

William Thackeray: A Study of His Technique and Style

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Abstract

This paper seeks to shed light on the technique and style of Thackeray's major novels Vanity Fair (1848), Pendennis (1848–1850), The History of Henry Esmond (1852), and The New comes (1855). The paper discusses the merits of each of the above mentioned work and concludes that each novel has its unique style, plot and characters.

Keywords: Plot, Characters, Brevity, Satire and reform, Contemporaries.

Introduction

Eighteenth century as we all know was remarkable for its emphasis on commonsense, reason and brevity. A typical and inevitable product of these tendencies was the satire as a form of literature. First, a handmaid of party polemic and personal recriminations gradually took the shape of social reprobation. The gall and the sting of Swift steadily passed through the gentler undertones of Addison censure on to the relativity diluted albeit calculated blows aimed at the follies and foibles of the times in the hands of Fielding. For a correct and balanced estimate of Thackeray as a novelist, we have to pick up the thread where Fielding left it. The latter had made an important advance on the road to fictional perfection by giving the novel a definite purpose “by using it as the vehicle for Satire and reform, chastising with a special zeal self-seekers and hypocrites” (Watt). In the hands of Dickens, the center of attention shifted from mere satire to the creation of a great gallery of characters who lived and moved and had their eccentric begins against the background of Victorian London. The mention of Dickens brings us to the consideration of a very persistent and not too far-fetched comparisons between him and Dickens for the two are usually bracketed together by literary historians as well as by literary critics. The tendency to pair together two important writers is partially explainable by the fact that it helps to throw into relief the characteristics and qualities of one of them when laid beside those of the other. A close study of these two contemporaries leaves one in no doubt as to their relatively general dissimilarity in most of the matters of consequence, and saves the fact of their contemporaneousness from which sprang some common ground between them, e.g., the identity of their moral values, “sterling, domestic, unspiritual of the Victorian middle class for which they both wrote” (D. Cecil).

The difference between the ranges of the two becomes evident when we come to grips with the world which each one of them has created in his novels. In the case of Dickens, we have rather an astonishingly varied and rich compass within which are included all sorts of characters of varying professions, individual eccentricities and mannerisms; most of them playing secondary roles only to strengthen the actions of the central figure. These characters are largely the product of a fertile imagination reared into the prismatic medium of their author's creative genius. Although not unconvincing, they are not real either. The chief difference between Dickens and Thackeray was that of their temperaments. Dickens had the precious gift of observation but lacked reflective power. In fact, thought has no place in his artistic creation. It is imagination that does the trick with him. This made him emotional and imaginative, even romantic. Thackeray was just the reverse of it. He was both a realist and a moralist. His observation did not end in itself. Rather, it became the raw material for his higher faculty of reflection. The latter informed him of the sham deceptions, vanities, intrigues, snobberies so universally present in his own day. Influenced by Fielding and Swift, he turned into a satirist.

Unlike Dickens who caricatured and burlesqued, mocked and ridiculed, Thackeray exposed and unmasked the moral weaklings which he found everywhere. In the words of Rickett “Thackeray satirized social conventions, Dickens national weaknesses. Pretense and snobbery felt the lash of the one, hypocrisy and cruelty the rage of the other”. Both Thackeray and Dickens deal with the middle classes although while the former deals largely with their apex the latter with the base. It is to the credit of Dickens that he brought to bear upon his comparatively unromantic subjects a truly romantic temperament. His imaginative power highly qualified him for this romantic treatment. In the case of Thackeray there was a strange mental confusion almost a kind of spiritual crisis. Constitutionally romantic he became more and more divorced from his inner self and in the end developed a realism which in itself bears most eloquent testimony to his repressed romanticism. The tragedy of his personal life including that caused by the insanity of his wife made him an escapist from the world of his own inner feelings and deeper emotions.

Embittered and disappointed with life - particularly its romantic aspects, he turned against that which he could not live up to. Coupled with the revelations of his clear-sighted intelligence, this disappointment and bitterness led him into the sensing of the presence in the world of spiritual mediocrity on a large scale. This saddened his outlook. His curiosity for truth yielded to him a sad panorama of life. This yearning for the better and woe at the real brought him, may be in spite of himself, very near that truly romantic mood of which a certain melancholy and discontent are so familiar strains. Had he taken seriously to poetry, he should have displayed a mood akin to Shelley. This inner and basic trait of romanticism in the personality of Thackeray became more and more perceptible in his later works. This is understandable when we encounter the fact that with the mellowing of years Thackeray’s judgment also ripened, and towards the second half of his career he came to recognize the essential one-sidedness of his subjects.

Here it may not be out of place to point out that his initial alienation from romance was partly produced by the excesses of the romanticists and partly by his mistaken judgment that reality was essentially opposed to romance. In fact, the success of Dickens had undoubtedly given cause to him for second thoughts. In order to get the better of him, he turned to realism and this, as we have already seen, to him meant hostility to romance. This accounts for “the preponderance through the first half of his career of what was hard and unlovely” (Hugh Walker). “But,” as the same critic points out, “gradually as time went on, he recovered his balance. He discovered that romance was not so much false and one-sided and partial and that its opposite might be equally one-sided and at same time less beautiful. The kindlier judgment and the more genial views which pervade his later works indicate his mature conviction that the chivalrous knight and the greedy noble were equally real.”

Thackeray’s Popular Plots

Thackeray’s plots usually revolve round the same themes like struggle between selfishness, vanity, deception and instinctive goodness, honesty and humility. In practical, all his books with the possible exception of *Henry Esmond*, his themes sag. The reader meets with many pages where the unconcealed fatigued and weariness of the author’s pen tires him. But it is rarely that there are no recoveries. Nearly always his “mood” returns, his fancy kindles up, his fatigue and melancholy retire and once again he is pleasant, refreshing and interesting. He is also in the habit of introducing sub-plots, a plot within a plot, in his stories. The center of tension shifts from one to the other adding to the impression of the multiplicity of characters and situations. However, through all these runs a common unifying influence, that of the author himself.

Thackeray’s Characters

Coming to Thackeray’s characters, several interesting facts are revealed to us. Dickens had created a huge army of characters giving each individuality of its own. His interest lay chiefly in the traits in which one character differed from the other. Thackeray also produced a large number of characters but he made them all co-sharers in a common fund of general characteristics. According to David Cecil “Thackeray is interested not in the variety but in the species; not in men but man”. This while it gave his characters a common denominator of what he regarded as universal aspects of human character, on the other hand it made them more firm and life like in their impression upon the reader’s mind because of the sure grasp of their author on those interests and motives which activate them all alike. The guiding impulse of Thackeray in the writing of his novels as we have seen was directed towards the exposing of the sham and the deceptions of his age. His characters too, became completely conditioned by the necessities of this impulse.

Within the time work of the world he wanted to criticize he created only such of the characters who were worthy of his preconceived criticism. The range of his characters, therefore, is in correspondence with the limitations of his general design. Unlike Dickens whose characters are mainly grotesque exaggeration of real life, those of Thackeray are within the range of their very much life like and possess a symmetry born of a common perspective and moral vision. Undoubtedly even Thackeray has circumscribed the world of his literary creation by deliberately ignoring some very important aspects of human life in his anxiety to paint the widely prevalent snobbery of his day which he condemned rather sensitivity. He peopled his stories with a new race of snobs who dangle about on the whole chart of society spread before him. Consequently, in his portrait of a character invariably he had to bring out the comic noses and big moustaches of caricature as ridiculous appendages. This tendency to burlesque was eminently suited to his general aim. An acute observer of life that Thackeray has his eye for character was exceptionally sure. Even though almost all his characters are simplified, they are uniformly excellent and memorable. Even today while reading Thackeray one cannot but feel homely with his world without experiencing a bar of antiquity dividing the present from the period nearly a century old. Once the limitations of his range necessitated by his central purpose are admitted, one has to completely agree with his own statement, "I have no brains above my eyes; I describe what I see." With remarkable exactitude, his eye caught the faults and the weaknesses of society. Combined with his great insight into the psychology of rogues both male and female and an unsurpassable power to mock, jest and taunt with a subtle sense of irony, this critical power of shrewd observation made Thackeray perhaps the greatest painter of adventures, cheats, hypocrites and fools. In this respect, Thackeray was an admirable draftsman of contemporary society who held a mirror up to nature as it were in drawing upon the canvas of his works, the manners and the conventions of his age.

The characters of Thackeray are not as rich and resilient as those of Shakespeare, in which respect Dickens was much nearer to the great master. But with regard to objectivity and independence Thackeray did display a considerable amount of genius as in the case of Shakespeare. "His characters are not merely puppets of or broadcasting stations for their master like those of H. G. Wells or Bernard Shaw. They have a momentum of their own which is generated out of their own character and which helps them unravel themselves without any extraneous direction by their author. Thackeray once said, "I don't control my characters, I am in their hands and they take me where they please". Commenting on this W. H. Hudson remarks, "He had, as it were, endowed them with independent volition and by so doing had to a large extent placed them beyond the range of his calculations; they spoke and acted on their own impulse ..." Again, writing upon the objective and impartial nature of Thackeray's character-drawing, Hamilton Thompson in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* observes, "His characters come before us like the casual acquaintances of ordinary life; we may feel instinctive affinities or repulsions; but we suspend our judgment till we get to know them better, with the consciousness that the novelist is in the same position as ourselves.

As he writes, "His characters discover themselves to him; he becomes the interpreter of events which lie beyond his conscious control". Thus, all the characters in *Henry Esmond*, several of them in *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* and a few of them in *The Newcomers* deserve a permanent place in the whole galaxy of literary creation. Here it may, however, be repeated that because of the strong stress of his age Thackeray bowed down to the moral demands of Victorian ethics and thus developed a certain inconsistency in the conception of his characters. It has already been pointed out how; where sex matters were involved, he deliberately created a false impression by refusing to trace the course of his characters' conduct to the logical end. His inner sentimentality had also not a little to do with the shortcomings of his character delineation, Becky's angry outburst at her own child for the simple reason of the killer's attempt to overhear her singing, is in glaring contrast with her real psychology. A woman of her nature keenly avid of admiration should have been rather gratified at the approbation her own son gave her instead of running into a fit of rage. This defect in Thackeray is a strong warning against the habit of uniting art with personal morality.

Thackeray's Analytical Method

Thackeray was the first novelist of note who introduced the analytical method in the portrayal and development of human character. This was a great advance upon his predecessors for it was to be the harbinger of the psychological novel in the hands of the succeeding generation of the novelists. His tendency to equate all his major characters with one another was a direct result of his belief in the universal mediocrity of mankind. He called his *Vanity Fair* "a novel without a hero". In this world, a vanity fair, there can be no heroes.

All are but diverse editions of the same follies and foibles, intellectual weaknesses and moral vices. This was essentially an antidote to Carlyle's hero worship. For Carlyle history was the tale of the adventures of the great man and it was the duty of the people to discover, obey and worship them.

Thackeray was not, as some assume, unwillingly to land and worship the great at all events. The trouble with him was that he seemed to have given up the quest for the great having been more than convinced that there were none to look for. His changed outlook in his later novels, the gentler nature of his creation in them, proves beyond the shadow of any doubt the honesty of his belief and the sincerity of his purpose as they also divisively refute the charge of cynicism against him. M. L. Cross has aptly pointed out the transition from his earlier to the later novels with respect to the corresponding change in the general nature of their chief personages in the following words: In Thackeray's first novel, as we have seen, rogues and gentlemen in motley were the real characters; in his second novel attention was fixed upon two characters, lamentably weak but having a dash of sterling manhood in them. Both novels were without heroes. Thackeray's later aim was to portray great and commanding goodness of the heart in characters like Ethel, and Colonel New comes, Colonel Esmond and Harry Warrington; and, by means of them to draw attention away from worldly meanness. He dwells upon pardon, renunciation, disinterested and friendship and the separation of parents and children by sea and death; and he bows his head in awe before the inexplicable course of events and the mysteries of life and death.

Thackeray had a very great gift for writing dialogue and he profusely makes use of the indirect or dramatic method on the psychological side of the characterization. While employing the above method admirably, he supports his results very often by a very large amount of personal interpretation and criticism. Through their dialogue his characters reveal themselves to the reader in all their dominant characteristics. By adding his own comments to their conversations, Thackeray makes these characters greater repositories of realism and lifelikeness. This may be illustrated by the following passage from his *Vanity Fair* in which Becky and Jos Sedley interact with each other. "Are you preparing to join the army? Mr. Joseph?" she said. Is there to be nobody left in Brussel to protect as poor women?" Jos succeeded in plunging into the coat, and came forward blushing and stuttering and excuses to his fair visitor. "How was she altering the events of the morning — after the fatigues of the ball the night before?" Monsieur Isidor disappeared into his master's adjacent bedroom, bearing off the flowered dressing gown. "How good of you to ask." said she, pressing one of his hands in both her own, "How cool and collected you look when everybody else is frightened! How is our dear little Emmy? It must have been an awful. Awful parting." "Tremendous." Jos said.

"You men can bear anything," replied the lady. "Parting or dangers are nothing to you. Own now that you were going to join the army and leave us to our fate. I know you were - something tells rue you were. I was so frightened. When the thought came into my head (for I do sometimes think of you when I am alone. Mr. Joseph) that I ran all immediately to beg and entreat you not to fly from us." The above passage clearly brings home to the reader's mind the unmistakable impression of the deceptive and wicked character of Becky together with the stupidity and gullibility of Jos Sedley. All this Thackeray has brought about with the help of his remarkable use of the dialogue and personal interpretation. By this subtle use of dialogue, he more than makes up for the absence of a well-developed technique of self-analysis in his characters. While discussing his method of writing novels it should not be forgotten: that before them for long he had been engaged in journalistic and miscellaneous writing and the traces of this earlier work are clearly visible in his novels. Drawing his inspiration largely from his eighteenth century predecessors, he looked upon the novel as "a sort of confidential talk between writer and reader." This is essentially the method of the essayist rather than the novelist. Like the essayist, he treated the novel as a vehicle of intimate and unrestrained communication between himself and his readers.

Thackeray's Style of Creativity

Thackeray has a rare gift unlike many of his compeers- the gift of style. He wrote pure and simple English and had always at his command a perfect expression for all varieties and shades of thought and feeling - sad, humorous, ironic, profound. There is no trace of effort or affection in his writings. His realistic mode of expression and its realism is largely derived from a strict sense of discipline and tactical reticence. As Max Beerbohm remarks "He blew on his pipe and words came tripping round him like children, like pretty little children who are perfectly drilled for the dance or game, did he will it, treading on their precedence, like kings, gloomily."

As has been observed before he had an armchair method of writing which while it gave his works intimacy and candor also made them negligent and full of digressions, colloquialisms, exclamations and abrupt transitions. It is nonetheless a conscientious style which makes the movement from the start to the end perfectly natural and smooth. He has a set of expressions for every mood and every occasion.

While at one time he can expose the self-deception or the treachery of a character with bitter irony, at another time in describing the elementary domestic affections and good human impulses his words can almost dissolve into sentiment. "His gift of style enabled Thackeray to turn even flat matter into inspired writing". He could laugh or weep, satirize or moralize with equal ease and could even rise to romantic eloquence as when describing the beauty of Beatrix. "Esmond found his little friend and pupil Beatrix grown to be taller than her mother, a slim and lovely young girl, with cheeks mantling with health and roses, with eyes like stars shining out of azure, with waving bronze hair clustered about the fairest young forehead ever seen, and a mien and shape haughty and beautiful such as that of the famous antique statue of the huntress Diana. At one time, haughty, rapid, imperious with eyes and arrows that dart and kill, Harry watched and wondered at this young creature, and likened her in his mind to Artemis with the ringing bow and shafts flashing death upon the children of Niobe. At another time, she was coy and melting, as Luna shining tenderly upon Endymion: this fair creature, this lustrous Phoebe, was only young as yet nor had nearly reached her full splendor, but crescent and brilliant. Our young gentleman of the university, his head full of poetical fancies, his heart perhaps throbbing with desires undefined, admired and rising young divinity and gazed at her (though only as at some "bright particular star" far above his earth) with endless delight and wonder".

Ease, suppleness, flexibility and purity are the distinguished characteristics of Thackeray's style. Added to these is his unique gift of introducing infinite variations in the expression of different characters and of the same character under different circumstances. Thackeray had before him certain novels of crime in which crime was exploited in a sensational and sentimental manner and in which glamorized villains paraded as heroes. This he regarded to be dangerous to morals and his earlier novels seek to provide a corrective to it. By turning their attention to London slums and factory towns the humanitarians had brought about a welcome return of fiction to realism and contemporary life. By his novels, Thackeray swelled the current of realism which had greatly thinned since Dickens wrote his *Pickwick Papers*. But his realism is different from that of Dickens as he does not reproduce all the facts of a scene with almost a photographic accuracy. On the other hand, he diligently selects from them what he considers to be the most significant and concentrates all his emphasis upon them. Even when writing historical novels, he took an unconventional view of history in as much as he "stripped the muse of history of her mask and cothurnus, and requested her to lay aside the voice and manner of the stage." (W. L. Gross.) Thus, Henry Esmond begins his story with the complaint: The nurse of history hath encumbered herself with ceremony as well as her Sister of the Theater ... She too, in our age, busies herself with the affairs of kings, waiting on them obsequiously and stately, as if she were but a mistress of court ceremonies, and had nothing to do with registering of the affairs of the common people ... I would have history familiar rather than heroic: and think that Mr. Hogarth and Mr. Fielding will give our children a much better idea of the manners of the present age in England, than the *Court Gazette* and the newspapers which get thence.

The same realism is reflected in his treatment of the war showing not its pomp and pride but its barbarism and brutality and in his depiction of the generals and military leaders as mainly motivated by self-interest and mutual jealousy and not as the popular heroes which historians in general paint them to be. The same view was to be later upheld by Bernard Shaw in his *Arms and the Man*. The impression of realism is further enhanced in Thackeray's novels by his acceptance of the organization of society in the institution of the family. Commenting on this R. M. Lovett and H. S. Hughes remark: He identified his characters by the marks with which society recognizes; his novels abound in genealogy. The persistence of characters and families through successive novels, as in Balzac's works, gives a sense of actuality and stability to this Social fabric, and bridges the historical gap between his novels of the eighteenth century and those of the nineteenth.

Another factor in Thackeray's novels which contributes to the overall atmosphere of reality and a reference to which has already been made before is his habit of introducing in the midst of the story his personal comments and interpretations. This while it detracts from the quality of his constructive genius, adds the illusion of actuality in whatever he says. It is very common to meet with criticism which labels Thackeray as a cynic. A study of Thackeray would be undoubtedly incomplete without a thorough investigation of this charge.

In the following few paragraphs, an attempt is made to approach this problem from a number of angles and thereby to test the validity of this serious accusation. First of all, it is desirable to know the true meaning of 'cynicism.' A cynic is one who does not regard the world merely as evil but thinks it essentially to be less; he does not only think badly of life but also meanly of it. From this a very useful and important distinction emerges between what we call a satirist and what is meant by a cynic.

To be aware of the presence of evil in this world, to portray it, and even to chastise it does not in itself constitute the necessary ingredients of cynicism. There is no doubt that to carry bitterness and acrimony beyond a certain point is most likely to result in the depiction of a partial view of life, the darker view, which if not redeemed by the inclusion of the other side of the shield is bound to look like, and pass for, cynicism. That Thackeray sometimes, but only sometimes, carried his criticism of life beyond that fatal point, may be granted. But a person does not become a cynic by interpolating a few extreme remarks in his general discourse on life. Before terming Thackeray as a cynic, it is very necessary that his work should be studied from beginning to end. To any casual student of Thackeray, it will be evident that he had to pass through diverse vicissitudes which shaped his outlook of life. Although born under affluent circumstances, he did not for long remain a stranger to poverty and misery. Added to this was the most painful of all his experiences, the insanity of his wife. A keen observer of life that Thackeray has, he could not remain unconscious of the follies, the foibles, the vices and the wickedness so widely rampant in the society of his day. If we apply the modern psycho-analytical method to dissect his personality and to discover his mind to us, we cannot avoid the following conclusions:

The early shocks of his personal life together with growing consciousness of his rival Dickens' increasing popularity as a romantic writer made him repress his inner romanticism and turn him into a runaway from that buoyant gaiety and light-hearted frivolity which are so conspicuous by their absence in his works. They made him a realist - a realist to whom the real became circumscribed within the four corners of sham, deceit, hypocrisy and vanity. Beyond this self-drawn boundary, he refused to see. His occasional touches of geniality and warm-heartedness in his characters particularly in his later novels culminating into the creation of such a loving character as Colonel New comes, is an eloquent testimony to his innate affability. In the school of life his share had been one of hard and bitter lessons and the same he repeated in the world of his creation. As his consciousness grew mature his experiences became mellowed and correspondingly his view of life also turned kindlier and more amiable. Let, therefore, those who prefer to call him a cynic turn their attention from *Book of Snobs* and *Vanity Fair* to the brighter world of *Pendennis*, *Henry Esmond* and *The Newcomes* and they will have a fitting reply to their charge of cynicism against Thackeray. Further analysis of his personality reveals another instructive truth about him, the tremendous influence of the environment upon the intellectual development of a person has of late been clearly brought out by modern psychology. Thackeray was inextricably bound up with the age in which he was born. He was conditioned by the codes and canons of Victorian morality. The reformist zeal and the role of a preacher which are so clearly evident from his works were a direct result of his surroundings. The preacher in him joined the band-wagon of the realist in Thackeray and the result was an unsparing exposure of the corrupt elements of society about him. It is only when we collect these different strands of his psychological make up together that we can understand the partial view of life he has given us through his works and can separate Thackeray 'the man' from Thackeray 'the writer'.

This brings us to correct another leading confusion with regard to Thackeray. In the minds of those who call him a cynic, the tendency to read the character of a writer in what he writes is the most objectionable one. Those who have known Thackeray personally and even intimately have unequivocally given their judgment in favor of his personal affability and lovingness. Shirley Brooks in one of the stanzas of his little poem to Thackeray's memory which appears in *Punch* wrote:

He was a cynic! By his life all wrought
 Of generous acts mild words and gentle ways;
 His heart wide open to all kindly thought,
 His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise!
 He was a cynic! You might read it writ
 In that broad brow, crowned with its silver hair;
 In those blue eyes, with childlike candor lit,
 In that sweet smile his lips were wont to wear!
 He was a cynic! By the love that clung
 About him from his children, friends, and kin;
 By the sharp pain light pen and gossip tongue
 Wrought in him, chafing the soft heart within!

This aptly proves that Thackeray 'the man' far from being a cynic was a gentle and amiable individual. Surely this is not the stuff out of which cynical literature is born. The fact is that Thackeray had from the very beginning a very strong sensibility and an active and well-developed reflective power. In this latter respect, he parted company with Dickens who had equally powerful sensibility but who instead of effectiveness had the imaginative power, and the gay abandon which is so necessary an element of a witty humorist. Where Dickens could have laughed away, Thackeray had to ponder on, censure satirize and also moralize. This was as it should have been, for Thackeray embodied in himself who contrary traits of looking down upon his moral weaklings and their intellectual littleness with a sneer in his face and of filling them with pathos too deep for his own tears. His observation of life and people revealed to him a state of all round arrogance, pretentiousness and subterfuge; his good nature led him to sympathize with his own morally mediocre creation.

In this mixed world where good and evil, black and white are inextricably woven together into the texture of life, art cannot be said to divorce itself from objectivity and truthfulness merely by its choice of a single side of human life in its presentation of reality. For the literary activity is by its very nature selective. All art seeks the effectiveness of impression through the intensification of factual matter with the concentration of light or shade on a selected aspect of the reality. Thackeray in deciding to present the sham and the hypocrisy and the vanity of the people of his age, exercised the unchallenged prerogative of a creative artist and any criticism which refuses to take into account the validity and the inviolability of this literary prerogative and thereby to meet the writer on his own ground and to judge him for what he set out to achieve and not by what he never laid any claims to give, is tantamount to being a travesty of the principles of scientific criticism.

The charge of cynicism leveled against Thackeray has its roots in a relatively modern tendency on the part of critics whereby they feel inclined to mistake sentiment for the genuine feeling. As is clear, Sentiment being but an unreal shadow of human feeling, criticism which identifies both very often results into installing cheap degrading sentimentality on the high pedestal of genial humanity and warm kindness. Thackeray had avoided both, assuming that they were born of the same raw material. As has been stated, there was enough ground for this assumption of Thackeray in the form of the excesses of romanticism in the works of the earlier writer.

Viewed dispassionately and as a whole we can formulate certain broad opinions with regard to the alleged cynicism in Thackeray. He was by nature kind and gentle and believed in the goodness of things. His search for the good in real life led him on to sensitiveness for the weak and the wicked. Together with the influence of the eighteenth century literatures made him mock and jeer and even reprehend the evil forces in society, and in satire he found a natural and convenient medium for the ventilation of his feelings. His constant dwelling upon the darker side of life and his zealous portrayal of it has tended to make him one-sided and partial in his view of life. Although vice is an eternal and permanent element in human composition, it is by no means exclusive. In concentrating his attention on the shame and deceits of this world, much as Hardy dwelt on the utter helplessness of man before blind forces beyond human control, Thackeray essentially reflected a prevailing and dominant mood of his temperament. We have seen how as years grew he gradually modified his vision and in the end with the growth of the romantic element at least partially abandoned, the canons of art with which he had started.

Thackeray was forbidden to take his craft seriously by his conception of the novel as a talk with the reader. This, coupled with the development of his art from journalistic and miscellaneous writing made him conspicuous negligent of form. His style which is partly essayistic is responsible for the general looseness of his plots (with the exception of *Henry Esmond*).

His novels are great and remarkable essays in persiflage against a predominantly mediocre society. His skit against the dupes takes the shape of incisive irony when he finds conventional morality confronted with the weaknesses of the flesh and the machinations of the confirmed scoundrels. The degree of the trenchancy of his raillery is in proportion to the divergence between the conduct of his personages and the accepted moral canons of the Victorian society. The banter which Thackeray aims against the inhabitants of *Vanity Fair* is felt the keener by the readers because of the wonderfully ironical way in which the speakers expose themselves through what they say. This 'Thackeray an irony' is a unique ornament and a great helpmate of its author's satire. The moral animus with which Thackeray wrote found its acrimony reflected in the treatment of his subjects resulting in the accentuation of his asperity towards them. This brought him very near the twilight borderland between censure and cynicism. That he turned his back upon the dark prospect facing him and made calculated as well as instinctive retreat into the slight sunshine of near romance is a tribute at once to his native geniality and to his intellectual acumen.

Thackeray called his characters puppets. It is to his credit that he made the character of these alleged puppets the mainspring of their actions. Such at least is the impression gained by the reader. The relation between the characters and the development of the story is one of inevitability. He has further imbued his creatures with an additional being an out-of-plot personality which confers upon them an intensity and a vigor all their own. Amplifying this, S. D. Neill remarks: Like Tolstoy. He (Thackeray) can express a sense of life larger than that which is confined within the story. Just as he, the author, can draw aside his chair and speak to the reader, so do his characters appear to have a life of their own outside the limits of their appearances in the story. This sense of reality is aided by the trick of letting the same character appear in several novels.

In the field of the organization and elaboration of form, Thackeray is open to damaging criticism. But as a satirist and a humorist his place in English literature is secure. In depicting the sullen psychology of human emotions and in realistically portraying the stupid and the sinful side of life, he has made a uniquely precious contribution to the growth of the English novel. His greatest weakness lay in his yielding to the Victorian ethics. It was the familiar case of the struggle between the artist and the moralist. The success of the one necessarily meant the failure of the other. Unfortunately in Thackeray, the moralist usually triumphed over the artist.

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