature criticism.

[128] See Thrall, op. cit., pp. 68—71, Dodds, op. cit., p. 22, *The Uses of Adversity*, pp. 240—244.

[129] For the quotations see op. cit., pp. 22, 5.

[130] Ibid., p. 6.