HOPE FOR VANITY FAIR:
LOVE AS SALVATION IN
THACKERAY'S NOVELS

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

William Makepeace Thackeray's contemporaries praised his art for many reasons, not the least of which was for setting a precedent with his realism. Thackeray's entire literary training before his first novel, *Catherine* (1839-40), tended toward satire. He not only satirized social pretension but also lambasted, for being unrealistic, both the Newgate and the Silver Fork schools of literature so prominent in his day. His parodies of well-known works of these schools were devastatingly effective (indeed, Bulwer-Lytton never forgave Thackeray for parodying his novels), and young writers, on the one hand, hailed him as the destroyer of effete literary convention, while on the other hand conservatives assailed him for the satire which they felt denigrated their society, its traditions, its mores. *Catherine*, in fact, was so successful in exposing the Newgate Novel school (as was *Oliver Twist* to some extent) that some readers recoiled from the later installations of the novel; Thackeray repeatedly admitted that he was repulsed by the vicious exposé. With *Barry Lyndon* (1844), Thackeray attracted a small but influential group of critics, who realized that a genius and major writer was in the making. By the time *The Book of Snobs* (1846-48) appeared, it was obvious that a great social satirist was emerging. Soon afterward, *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) pushed Thackeray to the summit of literary recognition.

It was then that Thackeray's writing began to be scrutinized more closely, and reviewers became aware of his many talents; critics
realized that Thackeray was a polished satirist and realist, a master of characterization, a supreme stylist, and a "University man" or intellectual. Nassau Senior, an influential Victorian critic and economist, wrote that Thackeray "is unrivalled by any living writer, as an inventor and describer of character."¹ Walter Bagehot, in reviewing *Philip*, maintained that Thackeray's "most obvious merit is an artistic expression. His words have a felicity in conveying what he means, which no other words would have. His delineation is inexplicably, but somehow certainly, better than any other sort of delineation of the same kind."² And concerning the intellectual content of Thackeray's novels, even John Forster, Dickens' staunch Boswell, often admitted that Thackeray's "thought" was more serious, more profound, than Dickens'. Furthermore, literary historians have often pointed out that Thackeray's fellow writers claimed him as the greatest novelist of the time. In the famous dedication to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte places Thackeray in the forefront of her contemporaries, and compares him favorably even to his acknowledged master, Henry Fielding. Anthony Trollope, greatly influenced by Thackeray, places him ahead of all other novelists of the time. And George Eliot's letters time and again evaluate the intellectual content of Thackeray's novels higher than any other contemporary novelist's.


²From The Spectator (9 Aug. 1862), quoted in Tillotson and Hawes, p. 305.
In our own time, critics have praised Thackeray's writing for much the same reason as did his contemporaries. His style receives accolades (Loofbourow, Rawlins, Ray, Fraser); Barry Lyndon, Becky Sharp, Major Pendennis, Beatrix Esmond, Col. Newcome, and the Baroness Bernstein are still praised as some of the best characters in English literature (Saintsbury, McMaster, Dodds); the intellectual content of the novels is heartily commended (Hardy, the Tillotsons, Stevenson). Thus, Thackeray's position as a master of the novel is confirmed by modern critics as well as by his contemporaries. But, like all great artists, his works are flawed, and critics (notably today J. Y. T. Greig) are quick to point out these shortcomings.

In his own time as well as in ours, Thackeray was often criticized for the moral bleakness of his novels. As a realist, Thackeray could not exclude the existence (and sometimes the triumph) of evil in the world any more than he could tolerate the good-hearted whore or the misguided gentleman-turned-criminal who comes back to the right path. Thackeray, beginning with Barry Lyndon, peered with his analytical eye into the human heart, and found there good and evil intermixed. Such a psychologically realistic view, when expressed in a Victorian novel, could not but alarm a large portion of the reading public.

3 Even Thackeray's method of composition has attracted scholarly attention. J. A. Sutherland, Thackeray at Work (London: Athlone Press, 1974) discusses Thackeray's methodology in connection with his art.

4 Lord David Cecil, Victorian Novelists (1935; rpt. Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 2, points out that many aspects of Thackeray's art, admired as strengths in his own day, are considered defects today. He warns that it is unwise and critically narrow-minded to judge art of bygone periods with no awareness and appreciation of what the artist was trying to do.
public. John Forster, for example, lamented that Thackeray saw "the evil that is in good things."\(^5\) People were composites of good and evil to Thackeray, composites of generosity and greed, and to the Victorians, who saw reality in shades of black and white, the man who saw in shades of grey trod on thin ice. In our own time, influenced by theories of relativity, "moral ambivalence" often comes into play in discussing literature.

Treating love in Thackeray's novels, Barbara Hardy, though not with the indignation of Forster, writes that Thackeray "judges human feeling and action by the standard of love, but it is a non-transcendent love, a love forced to exist in ordinary everyday circumstances. His world is the world we live in, the world of Vanity Fair, and in it love cannot be free, or pure, or intact; it must be circumscribed and shaped by the society into which it is born and in which it dies or half-dies."\(^6\) Furthermore, Nassau Senior, immediately after praising Thackeray's characterization, commends him for exposing "pride, vanity, and selfishness" (Tillotson and Hawes, p. 201). Whether one discuss Thackeray's themes or his style, one cannot escape discussing

\(^5\) The *Examiner* (13 Nov. 1852), quoted in Tillotson and Hawes, p. 146.

\(^6\) *The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray* (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), p. 161. It may be noted here that love, as used in my study, denotes a love of constancy and of stability; further, the term (again, in terms of this study) applies to love relationships of characters for characters (as opposed to a character's love for God, for a sacred institution, etc.). Love is a redemptive force, and need not apply only to passionate, romantic love (though it may), but may also apply to filial love, familial love, brotherly love, or even love of one friend for another.
his moral concerns to some extent. Of course, Thackeray, on this account, is squarely in the Victorian tradition. The purpose of the Victorian novel was clearly didactic; in fact, in the eighteen forties and fifties, the respectability of the novel grew because it was found, in some instances, to encourage morals and to discourage evil. As Kenneth Graham notes, "The moral ideal, or a specifically Christian ideal, or most frequently, a belief in the absolute nature of the social code, continues to dominate most accounts of the relationship of fiction to values right to the end of the century."7 Indeed, Graham points out that even after realists like Trollope and Meredith discarded the conventions of the mid-Victorian years, "there is a widespread sense that the novel has an outright moral or philosophical function" (p. 74). Even considering the prominence of moral concern in Thackeray's novels, the charges that his novels are morally bleak have yet to be answered.

That this bleakness is a distinct flaw, and that the novels suffer consequently from an alleged lack of realism, seems to me untrue when the novels are closely studied. The treatment of good and bad characters, Thackeray's own feelings about his characters and themes as revealed in his correspondence, and the emergence of a love-as-salvation theme convince me that Thackeray does offer respite from a cruel, immoral world, that his novels are morally realistic, and that critics have long overlooked the saving force in the novels: love. As early as The Book of Snobs (1846–47), Thackeray was becoming

convinced of love's importance both in life and in literature, for
about the book, he wrote: "... if Fun is good, Truth is still bet-
ter, and Love is still better." Of this early satire, Lambert Ennis
writes that "The morality, too, was implicit in the satire, for
Thackeray was always consciously placing himself in the great English
satirical tradition that went back through Fielding to the Elizabe-
thans. This tradition had constantly avowed the moral function of
satire." Ennis's fine book deals with Thackeray's transformation
from satirist to satirist-moralist whose outlook became increasingly
emotional and less harshly satirical. In fact, Ennis claims that
love becomes inextricably part of Thackeray's fiction; for example,
he sees two plots in Vanity Fair, both of which involve love and moral
decisions. It is clear, once again, not only that Thackeray is con-
cerned with morality, but also that he views love in moral terms.
As I shall show later in some detail, Amelia and Dobbin are rewarded
with happiness (as much happiness as is possible for denizens of
Vanity Fair) because they are good and because they love sincerely.

At the same time Vanity Fair was appearing, Thackeray's letters
reveal the increasing importance of love in his life. After Charles
Buller died, Thackeray on 29 November 1848, communicated to Mrs.
Brookfield his thoughts on death: "There go wit fame friendship ambi-
tion high repute. Ah aimons nous bien, it seems to me that it [love]

8 Quoted in The Oxford Thackeray, ed. George Saintsbury (London:
Oxford Univ. Press, 1908), IX, 493.

9 Thackeray: The Sentimental Cynic (1950; rpt. New York: AMS
is the only thing we can carry away. When we go let us have some who
love us wherever we are."

Less than a month later, on 18 December, he wrote to Mrs. Brookfield that "Soft-heartedness seems to me better
than anything better than stars and garters great intellect blazing
wit &c." This belief in emotion becomes more obvious and more for-
malized as the novels and the years pass, and by the time The
Virginians (1857-59) was published, Thackeray's last three novels
(Henry Esmond, 1852; The Newcomes, 1853-55; and The Virginians) in-
cluded direct statements of love's immortality. Thackeray had found
in love an escape from the sufferings and hypocrisy of Vanity Fair.
Astonishingly, the statements of love's immortality all bear remarka-
ble resemblance to a passage in another letter to Mrs. Brookfield:
"I can't all perish living in your heart. That in itself is a sort
of seal and assurance of heaven. . . . Say that I die and live yet
in the love of my survivors? isn't that a warrant of immortality al-
most? say that my 2 dearest friends [his mother and Mrs. Brookfield]
precede me and enter into Gds [God's] futurity spotless and angelical
I feel that I have 2 advocates in Heaven and that my love penetrates
there as it were." Thackeray, both in the novels and in his letters,
seems to rebut critics (e.g., Barbara Hardy) who cannot see that if
love is mocked by many characters in the novels, those who do love are

10 The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray,
II, 461.

11 Letters, II, 469.

12 Ibid.
rewarded with happiness, while those who fail to love come to shameful or lonely ends.

The six major novels used in the study (Barry Lyndon, Vanity Fair, Pendennis, Henry Esmond, The Newcomes, and The Virginians) all demonstrate the love-as-salvation motif and show the development of the motif from early novel to late. Because Barry Lyndon was extensively revised in 1856, the study begins with Vanity Fair. This novel serves well as a starting point for several reasons. It is a "typical" Thackeray novel conceptually and stylistically; Barry Lyndon is not. Furthermore, Vanity Fair's characters (Amelia and George, Becky and Rawdon, and Dobbin) are rewarded or punished for their success or failure in love relationships, while Barry Lyndon offers only negative examples—shows only how not to act in a love relationship. Pendennis shows an expansion of the love motif from marital relationships to filial love, love among friends, and familial love. With Henry Esmond and The Newcomes come the first direct statements of love's immortality: Thackeray announces eloquently that escape from Vanity Fair is made possible through love. The Virginians completes the cycle, not only repeating the immortality of love idea but also returning to the use of negative examples, as found in Barry Lyndon. Except for Barry Lyndon, then, this study treats the love motif chronologically. As a final note, it must be remembered that Thackeray's art is to be admired for a number of reasons, as I have shown earlier in the chapter, and that if this study concentrates on an important thematic concern, it does not attempt to value Thackeray's handling of the love motif more highly than the other artistic aspects of the novels, for this
study is too limited, and Thackeray's genius too esthetically rich and complex.
CHAPTER II

THE MOTIF IN VANITY FAIR

Love as a form of salvation from Vanity Fair at this point (1847-48) in Thackeray's artistic development appears primarily in the marriages found in the novel. The best examples are, of course, the marriages of Amelia Sedley and George Osborne, of Becky Sharp and Rawdon Crawley, and finally of Amelia Osborne and William Dobbin. Other characters, some of whom are married, also serve as examples; still others (like Miss Crawley) are examples of loveless lives. Regardless of the characters' attachments, all the major characters in Vanity Fair contribute to Thackeray's "statement" that those who love unselfishly and honestly find happiness in life, while those who fail to enter into sincere love relationships end unhappily.

Thackeray's attitude towards love and marriage surfaces quite early in the novel, as though he wishes to make plain at the outset that although he realizes the nature of the self-serving denizens of Vanity Fair, there are forces, both positive and negative, that the moralist-narrator will applaud or denounce, as need be. As Amelia and George become more attached to one another, the narrator pauses briefly to comment on the marriage of Maria Osborne to Frederic Augustus Bullock, son of a wealthy and eminent banker. It is no accident that the bridegroom is described as follows: "... a house in Park Lane, a country house at Wimbledon, a handsome chariot, and two prodigious tall horses and footmen, and a fourth of the
annual profits of the eminent firm of Hulker & Bullock, all of which advantages were represented in the person of Frederick Augustus.\textsuperscript{1}

Rather than marrying a person, Maria marries a huge bank account; indeed, never is love or even affection mentioned in regard to this marriage, even though the couple appears several times in the course of the novel. Perhaps for emphasis, the narrator assures the reader that Maria "would have taken Bullock Senior . . . would have assumed the spotless wreath, and stepped into the travelling carriage by the side of gouty, old, bald-headed, bottle-nosed Bullock Senior . . . only the old gentleman was married already . . . " (p. 113). Surely there is no mistaking Thackeray's opinion of loveless marriages; the precedent is set early, and the author is to reinforce this opinion time and again in the novel.

With Amelia and Becky, however, marrying for the wrong reason is not so easily dispensed with, and both women must suffer before the lesson is learned. Amelia is, like so many critics (Dyson, Fraser, Karl, Dodds, et al.) have hastened to point out, a foolish, deluded little chit for much of the novel. To view her goodness in a diminished light, however, is to misread Thackeray, as will be shown later. Similarly, George Osborne, Rawdon Crawley, and William Dobbin must undergo love-related sufferings before they are freed of their illusions (George, in his monstrous egoism, is incurable, and must die). As Thackeray illustrates so poignantly with these

\textsuperscript{1}William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair, ed. Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1963), p. 113. All further references are to this edition and are cited by page in the text.
characters and their love relationships, loving is a difficult task, and a lover, while he cannot succeed with a non-emotional attachment, must guard against infatuation, lest he blind himself to hidden and serious faults of another person. To be sure, there are no "perfect" marriages in Thackeray's novels, for he is too much a realist to deal with relationships that cannot exist among humans. What Thackeray does show, however, is that real and unselfish love can bring humans nearer to complete happiness on earth than any other force. Thus it is that Gordon N. Ray, in considering *Vanity Fair*, contends that "Life is redeemed for Thackeray only by affection, by love, by loyalty to the promptings of the heart." If love will not bring a heaven on earth, it will bring salvation from much earthly suffering to those caught in *Vanity Fair*. It is to this salvation that the characters unconsciously aspire, and which a few do attain.

If in the end Amelia does get her booth in *Vanity Fair* (in the form of her happy life with her family and William), a painful maturing process must first be endured. Indeed, much maturing is necessary, for when Amelia is first introduced to the reader, her blind adulation of George appears immediately to be dangerous. Amelia, referred to several times as a parasite or as a vine, cannot at first view George in his proper perspective; that is, she cannot be content to think of him as the special person she loves. Rather, she must place him above her, above the human ranks to which he rightfully belongs. Such hero worship is, of course, unhealthy, and

serves well as an omen. This unrealistic and unhealthy regard for George is exposed early in their relationship: "The fate of Europe was Lieutenant George Osborne to her. His dangers being over, she sang Te Deum. He was her Europe; her emperor; her allied monarchs and august prince regent. He was her sun and moon; and I believe she thought the grand illumination and ball at the Mansion House, given to the sovereigns, were especially in honour of George Osborne" (p. 112). By this time, both Osborne and Dobbin have appeared, and Thackeray's audience is well aware of the former's inferiority to the latter: the audience knows also that even if George Osborne is not compared to this friend, he is still not the man Amelia thinks he is. Amelia's love, in short, is not at all an admirable love; it lacks substance. It is, in fact, little more than infatuation, an infatuation that is to bring her a sad, woeful marriage and an equally sad 15 years of widowhood.

If Amelia's fault in her relationship with George is excess (infatuation), George's fault is the opposite—a lack. Love presupposes sharing and giving; George is unwilling or unable to do either. Even his kindnesses are performed so as to enhance his conceited and egotistical image of himself as a knightly hero. Although the pages leading up to George's and Amelia's marriage often reveal Osborne as a vain and shallow prig, none shows him to be such an egocentric cad as the one in which he takes money from Dobbin to buy Amelia a gift—and then does not: "And I dare say he would have bought something very handsome for Amelia; only, getting off the coach in Fleet Street, he was attracted by a handsome shirt-pin in a
jeweller's window, which he could not resist; and having paid for that, had very little money to spare for indulging in any further exercise of kindness" (p. 118). If Osborne cannot share borrowed money with the woman he purports to love, how can he possibly be expected to share emotional responsibility with her for the rest of his life? More significant than this, however, is George's visit to Amelia after her father's financial collapse, for it is this visit that strips away the false sentiment surrounding Osborne's motives in the courtship and bares his monstrous egotism for the reader's inspection: George is "touched and flattered" by Amelia's "prostration"; he views Amelia as "a slave before him"; her pitiable aspect "thrilled" him at "the knowledge of his power"; he is touched by her "submission" and "forgives" her for an offense never committed (all references to p. 187). If there is love present, it is, unhappily, only George's love for himself. Before the marriage ever occurs, it is doomed; both Amelia and George are marrying for the wrong reason.

The courtship and marriage of Becky Sharp and Rawdon Crawley is strikingly similar to that of Amelia and George: in both marriages, one partner fails to see the other partner in the proper light, and in both marriages one partner does not feel true affection (at least Amelia and Rawdon marry for what they think is love). It is clear to Becky that Rawdon is the key to his Aunt Crawley's fortune; the old woman detests Pitt Crawley and her brother, Sir Pitt Crawley. Rawdon, the rascally dragoon, is her favorite, and if Becky is to have part of that fortune, she must have Rawdon. Against Becky's
artifice, the slow-witted dragoon has little chance. By the time they are secretly married, Becky's motives are quite obvious. To indicate her motives, Thackeray subtly draws her out in the form of a temptation offered too late—Sir Pitt's proposal. Becky knows that marrying Rawdon is a calculated risk, but knowing that Sir Pitt's fortune and title are, or could have been, a certainty strikes deeply into her conniving heart. In fact, she is caught totally off guard by the proposition: "Rebecca started back a picture of consternation. In the course of this history we have never seen her lose her presence of mind; but she did now, and wept some of the most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes" (p. 142). Contrary to what some critics write about this incident, Becky cries "genuine tears" not because she is emotionally moved by Sir Pitt's proposal, but because it is a lost opportunity.

Now that she has married Rawdon on the long shot that he will win his Aunt Crawley's fortune, she cannot possibly take advantage of what would certainly be a lucrative marital partnership. The key to this incident appears in the beginning of the next chapter, where Becky's reaction is given: "'Married! Married!' Rebecca said, in an agony of tears—her voice choking with emotion, her handkerchief up to her ready eyes, fainting against the mantel-piece—a figure of woe fit to melt the most obdurate heart" (p. 143). The tears she weeps, then, are not tears of honored thanks that Sir Pitt thinks highly enough of

A. E. Dyson, among others, offers the scene of the proposal as proof that Becky is not cold-hearted, that she is "touched" by a kind offer. See Dyson's article, "Vanity Fair," Critical Quarterly, 6 (1964), 11-32.
her to marry her, but are rather tears of the bitterest sort, tears of an irrevocably lost chance to attain wealth and social position. Little love for Rawdon can be found in the futile rage she apparently feels; she bemoans the fact that she is already married, and is "a figure of woe." Thackeray subtly but unquestionably exposes Becky's lack of love for Rawdon.

With the courtships of both couples concluded in an unpromising manner, the marriages unfold as one might guess. Interestingly, it is Amelia's and George's marriage that first crumbles. Given the reasons that George married—especially the argument he has with his father, who forbids him to marry Amelia, and who prompts George to marry her out of spite—it does not take him long to rid himself of the delusions he previously held about marriage. Indeed, long before the honeymoon is over, he begins to tire of his new station in life, and when Dobbin brings him the letter from his father which does not contain the reconciliation he awaits, George childishly lashes out at the innocent Dobbin, wishing to saddle him with the responsibility. The longer the newly-married George and Amelia associate with Rawdon and Becky, also honeymooning at Brighton, the more Amelia is neglected by George. Even Amelia realizes what is happening: "They were only a week married, and here was George already suffering ennui, and eager for others' society! She trembled for the future" (p. 233).

If Amelia has correctly guessed the effect (George's discontent), she still deludes herself as to the cause; although her "mind somehow misgave her about her friend" (Becky), she foolishly persists in attributing any fault to herself: "How shall I be a companion for him,
she thought,—so clever and so brilliant, and I such a humble foolish creature? How noble it was of him to marry me—to give up everything and stoop down to me!" (p. 233) It is not until years after George has been killed that Amelia admits what she has known for a long time: George was never the man she deluded herself into thinking he was. Not only is she unduly obdurate in preserving a mistaken image, but she also must be slapped in the face, as it were, by Becky, who for all of her faults does help Amelia to destroy her preposterous image of George so that she may marry Dobbin in good conscience. Although he tends to judge Amelia too harshly, A. E. Dyson offers an insightful comment on her love for George: "Her love of George is imperceptive and self-indulgent. She blinds herself to his faults and (more seriously) refuses to see that he does not love her; duty and dignity are thrown overboard in the pursuit" (p. 17). George tires quickly of being married, Amelia recognizes this fact, and unwisely she denies it to herself. Such a marriage, based on illusion, cannot but fail.

Although Becky and Rawdon have no such difficulty as of yet, there is one telling incident described immediately before Amelia first senses something wrong in her relationship with George. As they laugh at George for his pretentiousness, Becky and Rawdon wonder how Amelia will react to George's absence. Exposing her true self carelessly, Becky answers Rawdon's query: "'I suppose she'll cry her eyes out,' Becky answered. 'She has been whimpering half-a-dozen times at the very notion of it, already to me!'" (p. 233). Rawdon may be dull-witted, but he is not insensitive, and quickly recognizes
the lack of affection on Becky's part: "'You don't care, I suppose,' Rawdon said, half angry at his wife's want of feeling." Granted that this is but a minor incident, it is nonetheless significant, especially considering Thackeray's choice of words: "want of feeling." In an important statement, Gordon Ray notes that "Thackeray adroitly reveals the chink in Becky's armour to be her lack of the quality in which Amelia excels. She is unable to feel affection or love" (p. 424). Becky's statement, then, may be viewed as the visible portion of the iceberg that is her calculating heart; the incident is a minor one, but what lies beneath this verbal faux pas is of major importance.

The first major rupture between Becky and Rawdon occurs when Rawdon fails to enter his Aunt Crawley's private bedroom after he has been allowed back into her house. Becky's carelessness is more costly this time; she explodes with anger: "'You fool! you ought to have gone in, and never come out again,' Rebecca said. 'Don't call me names,' said the big guardsman, sulkily" (p. 245). Although Becky immediately tries to cover up her outburst, the damage is done, and Rawdon, Thackeray takes pains to tell the reader, "passed the forenoon at the billiard-room, sulky, silent, and suspicious." The chink in Becky's armour—her inability to feel true affection—is a fatal one, and it is because of this flaw that she is both "uncovered" in her relationship with the nefarious Lord Steyne and stopped from saving herself afterwards by the usually docile Lady Jane, Pitt Crawley's wife.

Examples not involving a confrontation between Becky and Rawdon
also abound. No better example of Becky's coldheartedness may be found than the scene in which Rawdon takes leave of her to go into battle. The simple but loving dragoon takes inventory of all of his possessions, evaluating their worth, in case he dies in battle. He even wears an old, tattered uniform in order to leave her one which is worth more money. This act of unselfishness becomes a key act later in the novel, when Rawdon finds that Becky has been hoarding money—a large sum of it—and would not even spare a small portion of it to bail him out of the retention hall. After Rawdon takes a sad, affectionate leave of her, Becky "wisely determined not to give way to unavailing sentimentality on her husband's departure" (p. 287).

In fact, Becky's first concern after her husband leaves her—possibly to be killed—is how dishevelled she looks. Then, unlike Amelia and the other wives and loved ones of the soldiers, Becky retires, "and slept very comfortably." The obvious irony of the passage but reinforces the revulsion one feels at the crass lack of feeling on Becky's part. Thackeray strengthens his judgment of Becky by contrasting her dress and deportment with that of Amelia, who remains praying for some time after George leaves, pale and "almost crazy with grief." Further, Becky's thick-skinned behavior upsets even Mrs. O'Dowd, a veteran of many such separations from her husband. Mrs. O'Dowd, who was "walking very disconsolately," tells Becky (with amazing accuracy), "It's not you that will cry your eyes out with grief, any way" (p. 299).

Finally, that Becky does not, and never did, love Rawdon is made clear in two passages which examine her attitude toward her husband. The first example is rather a simple—but telling—one; as she puts
away the note George slipped into her bouquet at the dance, she "fell
to thinking what she should do if—if anything happened to poor good
Rawdon, and what a great piece of luck it was that he had left his
horses behind" (p. 312). In this statement, Thackeray uses one of his
favorite comic devices—undermining the meaning of the first part of
a sentence with the last part—for a serious purpose. If Becky begins
to wonder what she would do if Rawdon were to die, she ruins the pos­
sible tenderness of the thought by thinking of worldly gain. Juxta­
posing the two aspects of this thought indicates Rawdon's importance
to Becky; he, like the horses, is no more than a useful commodity.
There is no love on Becky's part.

In a similar passage, the reader is told explicitly that Becky
does not care for Rawdon; when Rawdon is encouraged more and more by
Becky to eat out, he sadly admits, "She won't miss me." The narrator
assures us that "he was right: his wife did not miss him" (p. 369).
After this admission, Becky's feelings toward her husband are further
examined: "Rebecca was fond of her husband. She was always perfectly
good-humoured and kind to him. She did not even show her scorn much
for him; perhaps she liked him the better for being a fool. He was
her upper servant and maitre d'hôtel. He went on her errands: obeyed
her orders without question: drove her to the Opera-box; solaced him­
self at his club during the performance, and came punctually back to
fetch her when due" (pp. 369-70). Rawdon, like Amelia, loves without
being loved; Becky does not love as a wife ought to love, and must
later pay for this unforgivable sin.
As if to complete Becky's loveless life, Thackeray comments several times on Becky's lack of love for her son. To Thackeray's Victorian audience, Becky's one sin that dams her as surely as Chaucer's Pardoner is damned by his sin of presumption and despair is that of not caring for her son. As with his father, Rawdon, Jr., interferes with Becky's many "schemes" and, unless he may be used for one of her several "motherly affection" performances, is completely ignored. Indeed, from little Rawdy's entrance into the story, little concern is shown for the boy: "She had not, to say the truth, seen much of the young gentleman since his birth. . . . Rebecca did not care much to go and see the son and heir" (p. 356). Later, the moralist-narrator once again steps down from the box to pass judgment on Becky as a mother: "O, thou poor lonely little benighted boy! Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children; and here was one who was worshipping a stone!" (p. 369) The ultimate outrage, however, occurs in the scene where Becky slaps her child for listening to her sing to Lord Steyne; the mother's unnatural lack of concern is no longer a neutral feeling. She now has definite feelings toward the boy, but they are only all the more wrong: "After this incident, the mother's dislike increased to hatred; the consciousness that the child was in the house was a reproach and a pain to her" (p. 431). In all aspects, then, Becky Sharp cannot love, and this inability is to Thackeray a fatal and unpardonable offense.

Much of the above discussion deals with the negative aspects of Thackeray's love motif, and it is time, then, to turn to discussion of those who do find salvation from Vanity Fair simply because they love
honestly. It is important to keep in mind, however, that a novel such as *Vanity Fair* functions largely as an exposé, and therefore a discussion of those who escape *Vanity Fair* must compare and contrast hero and villain. One cannot fully understand or appreciate the goodness of Dobbin, for example, unless one measures him against George or Becky. It must be understood, also, that none of Thackeray's characters are supposed to be wholly unselfish in their love relationships, for Thackeray is too conscious of man's faulty nature. As will be shown shortly, too many critics misunderstand Thackeray when they attack his "good" characters for their faults, and accuse Thackeray of inconsistency or of being artistically lax.

William Dobbin, of course, first comes to mind when one thinks of a "good" Thackeray character. He, of all the characters in *Vanity Fair*, is the least selfish. Unlike Dickens's Oliver Twist, Dobbin does not come off as a flat character, a hero who is nothing more than kindness, honesty, and heroism personified. Thackeray employs several devices that give Dobbin verisimilitude as an individual. One is that Dobbin even lacks heroic appearance: he is tall, gawky, clumsy, big-footed. Most obvious is his lisp. In keeping with his lifelong hatred of the "Silver Fork" hero, Thackeray makes George Osborne, an egotistical cad, the "tall, dark, and handsome" hero figure, except for the fact that the smooth-talking George is anything but a hero. Further, in keeping with his anti-worldly philosophy, Thackeray sees to it that Dobbin's quiet learning and heroism remain largely unrecognized by the superficial *beau monde*. Those worldlings who are concerned with only the surface of things (looks, wealth, titles) fail
to appraise Dobbin's value, while less substantial characters are admired. For example, Ensign Spooney feels that George is a "capital fellow, a regular Don Giovanni," while he regards the unpretentious Dobbin as little more than a laughable clod.

Salvation, however, will not come because of one's status in Vanity Fair, and it is then appropriate that goodness should be overlooked among the insignificant glitter of the world. From beginning to end, much of Dobbin's kindness goes unnoticed; because he is concerned with the kindness rather than with any gain such kindness will bring (a fundamental difference between Dobbin and Becky or George), it is unimportant that he receive no credit. Dobbin, thinking he is doing Amelia and George a service, works long and hard to preserve the courtship after Mr. Sedley's financial ruin, and tries also to reconcile both fathers. Amelia, as selfish as the next human, at first resents Dobbin's friendship with George, among other things feeling that he is not worthy of George's company. Indeed, after Dobbin has arranged for Amelia and George to meet after Mr. Sedley's downfall, Amelia's reaction is as follows: "she thought his arrival rather provoking—Miss Sedley did not once notice Dobbin during his visit" (p. 195). Dobbin, on the other hand, is happy simply to have brought George and Amelia together: "it did his heart good to see how Amelia had grown young again," and further, "he was content, so that he saw her happy; and thankful to have been the means of making her so" (p. 195). Amelia remains blind to Dobbin's goodness, seemingly obsessed with finding all men inferior to George.
Thackeray continues his comparison of Amelia and Dobbin, stressing always that Amelia is wrong and imperceptive in her early judgment of him. Amelia's long-awaited marriage to George is brought about solely through Dobbin's efforts, and still Dobbin gets no credit. What is to his credit, however, and what in the final analysis is Dobbin's triumph, is that he loves Amelia unselfishly, so unselfishly that he puts her happiness ahead of his. When they leave the church, Dobbin prays that they are happy, even though he has not "felt so miserable and so lonely" since his childhood. Certainly this act of unselfishness is a key to understanding why Dobbin is "saved"; in a letter to Mrs. Brookfield, Thackeray writes: "Love proves God. By love I believe and am saved." Just as Thackeray himself is saved because he loves, so is his character saved from the unhappiness that accompanies those who cannot escape from Vanity Fair, and ultimately Dobbin wins the object of his love. Before Dobbin does win his well-deserved prize, he must come to view Amelia for what she is—-a human being and not a goddess. At first, Dobbin's view of Amelia is almost as unreal-istic and therefore as unhealthily illusory as Amelia's idea of George Osborne is.

Near the end of the novel, Dobbin actually becomes angry with Amelia, who has unwisely taken Becky into her care. Finally, Dobbin can no longer stand Amelia's foolish actions, and makes it plain that either he or Becky must leave. When Amelia turns on Dobbin, he is

finally awakened to the fact that Amelia is a selfish (and therefore very human) creature. The futility of his long years of loyalty and devotion finally infuriates him, and he makes one of the most important speeches of the novel:

'It is not that speech of yesterday,' he continued, 'which moves you. That is but the pretext, Amelia, or I have loved you and watched you for fifteen years in vain. Have I not learned in that time to read all your feelings, and look into your thought? I know what your heart is capable of: it can cling faithfully to a recollection, and cherish a fancy; but it can't feel such an attachment as mine deserves to mate with, and such as I would have won from a woman more generous than you. No, you are not worthy of the love which I have devoted to you. I knew all along that the prize I had set my life on was not worth the winning; that I was a fool, with fond fancies, too, bartering away my all of truth and ardour against your little feeble remnant of love. I will bargain no more: I withdraw. I find no fault with you. You couldn't reach up to the height of the attachment which I bore you, and which a loftier soul than yours might have been proud to share. Good-bye, Amelia! I have watched your struggle. Let it end. We are both weary of it.' (p. 647)

The Round Table has fallen, and men once again act like men; Woman has been put back on earth. Dobbin is free of his illusions, and sees Amelia as she really is. Although at first glance Dobbin's good-bye speech may sound serious, it really is not. Unless he can view Amelia and love her as a woman, would not their marriage end as did Amelia's first, which also was based on illusion? Further, Dobbin's speech is necessary to shake Amelia out of her own selfishness. What Dobbin tells Amelia is the crucial emotional catharsis that is long overdue. It is healthy and necessary if Dobbin's and Amelia's relationship is to be a sound one: "But Dobbin does not win his Amelia (nor Laura her Pendennis) until some illusions have been lost on both sides."5

If Dobbin himself realizes that his prize is not worth the having, and if Amelia is indeed selfish, why then is she rewarded with happiness at the end of the novel?

Amelia is imperceptive, and when, as has been pointed out earlier, she does see clearly that George is not at all what she thought him to be, she purposefully deludes herself. She makes a hero out of a scoundrel, and sacrifices her happiness for 15 years so that an image, a myth, may be preserved. Even to her son she lies about a man who she knows would have been unfaithful to her. In wasting her life in widowhood for an unworthy man, she is also selfish in that she hurts Dobbin, the one gentleman (as Thackeray calls him) she has known in her life. Indeed, at times Amelia appears to be as selfish and cruel as Becky. But the answer to Amelia's good end is in Dobbin's indignant parting speech to her: she is capable of loyalty, and she is constant in her loving. In short, Amelia, however foolish her reasons may be, can and does love. It is this that sets her far and above Becky Sharp.

In a widely-quoted letter of 2 July 1847, Thackeray explains why Amelia is rewarded; he writes that while Amelia is selfish, "she has at present a quality above most people whizz: LOVE--by which she shall be saved." Because Amelia loves, and is capable of loving honestly and without any ulterior motives, Thackeray allows her to be happy, at least as happy as is possible in this world.

Much criticism has been written attacking Thackeray's handling of the marriages in *Vanity Fair*. Some critics, including A. E. Dyson,
misread *Vanity Fair* in that they confuse the excitement Thackeray has written into Becky with the obvious critical judgment stamped upon her by the author; Dyson contends that Becky is a "good wife to Rawdon from the first. . . . It is not the least of the novel's ironies that she loses her husband without really deserving to. . . ." (pp. 21-23). Keeping in mind what Thackeray himself wrote about love as a form of salvation, considering Becky's end, and seeing with what revulsion Thackeray describes her treatment of and feelings toward Rawdon and her son, Dyson's argument seems to be a vacuous one.

Further, a number of letters written during the composition of *Vanity Fair* disclose Thackeray's hatred for the vain characters—excepting Dobbin, Amelia, and Briggs—of the novel, and we have his own warning in "Before the Curtain" not to be deceived by the "flexible Becky Puppet." Another critic, Barbara Hardy, views the "angelic women" in Thackeray (including Amelia) as being "tainted" by jealousy and possessiveness, and concludes that love "cannot be free, or pure, or intact." First of all, it seems that Hardy would have Thackeray's characters with no human characteristics; of course the love that Amelia feels is "tainted" with jealousy and possessiveness. Amelia is, after all, a mortal with both faults and strengths. It is because Amelia does feel jealousy that she escapes being a completely flat character; Thackeray writes of her that there "is not much of a life to describe. There is not much of what you call incident in it."^7^


In addition, it does not follow that because Amelia is possessive her feelings are thus "impure." Finally, William C. Brownwell, who discusses jealousy and selfishness in *Vanity Fair's* many love relationships, concludes exactly opposite from what Hardy does: love in the novel is "the universal principle to which true salvation is inseparably attached."³

It remains to be shown that Thackeray in other ways stresses his message of love as salvation. One is his exhortative use of the narrator-moralist, who advises the reader to eschew or to embrace certain philosophies in conducting his affairs. One such bit of advice comes after a description of Becky's patience while caring for Miss Crawley (in the hopes of gaining part of the old woman's fortune). After listing the various idiosyncrasies of the old woman, and illustrating the provoking nature of some of them, Thackeray's moralist-narrator becomes suddenly serious: "Picture to yourself, oh fair young reader, a worldly, selfish, graceless, thankless, religionless old woman, writhing in pain and fear, and without her wig. Picture her to yourself, and ere you be old, learn to love and pray!" (p. 132) This one passage is exemplary: presented is an old woman ("long a resident in *Vanity Fair*") who is to die shortly, knows it, and is aware of how many people hover over her, eager to snatch and to grab at her fortune before she is even in the grave. It is no coincidence that the escape from this fate involves love.

Another important narrative comment involves Amelia, who suffers after being ordered to give up all thoughts of marrying George. With

characteristic and effective irony, Thackeray's narrator offers the following "advice":

Be cautious then, young ladies; be wary how you engage. Be shy of loving frankly; never tell all you feel, or (a better way still) feel very little. See the consequences of being prematurely honest and confiding, and mistrust yourselves and everybody. Get yourselves married as they do in France, where the lawyers are the bridesmaids and confidantes. At any rate, never have any feelings which may make you uncomfortable, or make any promises which you cannot at any required moment command and withdraw. That is the way to get on, and be respected, and have a virtuous character in Vanity Fair. (p. 172)

Certainly Becky Sharp could have been the author of the passage, and Amelia, who has not heeded its dubious wisdom, pays for her affection, but in the end it is Amelia, Dobbin, and to a lesser extent Rawdon (because Rawdon did honestly love his wife and his son, he is rescued from Vanity Fair, and as governor of Coventry Island dies "beloved") who in the end are treated kindly by Fate. In a similar vein is the description of the first Lady Crawley's death and funeral. Thackeray tells the reader that Rose Dawson (later Lady Crawley) had an option: she could have married the village blacksmith, who loved her dearly, and settled down to a simple but happy life, or could have married old, ugly, vulgar Sir Pitt Crawley, moved into a gloomy mansion, and achieved social status. Unfortunately, Rose Dawson chose the latter option, and for the glittering prizes of Vanity Fair paid with her happiness and peace of mind. Her bedside is "friendless," and "her heart was dead long before her body. She had sold it to become Sir Pitt Crawley's wife. Mothers and daughters are making the same bargain every day in Vanity Fair" (p. 140). Thackeray's message is obvious in this allegory, of sorts. Everyman (Rose Dawson) chose wealth
and status over love and contentment and paid with his life.

_Vanity Fair_, then, marks the beginning of the love motif, which in the remainder of Thackeray's novels takes an increasingly prominent role, and which in his next novel (Pendennis) is seen not only in marriages but also in other relationships. This chapter sets forth the principles necessary for salvation through love; egotism, status seeking, fortune hunting—all who marry for these reasons in _Vanity Fair_ suffer direly. Even those who are rewarded for loving honestly must first slough off illusions, which weaken the foundation of any love relationship. Further, because Thackeray deals with characters as he found them in life, those who do find solace in love are not spared human peccadilloes: they make egregious errors in judgment, they are possessive and selfish, they can see faults in their loved ones without losing love for them. If Dobbin does seem to care more about little Janey than about Amelia, he still "never said a word to Amelia, that was not kind and gentle; or thought of a want of hers that he did not try to gratify" (p. 666). The point is not that love is a panacea for the world's ills, but that it offers a psychological and emotional succor that makes living in _Vanity Fair_ bearable.
CHAPTER III

THE FORCE OF LOVE IN VARIED RELATIONSHIPS

If in Vanity Fair Thackeray's comments on love deal largely with marital relationships, in Pendennis (1848-50) these comments are concerned with love in different types of love relationships. Indeed, it may be said that the author more consciously deals with love as a force in Pendennis: more conflicts involve love, more narrative treats love relationships, and more fates of characters are related directly to success or to failure in love relationships. Hence, in Pendennis Thackeray may be seen moving toward a definite stance, as it were, on the power of love in human relationships. Of course, since there must be some way to measure a character's goodness, Thackeray pairs characters in Pendennis (a technique which becomes virtually standard in his major works): Pen and Warrington, Pen and Laura, Laura and Blanche. Thus, the reader cannot but weigh and compare the merits and defects of one character against another. As usual, however, Thackeray is careful not to create a character whose personality is totally unreal, and makes certain that the "happy ending" is only humanly happy. As critics have often noted, Thackeray's refusal to end his novels by bestowing upon his characters paradisical happiness was precedent-setting. Similarly, Thackeray's "good"

characters do have enough faults to prevent them being unbelievable.

Helen Pendennis, Arthur's mother, is one such character. Although the reader witnesses her vices, Mrs. Pendennis's salvation is love; for most of the novel, she is seen as an unworldly, unselfish mother whose fondest wishes are for the well-being and success of Pen and Laura Bell, her ward. Early in the novel, the narrator reverentially describes Mrs. Pendennis's affection for her son: "What passed between that lady and the boy is not of import. A veil should be thrown over those sacred emotions of love and grief. The maternal passion is a sacred mystery to me. . . . the maternal storged . . . began with our race and sanctifies the history of mankind."2 Praise for Mrs. Pendennis is limitless; she is continually called a "sainted woman," admirable characters constantly laud her as a loving mother, and the narrator mentions several times her charitable work in the neighborhood. A paragon of maternal love and kindness, Mrs. Pendennis is drawn from Thackeray's memories of his mother. In his diary, Thackeray recorded: "All sorts of recollections of my youth came back to me: dark and sad and painful with my dear good mother as a gentle angel interposing between me and misery" (Ray, p. 109). Criticism of this saintly woman has not been lacking.

J. Y. T. Greig, the most prominent modern anti-Thackerian, writes off Thackeray's treatment of Helen as "maudlin stuff" and "counterfeit-sentimental."3 Surely Greig regards the Victorian character with


a jaundiced modern eye. Was sentimentality in this period only found in Thackeray's novels? Furthermore, Thackeray rescues Pen's mother from cheap sentimentality by instilling in her less than desirable and unadmirable human personality traits; although Mrs. Pendennis is a superior--and even saintly--character, she does have a bit of the sinner in her, too. In fact, Thackeray's narrator unequivocally tells the reader that Mrs. Pendennis has her share of human foibles:

That even a woman should be faultless, however, is an argument not permitted by nature, which assigns to us mental defects, as it awards to us headaches, illnesses, or death: without which the scheme of the world could not be carried on,--nay, some of the best qualities of mankind could not be brought into exercise. As pain produces or elicits fortitude and endurance; difficulty, perseverance; poverty, industry and ingenuity; danger, courage and what not; so the very virtues, on the other hand, will generate some vices; and in fine, Mrs. Pendennis had that vice which Miss Pybus and Miss Pierce discovered in her, namely that of pride; which did not vest itself so much in her own person, as in that of her family. (pp. 50-51)

That Mrs. Pendennis is not a faultless character is further shown in her tendency to take pride in her family; she is blind to Arthur's faults, and during the course of the novel, several characters complain that Mrs. Pendennis has spoiled Pen. Indeed, immediately after the above excerpt the reader is told that "This unfortunate superstition and idol-worship of this good woman was the cause of a great deal of the misfortune which befell the young gentleman who is the hero of this history, and deserves therefore to be mentioned at the outset of his story" (p. 50). Yet, Mrs. Pendennis's peccadilloes take a crueler--and quite human--form in the novel.

When through an anonymous letter Mrs. Pendennis hears of Pen's involvement with Fanny Bolton, she groundlessly and foolishly believes
her son to be guilty of an illicit relationship. Mrs. Pendennis and Laura go to London to take care of the deathly ill Pen, and upon arriving find Fanny Bolton in his apartment. Mrs. Pendennis again assumes—without substantial evidence—the worst. However, it is her treatment of the frightened and innocent Fanny that best reveals her human capacity to be cruel. The reader is told that "Hard-heartedness and gloom dwelt on the figures of both newcomers; neither showed any the faintest gleam of mercy or sympathy for Fanny" (p. 538). A far cry from her usual self, Mrs. Pendennis "closed the door upon Major Pendennis, and Laura, too; and took possession of her son" (p. 539); significantly, the now self-righteous mother first indignantly removes Fanny's shawl and bonnet from Pen's bedroom. Final judgment of Mrs. Pendennis's (and to an extent, Laura's) treatment of Fanny is provided by the narrator: "What could Fanny expect when suddenly brought up for sentence before a couple of such judges? Nothing but swift condemnation, awful punishment, merciless dismissal!" (p. 551) If Mrs. Pendennis is a saintly woman, and if she is described sentimentally, she is, nonetheless, sufficiently subject to human faults as to render much critical complaint about her either invalid or only half true.

Because Mrs. Pendennis does love both sincerely and unselfishly, however, she is allowed to die happy. As always, Thackeray is far too much a realist to reward Mrs. Pendennis until—like all humans—she has suffered. And suffer she does; she does not marry the man she loves most, and takes Pen's father only to save herself from a bleak future indeed. Unlike those who marry for reasons other than love, Mrs. Pendennis greatly admires and respects her husband, and given the descrip-
tion of her mourning for him, she may have loved him after all. Further, because of her foolish hero-worship of Pen, she suffers (partly from jealousy) for her possessiveness when in the incident involving Fanny Bolton Pen is found to be quite human, and not the ambrosial god she formerly made him out to be. After due suffering, Helen dies. Unlike other characters in Thackeray's novels, Mrs. Pendennis dies contented—and happy: "The last emotion of her soul here was joy, to be henceforth unchequered and eternal. The tender heart beat no more; it was to have no more pangs, no more doubts, no more griefs and trials. Its last throb was love; and Helen's last breath was a benediction" (p. 599).

Because she loves, Helen's death—again so unlike other Thackeray characters—is not described in terms of unhappiness, unfulfillment, and futility. Mrs. Pendennis's last emotions were joy and love, her last breath a benediction; compared with the deaths of Miss Crawley and Sir Pitt Crawley in *Vanity Fair*, Viscount Castlewood in *Henry Esmond*, Sir Brian Newcome in *The Newcomes*, and Beatrix in *The Virginians*, Helen Pendennis's death but reinforces the idea that those who love are rewarded. If as Juliet McMaster writes, there is a "battle of love against the world" in Thackeray's novels, there is no doubt that Helen Pendennis's love wins for her a resounding victory.

In keeping with the technique of juxtaposing characters, Thackeray offers Sir Francis and Lady Clavering as negative examples—those who marry for the wrong reasons; and as usual, such a relationship cannot endure. Before the reader ever meets the Claverings, Thackeray suggests

several times that love was not the reason for marriage—especially on Sir Francis's part: "At that time the legend in the county was that Clavering, who had been ruined for many a year, had married a widow from India with some money. . . . It was at a boarding-house at Lausanne, that Francis Clavering made what he called the lucky coup of marrying the widow Amory. . . ” (pp. 235-36). Later, Sir Francis is forced to admit that his motive in marrying was not love:

'Gad, she said I wasn't her father; that I wasn't fit to comprehend her; that her father must have been a man of genius, and fine feelings, and that sort of thing; whereas I had married her mother for money."

'Well, didn't you?' asked Strong.

'It don't make it any pleasanter to hear because it's true, don't you know,' Sir Francis Clavering answered. (p. 252)

As Sir Francis incurs larger gambling debts, and as "the Begum's" fortune dwindles steadily because of these debts, poor Lady Clavering becomes increasingly aware of her mistake in marrying Sir Francis. Talking with Major Pendennis, she finally explains why she married:

"For perhaps I should not have married at all if I had not been so anxious to change his [her first husband's] horrid name" (p. 467). If Lady Clavering is a victim of Fate (two worthless husbands), and if she is clearly a kind and good woman, her wrong reasons for entering into a relationship Thackeray held to be sacred must nonetheless end in unhappiness, and she admits to Major Pendennis that she was foolish to have married.

As she talks of her ill-founded marriages to Major Pendennis, Lady Clavering, in an untypically lucid and didactic speech—one in which Thackeray clearly adopts a serious tone—elaborates on the shallowness of worldly fortune and splendor:
'Ah, Major Pendennis, I've got money to be sure, and I'm a lady, and people fancy I'm very happy, but I ain't. We all have our cares, and griefs, and troubles: and many's the day that I sit down to one of my grand dinners with an aching heart, and many a night do I lie awake on my fine bed, a great deal more unhappy than the maid that makes it. For I'm not a happy woman, Major, for all the world says; and envies the Begum her diamonds, and carriages, and the great company that comes to my house. I'm not happy in my husband; I'm not happy in my daughter.' (p. 467)

In one breath, as it were, the happiness thought to accompany status (wife of a baronet) and material wealth (the Clavering Park mansion, fabulous feasts, diamonds) is shown to be a mirage. Indeed, the maid who serves the feast and who doubtless envies her mistress's good fortune is probably the happier of the two. What, then, would have brought happiness to Lady Clavering? The answer is, of course, love: "Ah Major, I should have been a good woman if I had had a good husband" (p. 467). Soon after this confession, Sir Francis loses 7,000 pounds betting, Lady Clavering's ready money is insufficient to cover the debt, and the narrator offers a summary of Lady Clavering's sad life: "Lady Clavering, one of the best-natured women that ever enjoyed a good dinner, or made a slip in grammar, has had her appetite and good-nature sadly tried by constant family grievances, and disputes such as to make the best efforts of the French cook unpalatable. . ." (p. 616). Lady Clavering deplores "her wretched fate as the most miserable of women" (p. 614). Thackeray's message is convincing: all of the wealth and social standing in the world are useless unless they are accompanied by love.

The brunt of Thackeray's comments on love, however, deals with the hero of the novel, Arthur Pendennis. Arthur needs much maturing before he is allowed to claim his prize--Laura Bell. He is a curious combination of selfish conceit and generous impulse; in short, Arthur is a
typical Thackeray hero, possessor of good qualities at times overshad-
owed by humanly bad ones. As stated earlier, much of Arthur's difficulty
in life is due to the excess pampering lavished on him by his mother.
Contrasted with Arthur's Byronic egoism is Laura's level-headed unself-
fishness. Throughout the novel, Laura is shown to be Pen's superior
morally, and as equal intellectually as a Victorian novelist could allow
a heroine to be. It is quite mystifying, then, to read the complaints
about Laura as a character. Greig calls her "inconsistent" and "uncon-
vincing" (p. 124), and says she is an "out-and-out failure" (p. 125);
even Saintsbury, one of Thackeray's stalwart admirers, complains about
Laura. 5 Indeed, Laura, like Ethel Newcome in The Newcomes, is not a
"typical" Thackeray "good woman": she has little in common with Amelia
or with Helen Pendennis, other than that she, too, is good and kind.
Laura is intelligent, she does not in the least feel Pen to be perfect.
She continually casts satiric barbs at Pen's egoism, becomes angry with
him, scolds him, and almost rejects him for George Warrington. Certainly
one cannot imagine Amelia Osborne playing the same role with George
Osborne as Laura does with Pen. Further, Laura admittedly has and ex-
poses her own shortcomings in the Fanny Bolton incident (see pp. 538-39);
as usual, Thackeray includes incidents that make his good characters
human. Thus, Lord David Cecil correctly omits Laura from his group of
Thackeray's "virtuous heroines," who he claims are "the same people in
different costumes." 6 Because Laura is open-eyed in her goodness, Pen

5George Saintsbury, A Consideration of Thackeray (1931; rpt. New

must sample love in several forms before he comes to appreciate Laura's worth.

These "forms" are Emily Costigan (the "Fotheringay"), Blanche Amory, and Fanny Bolton. Since Pen is the hero of the novel, and since most of his adventures revolve around love-related difficulties, Greig (p. 120) is right in recognizing the prevalence of a "love story" in Pendennis. McMaster is equally correct in perceiving that one of the major problems in Pen's life is "the question of how to love" (p. 70), and this seems to indicate that Greig is wrong in saying that the "love story" is not "of much account" (p. 120); like a Faust concerned with love, Arthur Pendennis must experience love in several relationships ("puppy love" with Emily Costigan, infatuation with Fanny Bolton, and worldly love with Blanche Amory) before he is emotionally matured and able to be the kind of husband Laura deserves. Pen's first love affair with "the Fotheringay" is not to be taken seriously. He is an adolescent emotionally, and is more in love with love itself than with the dull-witted but bright-eyed Emily Costigan. Thackeray makes certain that the reader understands the nature of this first mild affaire de coeur by exposing Pen's motives: "Yes, Pen began to feel the necessity of a first love--of a consuming passion--of an object on which he could concentrate all those vague floating fancies under which he sweetly suffered--of a young lady to whom he could really make verses, and whom he could set up and adore, in place of those unsubstantial Ianthes and Zuleikas to whom he

7 Barbara Hardy, The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), pp. 171-72, terms Pen's experimentation with love "quixotic."
addressed the outpourings of his gushing muse" (p. 61). After seeing Emily in a play, Pen fancies himself to be in love with the actress, and Thackeray masterfully exposes Pen's "love": "There was no mistake about it now. He was as much in love as the best hero in the best romance he ever read" (p. 75). Obviously, by comparing Pen's love to that of the romance heroes, Thackeray again leaves little doubt as to the seriousness of this "introductory" love affair.

A more serious and troublesome love affair for Pen involves Fanny Bolton, a porter's daughter. It is in dealing with this attachment that the restrictions placed on Thackeray by his society harm Pendennis esthetically. Fanny, a foolish young girl who reads far too many romances, could never enter into a respectable love relationship with Pen, who is above her intellectually and socially. Although Tillotson feels Pen's behavior in the Fanny Bolton affair to be in character, it seems far more probable that Pen, who is strongly attracted to Fanny, would make her his mistress. Working within limited Victorian convention, however, Thackeray is forced to be untrue to the realism of his novel, and has Pen—with the aid of an illness that brings his mother and Laura to London—escape the temptation. Surely the Fanny Bolton incident prompted Thackeray's often-quoted complaint that "Since the author of 'Tom Jones' was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper. Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art" (Preface, p. 34). Even this more serious affair appears

to be unsuitable and fleeting. Pen assumes a patronizing and condescending attitude toward Fanny from the time he meets her, and as usual, plays histrionically at love. Fanny continually associates Pen with the wealthy heroes in the cheap romances she reads, and views herself as a Cinderella figure, a person of low social status who has much love to give to a worthy hero. Fido aptly assesses Pen's and Fanny's roles in the affair as "a love which consists of a considerable amount of romantic self-deception and self-satisfaction on both sides."

And as seen in Vanity Fair—and in later novels—illusory relationships inevitably crumble. Pen's search is far from over.

In the third of Pen's love relationships, two insincere characters delude themselves into thinking they are in love. Later in the relationship, Pen is so worldly that he rather cavalierly admits he has no real love for Blanche; indeed, even Blanche cannot bear such callousness. Finally, Pen at one time nearly marries Blanche with mercenary intentions. What all three phases of this relationship have in common are insincerity and worldliness, and Pen is saved only because at the eleventh hour his sense of honor is too powerful to allow the marriage. Blanche, on the other hand, never does repent of her false sentiment, and comes not to one but to two ignoble ends at the close of the novel.

From Blanche's introduction into the novel, Thackeray begins a long, ironic, and witty expose of the young hypocrite. Blanche, clearly a parody of romantic sentiment, exposes herself immediately:


10 It is incredible that no critics have explored in depth Thackeray's devastating parody of romantic sentiment in Pendennis. Pen is continually portrayed as a Byronic hero, Blanche, like Shelley,
"Has he [Pen] suffered? A lady . . . came here, and said he has suffered. I, too, have suffered,--and you, Laura, has your heart ever been touched?" (p. 247) Laura, significantly, is embarrassed at the absurdity of Blanche's question. Throughout Pendennis, Blanche's insincerity and inability to feel are uncovered--often through her own words. In exposing Blanche, Thackeray's considerable ability to employ irony becomes readily obvious:

As for Miss Blanche, she had a kind heart; and having, as she owned, herself 'suffered' a good deal in the course of her brief life and experience--why, she could compassionate other susceptible beings like Pen, who had suffered too. . . . Blanche unlocked 'Mes Larmes' for him, and imported to him some of the plaintive outpourings of her own tender Muse.

It appeared from these poems that the young creature had indeed suffered prodigiously. She was familiar with the idea of suicide. Death she repeatedly longed for. A faded rose inspired her with such grief that you would have thought she must die in pain of it. It was a wonder how a young creature should have suffered so much--should have found the means of getting at such an ocean of despair and passion (as a runaway boy who will get to sea), and having embarked on it, should survive it. What a talent she must have had for weeping to be able to pour out so many of 'Mes Larmes'!

(p. 250)

Blanche is, to borrow the sagacious Warrington's phrase, "a humbug."

During the course of the novel, almost all of the good characters see Blanche for what she is; Helen, Laura, Sir Francis, Capt. Strong, Lady Rockminster, and even Lady Clavering, Blanche's mother, find her to be a consummate hypocrite. Pen, in his own egocentric blindness, cannot see Blanche for what she really is, and he must witness her flirting with others, singing songs to them that she sang to him, showing others the supposedly "private" 'Mes Larmes,' and finally, flirting glories in recording how she suffers in the world, and the narrator often assumes a mock-pastoral tone.
desperately with Harry Foker and his 15,000 pounds per year after finding out that Pen refuses to be bribed by a large sum of the Claverings. Thackeray brilliantly captures the essence of Pen's and Blanche's mock-courtship when he describes them walking about in the country:

"Here were two battered London rakes, taking themselves in for a moment, and fancying that they were in love with each other, like Phillis and Corydon" (p. 668). Both know the nature of the "love" between them, and both realize, perhaps, what would come of a union, for Blanche quickly consoles herself with the unwitting Foker and his fortune, and Pen, regardless of his uncle's urging, cannot bring himself to sell his honor and his life for a fortune and for Sir Francis's seat in Parliament. Fido is quick to point out that "Blanche's offers of love are an insubstantial lure which must, if accepted, lead to some form of destruction" (p. 365); further, it is imperative that Pen realize the latent danger in attaching himself permanently to Blanche, for according to Fido, "her Sylphide nature is one to be avoided in favour of reality" (p. 365). In a letter to Mrs. Brookfield, Thackeray proffers a statement relevant to this study of Pendennis: "... I will make Pendennis and Blanche play at being in love, such a wicked, false, humbugging London love, as two blasé London people might act, and half deceive themselves that they were in earnest."11 Because Pen's and Blanche's relationship is a false one, based on wicked "London love," it must fail.

Arthur is saved from this relationship both by his own sense of honor and by his increasing awareness of Laura's own goodness and worth. Compared with Blanche, Laura's lack of pretense and hypocrisy, her abundance of kindness and understanding, and simply her willingness to love Pen as long as he returns that love sincerely become increasingly valuable to Pen. He comes to "appreciate the sweet frankness of her disposition, and the truth, simplicity, and kindliness of her fair and spotless heart" (p. 697). Finally, Pen admits to Warrington that "Laura is the best, and noblest, and dearest girl the sun ever shone upon. . . . Suppose I have found out that I have lost the greatest prize in the world . . . that for years I had an angel under my tent, and let her go . . . " (p. 723). Pen has fully matured emotionally, and only after three love relationships can he rightly assess Laura's value. He finally admits that he has loved Laura all along. Pen is saved by love—and by realizing what is not love; in this case, it is Laura's true love for Pen that largely lures him away from Blanche. The narrator assures his reader that Pen and Laura live happily, even though Pen is still subject to his "fits of moodiness" (a malady that affects other heroes in Thackeray: Henry Esmond, Clive Newcome, George Warrington).

Blanche's fate is more unhappy. Immediately after breaking off her engagement to Pen, Blanche eagerly snatches at Harry Foker's emotions, and almost succeeds in snaring an extremely wealthy partner. Once again, she is undone by her own falseness. At the end of the novel, Blanche's real—and rascally—father turns up for her wedding. Blanche tries to conceal the secret of her parentage until after the
marriage. Harry finds out about her father, and is understandably crushed: not so much about her parentage as about her wish to deceive him even before they are married. Harry accurately perceives that this would be neither the first nor the last time Blanche would attempt to deceive him. The narrator eloquently passes judgment on Blanche: "For this young lady was not able to carry out any emotion to the full; but had a sham enthusiasm, a sham hatred, a sham love, a sham taste, a sham grief, each of which flared and shone very vehemently for an instant, but subsided and gave place to the next sham emotion" (p. 757).

Just as Becky Sharp's downfall is her inability to feel affection, so is Blanche Amory's failure rooted in the same defect. She is cheated of worldly happiness once again on the final page of the novel, for the reader is told that although Blanche married a French Count, he was killed in a duel (the implication is that Blanche was involved in an illicit relationship), and Blanche is reduced to publishing her shallow "suffering" poems for Bungay, one of the publishers for whom Pen wrote, and who publishes sentimental drivel. Thackeray chooses an appropriate end for Blanche. If Pen's and Laura's salvation is love, Blanche's demise is the lack of it.

Finally, it remains to be seen how Thackeray drives home his message through narrative comments and through the comments of other characters. In commenting upon Pen's infatuation for Emily Costigan, Thackeray writes: "Let the poor boy fling out his simple heart at the woman's feet, and deal gently with him. It is best to love wisely, no doubt; but to love foolishly is better than not to be able to love at all. Some of us can't: and are proud of our impotence
too" (p. 97). Clearly, Thackeray indicates the importance of love in his own schema, and Lady Rockminster later reinforces the thought by scolding Pen and all young men for worrying more about the worldly aspects of love than about the emotional aspects: "They all marry for money now. You are all selfish and cowards. We ran away with each other, and made foolish matches in my time. I have no patience with the young men!" (p. 694) Further, Gordon Ray notes that in Pendennis, "true happiness" is found only in "sentimental life" (p. 109); Lady Rockminster is only one of many characters in Thackeray's novels who laud the life of emotion over what Ray calls the "practical life." Another significant comment is one made by Arthur after he and Laura admit their love for one another; Arthur assures Lady Rockminster that the "love and company of the best and purest creature in the world" will "better" him (p. 759). Simply stated, Pen's salvation will come through Laura's love. A final example is George Warrington, the brilliant Dobbin (though not so cloddish) of Pendennis; George serves as, and describes himself as such, an example of an ill-founded marriage. In describing his own case, George says his marriage had "no love," and asks "What could he have been but most miserable?" (p. 595) Relationships can withstand poverty, social condemnation, and even the ravages of time and illness, but it is obvious that they simply cannot and do not survive if love is not involved.

In Pendennis, Thackeray's ideas on love are seen widening in scope from marriages to filial relationships, to courtships, and even to the love of one friend for another. Also, this love motif is far more prevalent and plays a more active role in Pendennis than in Vanity Fair.
Not only are most of the characters in the novel (Blanche, Warrington, Lady Clavering, Fanny, Capt. Costigan, Lady Rockminster) directly involved in at least one love relationship (either as participant or mentor), but the story of the novel's hero is overwhelmingly concerned with loving. Arthur Pendennis learns about different kinds of love, learns ultimately to distinguish between false and real love, and when he can fully appreciate Laura and her love, is saved by that love. In Thackeray's next novel, *Henry Esmond*, the emerging motif crystallizes, and takes the form of a key statement that reveals what a profound importance love as salvation has assumed in the artist's mind.
Thackeray's only major novel not published serially, *Henry Esmond* (1852), has attracted (in its own day as well as today) extensive critical attention. One of Thackeray's contemporary admirers, Charlotte Bronte, herself an artist of the first rank, nonetheless complained about *Esmond*: "As usual, he is unjust to women, quite unjust."\(^1\) Another famous contemporary, George Eliot, wrote that "'Esmond' is the most uncomfortable book you can imagine."\(^2\) There was, however, an abundance of praise for Thackeray's third major novel. Anthony Trollope, in assessing Thackeray's life and works shortly after his death in December, 1863, asked, "Who ever wrote of love with more delicacy than Thackeray has written in Esmond?"\(^3\) Earlier in this century, George Saintsbury, moved to rapturous praise of the novel, proclaims: "A greater novel than *Esmond* I do not know; and I do not know many greater books."\(^4\) Further, Thackeray himself said that he wished to be judged as a novelist by *Henry Esmond*, that it was "the very best I can do . . . I stand by this book, and am willing to leave it, when I go,

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\(^1\) Letter to George Smith, 14 Feb. 1852, quoted in Howard O. Brogan, "Rachel Esmond and the Dilemma of the Victorian Ideal of Womanhood," *Journal of English Literary History*, 13 (1946), 223.


\(^3\) "W. M. Thackeray," *Cornhill Magazine*, 9 (Feb. 1864), 136-37.

as my card.\textsuperscript{5} Ray calls Esmond "Thackeray's most careful and consummate work of art . . . " (p. 176). The novel's importance to this study, however, is that Thackeray first suggests love's immortal power in \textit{Esmond}. Further, the author's comments on love and human relationships become more substantial and psychological, again indicating the increased formalization of the love motif. \textit{Esmond} also incorporates Thackeray's concern with the transitory nature of worldly wealth and status found in the earlier \textit{Vanity Fair}, as well as the reward and punishment theme found in \textit{Pendennis}.

As in both earlier novels, one character attracts complaints, largely undue, for her personality. Rachel, Viscountess Castlewood, is, like earlier, similar characters (Amelia, Helen Pendennis, Laura), written off as an "angelic woman." However, this all-too-frequent and trite criticism of many of Thackeray's female characters, based apparently on superficial reading of the novels, appears less frequently for \textit{Esmond} than for other novels. In Rachel Esmond one finds a very realistic and believable good woman, whose psychological motivations look forward to Eliot's \textit{Middlemarch} and to Hardy's \textit{Jude the Obscure}. Because Thackeray reveals Rachel's motives for action, one simply cannot label her, for she looms too large as a real person, a conglomeration of faults and strengths, and always human. Far from being psychologically imbalanced, as John Hagan argues\textsuperscript{6}, Rachel Esmond, both in her


\textsuperscript{6}"Bankruptcy of His Heart": The Unfulfilled Life of Henry Esmond," \textit{Nineteenth Century Fiction}, 27 (1972), 293-316.
loving and in her selfishness, is an example of Thackeray's realism. Indeed, Ray feels she is Thackeray's "most complex" character (p. 183). Despite her obvious flaws, Rachel, like Amelia, loves, and Hagan is right in noting that much of the action in the novel involves Henry's "quest for love" (p. 297); Rachel, of course, plays a vital role in this quest. She is also capable of acting unselfishly, even to the extent of advising Harry, with whom she is in love, in his futile courtship of Beatrix. Henry Esmond abounds with praise of Rachel, in both narrative and dialogue alike. Rachel's clear superiority to her daughter, especially in being able to love, is seen in her "reward" (i.e., marrying Henry at the end of the novel).

She must, however, bear many hardships and disappointments before she and Harry are united. Rachel's marriage to Francis, Viscount Castlewood, is more complex than earlier "disastrous" marriages in Thackeray. Through narrative analysis, Thackeray reveals the innermost workings of the human mind, casting aside Victorian taboo to peer at emotions, suggesting sexual influences in Lord Castlewood's choice of a spouse, and looking far into literary futurity in scenes of muted erotic passion that resemble Lawrence's. As a Victorian, Thackeray usually remains circumspect in describing these scenes, but not enough so to prevent a number of his contemporaries from condemning them for their implicit sexual overtones. For example, Lord Castlewood's love for Rachel obviously decreases after she is blemished by smallpox:

"With her illness and altered beauty my lord's fire for his wife dis-
appeared. . . ." It is obvious that "fire" is sexual desire, and shortly after this, the reader finds that Lord Castlewood maintains a mistress. Further evidence of the sexual in Esmond is seen in Castlewood's complaint of "frigid insolence" (p. 127) on his wife's part; in the same conversation with Harry, he bitterly tells him that "She keeps off from me, as if I was a pestilence." It may be seen, then, that Lord Castlewood marries because of physical attraction for Rachel, and the narrator assures the reader of this fact: "'tis certain that a man who marries for mere beaux yeux, as my lord did, considers this part of the contract at an end when the woman ceases to fulfil hers, and his love does not survive her beauty" (p. 90). Thackeray takes advantage of the intimate knowledge he has of the Castlewoods, and uses their relationship to show that loveless relationships cannot endure.

Shortly before Lord Castlewood returns (he fled from his infected family), Rachel perceptively realizes that her loss of beauty (a temporary loss) will affect her marriage: "'It is not for myself that I cared,' my lady said to Harry . . . 'Will my lord think so [that she is still beautiful] when he comes back . . . 'Tis all men care for in women, our little beauty. Why did he select me from among my sisters? Twas only for that. We reign but for a day or two . . . '" (p. 85). And, indeed, her fears are true, for from the moment Lord Castlewood

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returns their relationship steadily deteriorates. At first, Rachel's husband is cold toward her, then abrasive. When he begins to maintain a mistress, however, Rachel remains no longer passive, and as shown earlier, denies her husband sexually. Finally, the reader is told that "the lamp was out in Castlewood Hall, and the lord and lady there saw each other as they were . . . with his selfishness and faithlessness her foolish fiction of love and reverence was rent away" (pp. 116-17). Certainly, Thackeray is bolder in Esmond than in either of his earlier novels or in his subsequent novels; not only does he preach the sermon that loveless marriages collapse, but he also ventures to demonstrate that sex or physical attraction is equally insufficient: "Respect!—who is to respect what is gross and sensual?" (p. 117).

If it appears that Rachel's life is for many years a sad, unfulfilled one, the outcome of Beatrix's life, one which is totally self-centered, can be expected to be a bad one. Actually, Beatrix ends badly in both Esmond and The Virginians, for she is picked up once again in Thackeray's last major novel. Beatrix fails as a human for two reasons, both of which stem from her egocentricity: she is cold-hearted and too worldly. Beatrix seems to epitomize Woman: vivacious, charming, intelligent, and beautiful. Throughout the novel, men are physically attracted to her, and her mother claims she is a coquette from childhood. Beatrix, for all her charm, is not a good person; she cannot break from herself and her own interests to care for others, she refuses to look beyond vanities and status to more substantial wealth. In the final analysis, this selfishness and inability to care
leave her a failure—even in the world's eyes. Juxtaposing two characters, one who loves and one who does not, conveys poignantly Thackeray's moral that love saves.

That Beatrix does not care for others is made obvious by characters and narrator alike. Harry's standing with Beatrix is revealed by the narrator, who in assessing Harry's place in Beatrix's life proffers rather an uncomplimentary judgment of the young female worldling: "Beatrix thought no more of him than of the lacquey that followed her chair. His complaints did not touch her in the least; his raptures rather fatigued her; she cared for his verses no more than for Dan Chaucer's, who's dead these ever so many hundred years; she did not hate him; she rather despised him, and just suffered him" (p. 259). Yet, to defend Beatrix's unfeeling behaviour toward Henry, as some critics do, on the basis that she is simply trying to discourage him from wooing her is to view only part of the picture. Her unkindness is seen and felt not only by wooers, but also by her own family. Indeed, Frank, Beatrix's brother, is aware of her fault at an early age: "'I can't make out Beatrix,' he said; 'she cares for none of us—she only thinks of herself . . . '" (p. 272). Finally, Beatrix admits to this grievous shortcoming after the Duke of Hamilton, her fiancé, is killed in a duel. She mourns not from sadness over her future husband's death, but rather from rage at having her ultimate success in the world snatched irretrievably away. Beatrix tells Harry: "I think I have no heart . . . " (p. 420). Yet, even with this Aristotelian self-realization, Beatrix steals away to a country retreat, and invites the Pretender to come unaccompanied for a "visit."
This action clearly reveals a seamy side (to Thackeray's audience) of Beatrix, and she is saved from a shameful, degrading relationship only by Harry's and Frank's arrival. Through narrative, characters, and Beatrix's own words, one finds a person whose heart is touched only by the thought of worldly gain, a character whose end cannot but be ignoble.

Looking back to *Vanity Fair's* Becky, Thackeray condemns Beatrix on a second charge—excess worldliness. All mortals are worldly to some degree, but Beatrix is arrogant and callous in her covetousness of worldly success. She admits to Harry and Rachel her motive for marrying: "'Yes,' says she, 'I solemnly vow, own and confess, that I want a good husband. Where's the harm of one? My face is my fortune. . . . I have a pretty taste for dress, diamonds, gambling, and old China. I love sugar-plums, Malines lace, . . . the opera, and everything that is useless and costly'" (pp. 360-61). Beatrix's goal in life is a purely hedonistic one, and the reader is reminded of other wealthy women of rank (Miss Crawley, Lady Kew) whose lives are sad and empty. Rachel, with her usual clear sight, recognizes Beatrix's perverted values, and fears for her daughter's future: "I can say but little good of poor Beatrix, and look with dread at the marriage she will form. Her mind is fixed on Ambition only, and making a great figure; and, this achieved, she will tire of it as she does of everything" (p. 371). Beatrix forms attachments with a baronet, then with an earl, then with a duke, her worldliness prompting her to drop each smaller trophy as soon as a larger and shinier one is within grasp, and she rather callowly justifies her actions: "I intend to live to
be a hundred, and to go to ten thousand routs and balls, and to play cards every night of my life . . . I like to be the first of my company . . . I like flattery and compliments . . . I like a coach-and-six . . . and I like diamonds" (p. 383). Beatrix is, perhaps, Thackeray's most worldly character, and is doomed to future unhappiness—seen in *The Virginians*; she would sell love for a coach-and-six with a ducal coronet affixed to its side. Given this dazzling portrait of the upper classes and their corruptness—a picture Dickens could not convincingly paint—it is curious to read John Hagan's claim that Henry was really the man for Beatrix (see Hagan, p. 306). More perceptive than Hagan's account is Adolphus Jack's: "But with all her dazzling caprice, and her charming mocks of affection, Beatrix remains worldly and heartless. If her character be examined with any care, she will be found to be absolutely incapable of an unselfish action." Thackeray's revulsion against the emotional commercialism of the Victorian period, as seen in the portrait of Beatrix, compares to that of Tennyson, whose similar complaints are unmistakable in "Locksley Hall" and "Maud." One cannot buy and sell happiness or love, for the stakes are too high and the results disastrous.

A far more curious and now hotly-debated love relationship in *Henry Esmond* is Rachel's and Harry's. As shown earlier, Thackeray's contemporaries, while acknowledging the brilliance and polish of the novel, were plainly frightened by the conclusion, scared by the supposed incestuous marriage of Harry and Rachel. More recent critics

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have assailed the novel's conclusion not because of the marriage but because it allegedly is not provided for in the novel. It is germane to this study to show that the marriage is feasible, and that Rachel's reward of Harry's hand in marriage is deserved. Not only does John E. Tilford feel that Harry's and Rachel's relationship provides "the major thematic integration of the novel," but he also demonstrates how well-provided for the marriage is through a painstaking, section-by-section analysis of the novel. 10 John Loofbourow views Rachel's and Harry's relationship as a natural part of the novel's action: "It is consonant with Thackeray's realistic approach to the human condition that he can value the idealisms of romantic love while he insists on the realities of a passion that 'sports with rich and poor, wicked and virtuous alike.'" 11 Remembering that Thackeray wrote of Henry Esmond: "A story is biling up in my interior, in which there shall appear some very good lofty and generous people," 12 one ought not to be surprised to find the two "good lofty and generous" characters rewarded with happiness at the novel's end. Harry devotedly loves Rachel--first as child, then as man--throughout Esmond, and Rachel loves Harry from the time he is 15 years old. Their love is tested, strained by Harry's love for Beatrix, and ultimately sanctioned by marriage. Far from

10 "The Love Theme of 'Henry Esmond,'" PMLA, 68 (1952), 684.


being a "wrong" love, their love, as Barbara Hardy says, consummates "the moral action of the novel." Both Harry and Rachel, then, are saved by their capacity to love, by their willingness to concern themselves with others.

In describing his marriage, Harry hints several times at the "position" of love in Thackeray's system of values and at the power of love in his philosophy. Harry describes love as having almost mystic powers: "That happiness [love] . . . cannot be written in words; 'tis of its nature sacred and secret"; he speaks of "the depth and intensity of love" which move him to "a transport of wonder and gratitude"; love is "the highest faculty of the soul"; "love vincit omnia"; love is a "blessing, in comparison of which all earthly joy is of no value"; and to think of Rachel "is to praise God" (all references are to pp. 491-92). Clearly, love goes beyond worldly pleasure; it assumes in Thackeray's philosophy the position of the Greatest Good. Love is not bound to the world; it is above worldly values. Hardy admits, significantly, that love in Esmond "suggests . . . the possibility of triumph over Vanity Fair" (p. 186). Finally, in a passage of utmost importance, Thackeray suggests love's immortality: "What is ambition compared to that [love], but selfish vanity? To be rich, to be famous? What do these profit a year hence, when other names sound louder than yours, when you lie hidden away under the ground, along with the idle titles engraven on your coffin? But only true love lives after


14 Hagan (p. 300), suggests the passage quoted is ironical. However, the suggestion seems to be thematically and rhetorically improbable.
you—follows your memory with secret blessing—or precedes you, and intercedes for you. *Non omnis moriar*—if dying, I yet live in a tender heart or two; nor am lost and hopeless living, if a sainted departed soul still loves and prays for me" (pp. 220-21). If name, wealth, and possession are but fleeting vanities, the force of love is not. (In *The Newcomes* and *The Virginians*, this thought is repeated—almost verbatim.) Through love, Rachel and Harry escape the vanities and trappings of the world and are "transported" to the regions of "the soul." Clearly, love is salvation.

*Henry Esmond* holds a curious place in Thackeray's canon. It has never attained the popularity of *Vanity Fair*, yet as Ray shows, it is the most admired novel among a large group of Thackerians. Its plot, its characters, and even its theme have been contested and debated. This study is concerned only with revealing Thackeray's unmistakable theme that one can be saved from *Vanity Fair* through love. Neither Lord Castlewood, who marries from physical attraction, nor Beatrix, who cannot escape her egocentricity, is rescued from the misery that is the inevitable lot of worldlings in Thackeray. Lord Castlewood dies unhappily, and Beatrix is also thwarted by death (of her fiancé) in her efforts to assume a high position in *Vanity Fair*. Only Rachel and Harry are allowed to come to a happy end. In Thackeray's next novel, *The Newcomes*, the love motif is seen in a carefully-planned, well-balanced novel that, structurally as well as thematically, lends itself to the comparison of families, lovers, and father-son couples, half of whom love and therefore live full lives. *The Newcomes* is simply a larger testing ground for love as salvation.
CHAPTER V

THE NEWCOMES: A PANORAMA OF LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

Without doubt, The Newcomes (1853-55) is Thackeray's most underrated novel. Its scope is breathtaking; the novel is nothing less than a complete diagnostic anatomy of Victorian society. The artistic courage necessary to undertake such a task is equally impressive. If the scope of the novel is panoramic, so is Thackeray's treatment of the love motif as found in varied types of love relationships. His assessment of love's role in a mammonistic and corrupt society combines the usual realism and a faith in love's saving graces. Not only does Thackeray juxtapose loving characters and unloving characters to drive home his message, but he also once again adumbrates love's immortality. If one understands Saintsbury's claim that The Newcomes' panoramic look at society goes beyond the usual scope of the novel, that The Newcomes is "almost the world itself" rather than "a microcosm," then one can appreciate the "panoramic" view of love in the novel.

Characters fail to love in domestic relationships, in filial relationships, and in familial relationships as often as they fail in romantic relationships.

Failure to love in familial relationships and the concommitant suffering are vividly revealed by comparing Clive and his father, Col. Newcome, as a family unit, with other families in the novel. What is different about Clive and his father as a family? Why are

they rewarded in the end? To answer these questions is to perceive the theme of the novel. Clive and his father love each other. The strength of their love for each other allows them to be honest with each other, to confide in each other, and even to endure the strain placed on their relationship by Clive's ill-fated marriage to Rosey Mackenzie. Indeed, it is only because the love between father and son is strong that Clive and Col. Newcome can willingly confront each other after the marriage sours Clive. After they air their complaints, both are able to find solace in each other. Early in the novel Col. Newcome's unselfish love for Clive is described, and the narrator (Arthur Pendennis) informs the reader that "everybody who knew him [Col. Newcome] loved him; everybody, that is, who loved modesty, and generosity, and honour." The continual praise of Col. Newcome, especially for his self-denial so that Clive's future will be a bright one, adds to the credibility of the Colonel's and Clive's relationship. Both father and son are frank and open by nature, and it is no wonder the narrator describes Clive as "just such a youth as has a right to be the hero of a novel" (I, 61). Final evidence of the strength of their love is that despite his fallen social position, and despite the humiliation heaped upon both Clive and Col. Newcome by Mrs. Mackenzie, the father dies both content and with a clear conscience.

On the other hand, little or none of this domestic love can be found in the other families (which are, ironically, both higher in

society and wealthier). Most clearly juxtaposed is Sir Brian Newcome's family. Like so many members of the aristocracy, Sir Brian Newcome, who has risen on the wings of the aristocracy by marrying an earl's daughter (Lady Ann), is a weakling in all aspects of life. His despicable son, Barnes, is the head of the family (indeed, Barnes looks down on his Osborne-like father as being vulgar). Sir Brian is ineffectual in anything other than snobbery. Certainly, this is one big difference between the Thomas Newcome family and the Sir Brian Newcome family, for Col. Newcome is both well-loved and respected, and is the unquestionable head of the family. Contrasted with Col. Newcome's death is Sir Brian's; the reader is told that just before he dies, Sir Brian is "loved" only by his valet—and then only because of the salary Sir Brian gives him. More importantly, after Sir Brian dies (Barnes and Lady Kew, the reader is told, take the death "philosophically"), Barnes complains because his father provided in his will for Lady Ann and the children (II, 113). Considering that love's immortality has assumed great importance to Thackeray, Sir Brian's dying unloved takes on added significance.

The Hobson Newcome family fares little better when compared to Thomas and Clive Newcome. Mrs. Newcome is self-righteous in conducting her life; she spends all her time competing with Sir Brian's family. She can see the faults and hypocrisy in others, but not in herself or in any of her children (Thackeray continually undermines Mrs. Newcome's "goodness" by referring to her as "Virtue" when she pompously, self-righteously judges—and therefore inevitably condemns—others). In fact, Mrs. Newcome is so "good" that her husband far
prefers to be at the bank or out in the country rather than at home with her. Finally, the children suffer from the upbringing, and the indication is that they are "trained" by the mother. It is no coincidence that what the kindly Madame de Florac tells Ethel applies perfectly to Mrs. Hobson Newcome:

Do you know that the children of those who do not love in marriage seem to bear an hereditary coldness, and do not love their parents as other children do? They witness our differences and our indifferences, hear our recriminations, take one side or the other in our disputes, and are partisans for father or mother. We force ourselves to be hypocrites, and hide our wrongs from them; we speak of a bad father with false praises; we wear feigned smiles over our tears, and deceive our children--deceive them, do we? Even from the exercise of that pious deceit there is no woman but suffers in the estimation of her sons.

(II, 102-03)

If Mrs. Newcome's superfluous and unfair judgments of others hurt the victims, the above indicates that ultimately she, too, will be judged as she has judged. Clearly, Clive and his father--a loving family--are far superior to the other two families. Wealth and social position do not bring the happiness that love does.

Of prime importance to this theme are Clive's and Barnes's marriages. Clive is the admitted hero of the novel, Barnes the villain. Both men make unhappy marriages. However, the motives for marrying are different, for Clive marries Rosey because of his father's pressure to marry her. More importantly, he thinks he has no chance of marrying Ethel, who is engaged to the dull-witted Marquis of Farintosh. Granted that Clive marries for the wrong reasons, he nonetheless does not consciously seek a marriage of convenience, as does Barnes, who marries Lady Clara Pulleyrn explicitly for social rank (Lady Clara, the daughter of a moneyless aristocrat, marries with her family's money-
There is no hesitation on the narrator's part to show not only that Clive is unhappy, but also why he is: "So Clive Newcome lay in a bed of down and tossed and trembled there. He went to fine dinners, and sat silent over them; rode fine horses, and black Care jumped up behind the moody horseman"; "He . . . was a very lonely, poor fellow, I am afraid . . . "; "They [Clive and Rosey] were not made to mate with one another" (all references are to II, 270-72).

The fact that Clive marries Rosey, hoping to forget Ethel and wishing to please his father, is important in the judgment passed on him—he will be miserable and pay dearly for his error, but in the end he will be rescued, simply because he does not marry for self-serving reasons.

Barnes Newcome, on the other hand, consciously, purposefully marries Lady Clara for the wrong reason. He seeks social status through the titled nobility, she, at the insistence of her father, the Earl of Dorking, seeks financial security. Never in describing the courtship does the narrator indicate emotional involvement on Barnes's or Lady Clara's part. Barnes loves and takes care of Barnes, his status in society, and his financial well-being; Lady Clara loves penniless Jack Belsize. After a final meeting with Jack, a telling description is given of Lady Clara: "After poor Jack Belsize's mishap and departure, Barnes's own bride showed no spirit at all . . . She came at call and instantly, and went through whatever paces her owner demanded of her. She laughed whenever need was, simpered and

3J.Y. T. Greig, Thackeray: A Reconsideration (1950; rpt. New York: Archon Books, 1967), p. 174, in refuting Henry James's imperceptive comment that The Newcomes is "a loose baggy monster," contends not only that "Marriage for the wrong reasons" unifies the novel, but also that it serves as the theme.
smiled when spoken to, danced whenever she was asked; drove out at Barnes's side in Kew's phaeton, and received him certainly not with warmth, but with politeness and welcome" (I, 358). At the wedding, an anonymous woman with a baby appears, claiming that the father of her baby is about to marry Lady Clara. Even if the Morning Chronicle does not take note of the disruption, the reader does. The marriage predictably is a miserable one:

More and more sad does the Lady Clara become from day to day; liking more to sit lonely over the fire; careless about the sarcasms of her husband; the prattle of her children. She cries sometimes over the cradle of the young heir. She is aweary, aweary. You understand the man to whom her parents sold her does not make her happy, though she has been bought with diamonds, two carriages, several large footmen, a fine country house with delightful gardens and conservatories, and with all this she is miserable—is it possible? (II, 157)

Through Barnes's cruelty, Lady Clara is driven to flee with Jack Belsize, now Lord Highgate, to the continent. Barnes, if not outwardly punished for his cruelty, is humiliated by the occurrence, and receives most unwelcome publicity over the matter. By the conclusion of the novel, Barnes is well-respected as an M.P., as a baronet, and as a wealthy banker, but by all of the good people in the novel is recognized as the villain he really is. Not the least of ironies is that Barnes himself describes his life as a miserable one. Clive, not well-respected by the titled denizens of Vanity Fair, survives the misery of his marriage, and at the novel's end wins Ethel's hand. One man loves and is saved; the other chokes on the worldly pomp he hoped would bring happiness.

Other examples of bad or loveless marriages appear in The Newcomes. Col. Newcome's own father, Thomas Newcome, Sr., makes two
marriages—one for love and one for money. As is often the case in Thackeray's novels, the first marriage, involving love, is with a poor girl—"to the penniless girl whom he had loved in the days of his own poverty" (I, 15)—but "What seemed an imprudent match . . . turned out a very lucky one for Newcome." After his first wife dies, Newcome is concerned for his son's future—becomes "an awakened man"—and marries the fabulously wealthy Miss Hobson. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to the "marriage-for-money" theme, and within the next few pages one finds Col. Newcome's early love for Léonore de Florac thwarted by M. de Florac, who is enraged at the thought of an untitled Englishman (for the impoverished de Floracs are exiled nobility) marrying his Léonore. (It is significant that neither Col. Newcome nor Leonore loves the person they later marry; Col. Newcome's last thought is of Léonore.) Col. Newcome's marriage to the widow Emma Casey is one not of love but of convenience. When she dies, Col. Newcome is not, for all of his kindness, grieved, for his heart has long since been given to Léonore de Florac. Mrs. Mackenzie realizes why her flirtation with Col. Newcome is futile: "Colonel Newcome has had some great passion, once upon a time, I am sure of that, and has no more heart to give away" (I, 237).

Col. Newcome's brothers make marriages of convenience without ever having loved. This is especially the case of Sir Brian and Lady Ann. As with others in The Newcomes, Sir Brian marries for social position, Lady Ann for wealth. There are no delusions about the marriage; Lady Ann admits that her marriage was one of convenience. Ethel takes part in one of the most revealing conversations of the
novel:

'We barter rank against money, and money against rank, day after day. Why did you marry my father to my mother? Was it for his wit? You know he might have been an angel and you would have scorned him. Your daughter [Lady Ann] was bought with papa's money as surely as ever Newcome was. Will there be no day when this mammon-worship will cease among us?'

'Not in my time or yours, Ethel,' the elder said, not unkindly; perhaps she thought of a day long ago, before she was sold herself. (I, 351)

And, as has been previously shown, Mrs. Hobson Newcome drives her husband away with her self-proclaimed, ostentatious goodness. In these loveless marriages is little indication of happiness, and the suggestion that the buying and selling of humans is ultimately futile remains hauntingly present throughout the novel.  

Thackeray does not rely solely on these marriages, however, to make his point. The novel tenders comments, often vitriolic, on marriage and on love, illustrating that loveless marriages—indeed, loveless lives—lead to loneliness and unhappiness. Indeed, when a reviewer of The Newcomes complained about an alleged lack of "morality" in the novel, Thackeray wrote to a friend, claiming that there was a definite moral stance in the book, that "all but Love and Goodness" are "vanity." That love is salvation in The Newcomes is obvious, and

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4 Russell A. Fraser, "Sentimentality in Thackeray's 'The Newcomes'," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 4 (1949), 187-96, selects isolated passages in which Thackeray, admittedly, writes sentimentally, analyzes them, and concludes that the novel is "marred" by such sentimentality. He overlooks the very theme of The Newcomes in doing so, fails to admire the forward-looking, rather stark realism seen in the broken homes, adulterous wives, and unhappy marriages found in the novel. Greig, Ray, Dodds, McMaster, et al. seem to refute Fraser's claim.

the action of the novel confirms this. In a description of Ethel's hesitancy over marrying Lord Kew, whom she does not love, the narrator indulges in what he himself describes as "a diatribe" against mammonism in marriage:

This ceremony amongst us is so stale and common that, to be sure, there is no need to describe its rites, and as women sell themselves for what you call an establishment every day, to the applause of themselves, their parents, and the world, why on earth should a man ape at originality, and pretend to pity them? Never mind about the lies at the altar, the blasphemy against the godlike name of love, the sordid surrender, the smiling dishonour... Her ladyship's sacrifice is performed, and the less said about it the better. (I, 301-02)

In a similar "diatribe," the narrator, describing the bitterness and misery in Barnes's and Lady Clara's marriage, notes that "We arrange such matches every day; we sell or buy beauty, or rank, or wealth; we inaugurate the bargain in churches with sacramental services, in which the parties engaged call upon Heaven to witness the vows—we know them to be lies, and we seal them with God's name" (II, 214). The narrator complains about loveless relationships not restricted only to romantic or marital love, and Madame de Florac (Col. Newcome's Léonore) shows that domestic love can also be lacking: "What a home, where the son sees a tyrant in the father, and in the mother but a trembling victim! I speak not for myself—whatever may have been the course of our long wedded life, I have not to complain of these ignoble storms. But when the family chief neglects his wife, or prefers another to her, the children too, courtiers as we are, will desert her" (II, 103). (It is in this same conversation with Ethel that Madame de Florac issues a terse warning: "Better poverty,
Ethel--better a cell in a convent, than a union without love.") A final example is what Laura tells Pen (the narrator of The Newcomes) as they talk of Barnes and Lady Clara: "What a dreadful place this great world of yours is, Arthur; where husbands do not seem to care for their wives; where mothers do not love their children; where children love their nurses [one is reminded of little Rawdy in Vanity Fair]; where men talk what they call gallantry" (II, 122).

In a letter written to Sally Baxter during the composition of The Newcomes, Thackeray captures the spirit of the complaints found in the novel:

They never feel love, but directly it's born, they throttle it and fling it under the sewer as poor girls do their unlawful children--they make up money-marriages and are content--then the father goes to the House of Commons or the Counting House, the mother to her balls and visits--the children lurk up stairs with their governess, and when their turn comes are bought and sold, and respectable and heartless as their parents before them.

... No--go and live in a clearing--marry a husband masticatory, expectoratory, dubious of linen, but with a heart below that rumpled garment--let the children eat with their precious knives--help the help, and give a hand to the dinner yourself. ... (Ray, III, 297)

Throughout The Newcomes, the absence of love precludes any lasting happiness, prevents contentment, and denies purpose in living. Without exception, those who love are saved from unhappiness in the end, even if they do suffer and even if Vanity Fair looks down at them.

But the alternative lifestyle--the loveless life--is that of characters like Barnes, Lady Kew, and Sir Brian. It is a lifestyle not likely to be desired. Of all the major novels, The Newcomes most cogently demonstrates the power of love.
As in *Henry Esmond*, Thackeray reveals the prevalence of love as salvation in his scheme of values; love once again is described unequivocally as the Greatest Good. In a novel brimming over with worldly pomp, greed, self-serving hypocrisy, deception, and mammonism—a world by nature seemingly a loveless one—man can be saved only through the power of love: "If love lives through all life; and survives through all sorrow; and remains steadfast with us through all changes; and in all darkness of spirit burns brightly; and, if we die, deplores us for ever, and loves still equally; and exists with the very last gasp and throb of the faithful bosom—whence it passes with the pure soul, beyond death; surely it shall be immortal" (II, 81)

What is the above if it is not consolation for the suffering, hope for the despairing, and salvation for both the living and the dead? It is the success of the Clives, the Col. Newcomes, and the Ethels that prompts McMaster to proclaim: "an existence without some measure of faith in love and honour emerges too as a barren half-life." And it is the all-too-real battle of the individual to live in the world at peace with himself or herself that makes *The Newcomes* "the most moving of Thackeray's novels" (McMaster, p. 168). To Dodds, this colossal battle in *Vanity Fair* makes *The Newcomes* "in many ways the richest of all his [Thackeray's] novels, the complete realization of his talent for seizing upon a whole society and fixing it in words." Once

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realized by Thackeray and expressed in *Esmond*, the immortality of love was "set loose" in *The Newcomes* to offer salvation to man and woman, husband and wife, father and son, and mother and child alike. In a corrupt and often inhumane world, one in which good and bad both suffer, love the conqueror towers above chaotic *Vanity Fair*, ever available to lift the believer from the sorrow below. To Thackeray, a Victorian author concerned with morals, love has become both a philosophic and a morally redemptive force.
CHAPTER VI

BARRY LYNDON AND THE VIRGINIANS:
THE CYCLE COMPLETE

In an earlier chapter, I said that Vanity Fair's effective treatment of the love motif lies in the use of negative examples; that is, by exposing the suffering concomitant with shallow love relationships, Thackeray adeptly makes clear his message. Thus, Vanity Fair has much in common with Barry Lyndon, first published serially in 1844 and again in book form in 1856. Because Lyndon was greatly revised by Thackeray for the 1856 publication, it paradoxically may be studied as both early and late novel. Viewed in terms of this study, Barry Lyndon, like Vanity Fair, offers its unheroic protagonist as an example of what not to be in a love relationship. And, in The Virginians (1857-59), the last major novel, Thackeray once again relies heavily on negative examples. On the other hand, The Virginians includes a number of themes and techniques not found in Barry Lyndon. A comparison of the earlier novel with the later, then, well demonstrates that a clear thematic cycle has been completed.

To assess Lyndon's relationship with his wife, Lady Lyndon, is to study Thackeray's early convictions about loveless marriages. Throughout the novel, Lyndon exposes his cruel, selfish nature through his own narration, and his relationship with Lady Lyndon is no exception.

Thackeray's brilliant use of the first-person narrator is perhaps the most praised aspect of Barry Lyndon, although some critics (McMaster, Jack, Wheatley) give the garland to the psychological realism of the novel.
From the beginning of the perverted "courtship" to Lyndon's death in prison, the turbulent relationship functions as a stark warning or negative example. If Thackeray has not yet developed to the point of including "warning passages" about false or selfish love, he has nevertheless made his point through a long and complex "example." (Lady Lyndon enters the novel on p. 194 and is involved with Lyndon until the end on p. 330.)

There is never any question about Lyndon's attraction to his future wife; his first mention of the Countess Lyndon is a telling one: "Honoria, Countess of Lyndon, Viscountess Bullingdon in England, Baroness Castle Lyndon of the kingdom of Ireland, was so well known to the great world in her day, that I have little need to enter into her family history; which is to be had in any Peerage that the reader may lay his hand on. She was, as I need not say, a countess, viscountess, and baroness in her own right. Her estates in Devon and Cornwall were among the most extensive in those parts; her Irish not less magnificent . . . " (p. 194). Several observations need to be made: Lyndon, a typical Thackerayan character always interested in social climbing, is attracted to Lady Lyndon as a status symbol, the repetition of her titles a clear indication of this. Further, Lyndon sees in her a limitless supply of money and material wealth. Both of these attractions have one trait in common: both are viewed selfishly, both are seen as valuable in so far as they add to Lyndon's image of self. Missing, of course, is Lyndon's interest in Lady

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2 All references are to *Barry Lyndon*, ed. Robert L. Morris (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1962), and are cited by page in the text.
Lyndon as a person.

Lyndon, for all of his self-proclaimed cleverness, cannot see through the false security and happiness of a marriage to a wealthy, titled woman, even though her husband, Sir Charles Lyndon, warns him: "Do anything but marry, my artless Irish rustic... She [speaking of Lady Lyndon] is enormously rich; but somehow I have never been so poor as since I married her" (p. 196). While warning Lyndon, Sir Charles reveals much of himself: he calls Lyndon, a murderous blackguard, an "artless rustic," admits his own mercenary motives in marrying his cousin, and fails to perceive that he is himself responsible for his marriage's failure. The reader, then, knows better than to take seriously Sir Charles's condemnation of marriage. Despite this gloomy advice, Lyndon persists in considering himself a replacement for the dying Sir Charles, for he asks, "Has her Ladyship a very large income?" Naturally, Lyndon does not listen to the advice, and with no emotional intentions, proceeds to "court" the widow.

The courtship is brilliant in conception, if somewhat frightening. Time and again Lyndon describes his courtship as "the siege" or as "the pursuit." He is as relentless in his quest for title and wealth (embodied in Lady Lyndon) as in his quest for any rival suitor's blood. Barry Lyndon is, in short, a monster, and Thackeray magnificently captures the paradoxical brutality of his motives for courtship: "Besides, my friend the knight was dying: his widow would

3Adolphus A. Jack, Thackeray: A Study (1895; rpt. Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. 53, writes that in Barry Lyndon, "mercenary marriages led to misfortune," and he is found to be correct in both Sir Charles's and Lyndon's cases.
be the richest prize in the three kingdoms. Why should I not win her, and, with her, the means of making in the world that figure which my genius and inclination desired?" (p. 199) Further, more explicit brutality is seen in Lyndon's "plan of courtship": "That is my way of fascinating women. . . . Attacking is my only secret. Dare, and the world always yields . . . " (p. 205). Lyndon relentlessly pursues the Countess, not leaving her free from his pressure until she finally consents to marry him. Before she consents, Lyndon strives to break her, to make her so dread his sudden appearances that she will capitulate. In fact, Lyndon admits that "Terror, be sure of that, is not a bad ingredient of love" (p. 236). Obviously, the sadistic Lyndon cannot distinguish love from slavery, and when Lady Lyndon finally gives in to him, he attributes his success to his "charm."

To be sure, Lady Lyndon is as much to blame for her troubles as Lyndon is for the unhappiness he finds in marriage. While she is understandably repulsed by Lyndon, she is incredibly "attracted" to him in a psychologically sick way: " . . . can he make me marry him though I cordially detest him, and bring me a slave to his feet? The horrid look of his black serpent-like eyes fascinates and frightens me: it seems to follow me everywhere, and even when I close my own eyes, the dreadful gaze penetrates the lids, and is still upon me" (p. 239). That Lady Lyndon even imagines marrying a man she knows to be a villain reveals her weak character; to be fascinated by such a man—to play the role of the fascinated "prey" of the snake-like
Lyndon--reveals a serious psychological flaw in her character. Her weakness, plus Lyndon's equally sick, brutal persistence (McMaster, 188, is impressed by the "psychological realism" of their relationship), yields a marriage that cannot but be a violent failure. Made clear in their relationship is the "moral" that loveless marriages fail; in Barry Lyndon more than in any other of his novels, Thackeray almost savagely develops this idea. In this early novel appear no "positive examples," couples (in this case) who love sincerely and unselfishly. The Bad are not compared with and balanced by the Good, as is seen in the later novels, and because of the presence of twin brothers in The Virginians, a good marriage and a bad one can be closely examined.

Like Barry Lyndon's and Lady Lyndon's marriage, Harry Warrington's flirtations and ultimately his marriage are ill-conceived. When he does marry, his union, like the Lyndons', is a failure. For all of his kindness and good nature, Harry Warrington is a fool--at least in love relationships. Harry first fancies himself to be in love with his spinster cousin, Lady Maria. He is blinded by his infatuation for Maria (the illustration of Harry and Maria in the garden informs the reader that in this case, Cupid is not only blind but also

4 Juliet McMaster, Thackeray: The Major Novels (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 189, points out that Lady Lyndon is a "psychological study in masochism."

5 James H. Wheatley, Patterns in Thackeray's Fiction (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1969), p. 51, praises Thackeray's depiction of the Lyndons' relationship, and writes that the marriage comes about "after a campaign of inventive ingenuity that is one of Thackeray's most impressive inspirations."
headless), and the narrator makes great comic use of the situation to show how absurd the relationship is: "He [Harry] does not see that the syren paints the lashes from under which she ogles him; will put by into a box when she has done the ringlets into which she would inveigle him; and if she eats him, as she proposes to do, will crunch his bones with a new set of grinders just from the dentist's, and warranted for mastication. The song is not stale to Harry Warrington, nor the voice cracked or out of tune that sings it." Eventually, Harry is cured of his infatuation, only to fall in love with Hester Lambert. Hetty, however, is too good for Harry, whose affection for women is continually ill-founded and unstable, and rejects him. By this time, it is obvious that "Harry is unworthy of his role in the novel: he is married off to a horrible little chit and retreats to the background forever . . . " (Rawlins, p. 198). The "horrible little chit" he marries is Fanny Mountain, the daughter of his mother's life-long companion.

The reader learns of the marriage in a letter Harry writes to George. Harry unknowingly hints at an ill-founded attachment when he gives his reasons for marrying Fanny: "Mine [his "love"] for Fanny was increased by seeing what the treatment was she had from Madam Esmond . . . " (p. 711). Sympathy and compassion are admirable traits, but as in all of Thackeray's earlier novels, nothing but love

6 William Makepeace Thackeray, The Virginians (New York and Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Company), p. 153. All further references are to this edition and are cited by page in the text.

7 Jack P. Rawlins, Thackeray's Novels: A Fiction that Is True (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), p. 200, discusses Thackeray's censure of foolish, unrealistic love, and cites Harry's love for Maria as an example.
is suitable for the life-long attachment of marriage. In short, Harry has married for the wrong reason. This is evident to all concerned, and George writes, "I fully credited poor Hal's violent protests and tearful oaths, that, by George, it was our mother's persecution which made him marry her" (pp. 734-35). On the same page, George admits to Theo that Harry does his wife's bidding, and that Harry thinks what Fanny thinks. The foolish Harry is now a servant to a domineering wife (the extent of his servitude is revealed by Madam Warrington on p. 723). Later in the novel, however, Fanny dies, freeing an older—and hopefully a wiser—Harry.

Another bad marriage, a typical Thackerayan bad marriage, is that of Lydia Van den Bosch and the Earl of Castlewood. Lydia's father is vulgar, but is also an exceedingly wealthy merchant. Lord Castlewood is an impoverished nobleman. As in all of the major novels, a marriage occurs between middle class wealth and moneyless aristocrat, producing the "hybrid" class Thackeray saw as the Englishmen of the future. And as with some such marriages in the earlier novels, this one fails, not because of class disparity, but because the intention is completely wrong. Lydia Van den Bosch and the Earl of Castlewood see in each other only a means to an end, in one case social position, in the other freedom from monetary worry. Both, however, pay dearly for their mercenary union. The new Countess of Castlewood visits George and Theo, and while there, admits that her marriage is not a particularly rosy one: "... if I have bought a countess's coronet, I have paid a good price for it—that I have!" (p. 697) It is interesting that Lydia chooses the verb "bought," for that is precisely
how she has become a countess—by buying an Earl. Lord Castlewood, the reader is told, also "paid a large price for having his estate freed from encumbrances, his houses and stables furnished, and his debts discharged. He was the slave of the little wife and her father" (p. 697). By the novel's end, Castlewood is again broken financially, his wife embittered. Between Barry Lyndon and Lady Lyndon, Harry Warrington and Fanny Mountain, and Lydia Van den Bosch and Lord Castlewood, Thackeray presents a convincing array of unsuccessful relationships. One fails because of psychological imbalance, another because of foolish, shallow infatuation, and yet another because of mercenary motives. In both the early and the late novel, it is shown that only sincere love makes for a strong relationship; anything less yields unhappiness. Where there is no love, there is no salvation.

However, if Barry Lyndon and The Virginians have unmistakable similarities (particularly thematic ones), they have equally clear differences. The Virginians is closely related stylistically to the later novels, Barry Lyndon is not; the love motif also receives different treatment in the later novel than in the early novel.

In keeping with the style and treatment of his later novels, Thackeray in The Virginians extends the love motif beyond only marriages and courtships to familial love, filial love, and brotherly love. While discussing negative examples, it is necessary to look at the negative example that is the Castlewood family. From the time it enters the novel, the family is comprised of unadmirable members, jealous, self-centered, greedy, and petty. They continually fight among themselves, hurling accusations and counter-accusations. In an
important scene, Will and Lady Fanny remind their mother (Lady Frances) of her fights with her husband. It is ironic that the vulgar Will exposes loveless marriages for Thackeray: "'And if you did not love our father before marriage, you certainly did not fall in love with him afterwards,' broke in Mr. William, with a laugh. 'Fan and I remember our honored parents used to fight. Don't us, Fan?'" (p. 144) Fanny adds, "I am sure, Madam, you were not much the happier for marrying the man you did not like, and your ladyship's title hath brought very little along with it." Not only has Thackeray established the family's discord, but he has also set a precedent for loveless marriages, as it were, that the current Lord Castlewood will follow—that of marrying for money. Thus, Lady Castlewood has much in common with Lydia Van den Bosch. Also implicit in this scene is the lack of affection on the parts of all the family members: children argue with mother, brother with sister, and sister with sister. And, of course, the supreme irony is that the social status, the large estate, and the conniving and backstabbing are all to no avail. The Castlewoods are unhappy and discontented.8

Like all the current Castlewoods, the Baroness Bernstein (Beatrix Esmond of Henry Esmond) is a fickle, worldly creature. Since the reader has last heard of Beatrix, she has, over the years,

8 Rawlins (191-92) discusses the seemingly hereditary shortcomings of the Castlewood family, and in analyzing the Castlewoods of The Virginians, writes that "All the Castlewoods live without resistance in the grip of congenital vices their forbears handled with some elegance."
been the Pretender's mistress, married Bishop Tusher (the toady, Tom Tusher, whom she scorned at one time), and after his death, wed a disreputable German baron. Now, she is a wealthy old woman who has not the good sense to realize her game is played out. Dodds writes that "The Baroness is as worldly and fickle as she had been in the days of her triumph, loving cards and shady stories to her unregenerate end . . . " (p. 221). Despite her undeniable charm as a character, her end is not a happy one. Thackeray masterfully guides the reader into her bedroom, describing the elaborate preparations necessary to bolster her aged appearance, exhibiting the suffering and illness of the old worldling, and ultimately revealing the haunting loneliness she feels at her death. A woman incapable of love, she has surrounded herself with creature comforts and evanescent vanities, none of which hold any meaning for an old woman who dies alone, knowing that her closest family, the Castlewoods, eagerly awaits her oblivion, anxious to see what her will has left them. Her death paradoxically shows that love--and only love--can bring salvation to lonely man.

In contrast to the Castlewoods, the Lambert family loves, respects, and enjoys the companionship of its members. Thackeray, in several instances, shows that Gen. Lambert and his wife married because they loved one another. Throughout the novel, their marriage is praised by characters and narrator alike. In fact, in this last major novel, Thackeray leaves insinuation and intimation behind him, and in describing the Lamberts' relationship states, with no qualification, that love is immortal: "All the prizes of life are nothing compared to that one. All the rewards of ambition, wealth, pleasure, only vanity and disappointment--grasped at greedily and fought for fiercely, and, over and over again, found worthless by the weary winners. But love seems to survive life and to reach beyond it. I think we take it with us past the grave" (p. 180). There can be no doubt at this point of the importance that love as salvation has attained in the artist's mind. Death, then, has become to Thackeray a worldly concern, restricted to the earth as surely as money, title, and suffering. Love gives to man the ability to soar beyond the reach of the world's sorrow and suffering. The love motif comes to its fruition in The Virginians: there is salvation for those who can and do love. Death becomes an empty threat. Thus, Gen. Lambert faces death unafraid, quite unlike the Baroness Bernstein. He is sure his wife awaits him on the other side of life, the Baroness fears what awaits her after death; Gen. Lambert is surrounded by loved ones, the Baroness is alone. Dodds, then, is correct in noting that the Lambert family "are thrown into contrast with the self-seeking Castlewoods" (p. 219). The one family is saved by their love,
the other doomed for their lack of it.

A final example, one contrasting with the Lyndons, the Harry Warringtons, and the Earl and Countess of Castlewood, is George Warrington's and Theo Lambert's marriage. What the other three marriages lack, this one has. Both marry only for love, both love unselfishly, both are open-eyed in loving. In fact, when George and Theo marry, they are quite destitute; what is important, however, is that Theo has to choose between living poorly with George or leaving George to go with her father, who has been appointed Governor General of Jamaica. Her choice reminds one of earlier, similar situations: Lady Pitt of *Vanity Fair* had to choose between a blacksmith who would make her happy or a baronet who would give her money and a title; Lady Clara in *The Newcomes* had to choose between a poor man (Jack Belsize) she loved and a man with money (Barnes Newcome). Theo is wiser than these: she opts to stay with the poor man she loves.

Yet, the decision is a wise one. Earlier, the conjugal unhappiness of the Earl and Countess of Castlewood was discussed. Significantly, George comments on his own marriage and poverty immediately afterwards:

> To lead a bear, as I did, was no very pleasant business to be sure: to wait in a bookseller's ante-room until it should please his honor to finish his dinner and give me audience . . . but would I have exchanged my poverty against Castlewood's ignominy, or preferred his miserable dependence to my own? . . . Now there was a certain person with whom Fate had thrown me into a life-partnership, who bore her poverty with such a smiling sweetness and easy grace, that niggard Fortune relented before her, and, like some savage Ogre in fairy tales, melted at the constant goodness and cheerfulness of that uncomplaining, artless, innocent creature [Theo]. (p. 697)

It is clear that though being poor has its disadvantages, to be poor
and happy is far superior to being rich and unhappy. Finally, Thackeray seems to give his blessings to their marriage, for he has George inherit his uncle’s baronetcy and the estate accompanying it; thus, George and Theo are rewarded also with worldly comfort.

George's marriage is one of the positive examples in The Virginians. His brother's, Lord Castlewood's, and the Dowager Countess Castlewood's marriages are all examples of loveless or foolish marriages. Barry Lyndon's is an example of both, one partner marrying for self-serving reasons and the other for a foolish, psychologically imbalanced reason. If the negative example of Barry Lyndon is more powerful in its brutality, the examples in The Virginians are more varied and subtle. Where the novels differ most, however, is in scope. Negative and positive examples of love appear not only in marriages or courtships, but also in familial love, filial love, and in the case of George and Harry, brotherly love. Barry Lyndon lacks this thematic scope. Further, it is in The Virginians that the love-as-salvation theme is given its final utterance, for Thackeray explicitly states that love goes beyond the grave. Concerning this motif, Thackeray has reached the pinnacle, has had his say.

10 The section of The Virginians dealing with George's and Theo's happy, moneyless, early married life is undoubtedly a picture of Thackeray's own early years with Isabella.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

During the course of this study, I have become convinced that
the love motif, undoubtedly an important and hitherto largely ignored
thematic aspect, fits naturally into the overall artistic expression
of William Makepeace Thackeray. That his writings are realistic I
have shown; from the time of Barry Lyndon (1844), where Thackeray re-
veals his departure from the heroic romance, his realism is obvious:

Had it [Barry Lyndon's autobiography] 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, repeat,
a hero of the common pattern; but let the reader look round,
and ask himself, Do not as many rogues succeed in life as
honest men? more fools than men of talent? And is it not
just that the lives of this class should be described by
the student of human nature as well as the actions of
those fairy-tale princes, those perfect impossible heroes,
whom our writers love to describe?1

Further, Thackeray's Vanity Fair (1847-48) makes clear its moral pur-
pose: "And, as we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as
a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to
step down from the platform, and talk about them: if they are good and
kindly, to love them and shake them by the hand; if they are silly, to
laugh at them confidentially in the reader's sleeve; if they are
wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which

1William Makepeace Thackeray, The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.,
ed. Robert L. Morris (Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1962),
p. 265.
politeness admits of. In this study, I have shown that love is of
umost importance both to the author's art and to himself. The real-
ism, the morality, and the love motif are intermixed. This motif,
like the other fictional elements in Thackeray's novels, functions as
a natural part of his expression.

Gordon N. Ray has shown Thackeray's writings to be unusually
autobiographical. (In fact, many critics feel this personal involve-
ment to be a distinct flaw in the novels. In his lifetime, Thackeray
often found himself in a caldron for drawing a character too true to
life.) Because of his personal involvement in the novels, all fic-
tional aspects of Thackeray's writing are suffused with his own per-
sonality and therefore mirror his own emotions. Consequently, as love
attains an ever-increasing importance to the author and to the man
Thackeray, form and content reflect this emotional interest. Through-
out the novels, the narrative distance between the writer and the
action of the book decreases in passages which are clearly personal,
particularly in the last three novels, where the direct statements of
love's immortality are written enthusiastically, even passionately,
and so even Thackeray's rhetoric is influenced by the love motif.
Failure to treat love in discussing Thackeray's novels is to render
incomplete a critical overview of man and artist.

2William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair, ed. Geoffrey and

3See The Buried Life: A Study of the Relation between Thackeray's
Fiction and His Personal History (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ.
Press, 1945).
Another characteristic I have perceived is that love is never meant by Thackeray to be a catholicon for the world's ills; all characters, whether they be bad or good, sincere in loving or insincere, suffer in Vanity Fair. That this suffering is recompense for living in the world I am certain; Thackeray himself came to realize in his later years, years of success and personal satisfaction, that a person is truly made better—tempered, as it were—by his struggles in life. If love is a redemptive force, then, it is nevertheless a rather stoical force, one which gives characters the strength and fortitude to bear the pain that living inevitably brings. The ultimate rewards of immortal love are not to be found in this world. In all of the novels but Lyndon, the characters who do love and who are rewarded in the end come to an Aristotelian self-knowledge which is nothing more than Thackeray's way of ridding these characters of delusion of any sort; it must be remembered that Amelia suffers as much for her roseate infatuation as does Becky for her lack of love, Amelia being saved, in Thackeray's own words, because she loves. Finally, realism and the love motif are evidenced in characters like Col. Newcome, Dobbin, or George Warrington, for often these characters are

4 The mistake that critics like Hardy, Greig, and McMaster make lies in their claim that if love is the standard by which characters are judged, then it is tarnished as it appears in Vanity Fair. What they implicitly demand is a paradisical world in which exists the "romance" Thackeray so hated. Love among mortals must be "corrupt." If Thackeray's characters are to be realistic, then their love must involve human pettiness and jealousy to some extent. Human flaws, however, do not preclude human purity in loving, and thus it is that characters like Amelia, Dobbin, Laura, Rachel Esmond, et al., are saved by love. They are saved because they love, not because their love lacks jealousy.
not at all respected by or welcome among the beau monde. The exclu-
sion is a significant one, for the beau monde comprises the worldly,
hypocritical, and self-serving society of Vanity Fair. The reward
spoken of cannot be only worldly, but involves "valuables" like con-
tentment, happiness, and of course, love, none of which are highly
regarded by Vanity Fair's citizenry. In his last three novels,
Thackeray tells his reader that while material comforts pass away,
love extends beyond the grave.

In Vanity Fair (1847-48), the love motif operates, but there is
not yet any mention of love as salvation. Examples abound, however,
which imply that happiness comes only to those who love. Amelia must
realize the inanity and selfishness of rejecting the worthy Dobbin for
the memory of the shallow George before she is happy. Becky never
does care for Rawdon or for her son or for anything other than her own
interests, and at the novel's conclusion has been reduced to an anony-
mous, colorless existence. Rawdon, simply because he loves Becky (al-
though the object is unworthy, the intention is right) and his son,
dies beloved; he is redeemed by love. The narrative commentary on
loveless marriages, pointed out in Chapter One, reinforces the neces-
sity of love for happiness. Vanity Fair, in dealing mostly with love
as seen in marriage, sets the stage for the variety of love relation-
ships found in Pendennis (1848-50).

The love motif receives more obvious treatment in Thackeray's
third major novel. More conflicts, more narrative commentary, and
the fates of more characters are related directly to failure or success
in love relationships. The main concern of Pendennis's hero, Arthur,
is how to love. The book's action revolves around Arthur's love relationship with three women: Emily Costigan, Blanche Amory, and Laura Bell. The only relationship which is a realistic one (for Arthur), one which pairs two compatible characters who can love one another while not blinding themselves to the other's faults, is Laura's and Pen's. Arthur realizes that Laura has been the right mate all along, and does marry her. In studying Laura and Helen Pendennis, one finds grouping Amelia, Laura, Helen, Rachel, and Ethel as "Thackeray's good women" to be critically unwise. Each of the characters is admittedly good, but each is clearly an individual, and Amelia has as little in common with Laura as does Ethel with Helen. The women's personalities emanate differently as one reads and compares the novels. Their independence of thought, their personalities, their faults—all of these characters have obvious differences, and to write them off in a group as "good women" is to write off as "good men" such disparate heroes as William Dobbin, Clym Yeobright, and Paul Morel.

Henry Esmond (1852), artistically Thackeray's masterpiece, includes the first direct statement of love's immortality; for the first time, Thackeray views love as salvation from Vanity Fair. The novel proceeds, step-by-step, to the statement on the last pages of the novel, depicting the poor, ill-founded marriage of the Viscount and Viscountess of Castlewood, the rampant worldliness of their beautiful and brilliant daughter, Beatrix, and the corruption of the beau monde. Henry Esmond, which shocked the Victorian sensibility with its psychological-sexual implications, is an elaborate expose of Victorian society. The stunning Beatrix, unable to love, is brought morally
low at the novel's end, and in *The Virginians*, the result of a loveless, worldly life drives home the point that life without love is futile and ultimately sad.

*The Newcomes* (1853-55) is similar in some ways to *Esmond*, for once again Thackeray attacks a mammonistic society, showing the results of greed and materialism in the hard-hearted characters who parade convincingly through the novel. Daughters are "sold" rather than married; Ethel Newcome, who dares to question the validity of being sold for money rather than married for love, is made an outcast, significantly an unworldly outcast who finds love only after she rejects the emotional corruption of the upper class. Col. Newcome and Clive, poor and not respected by the fashionable upper class, are juxtaposed with their worldly relatives, Sir Brian Newcome and his family, and Hobson Newcome and his family. To Clive and his father, love is more important than titles, wealth, or status, and it is they who find happiness in the end.

Finally, I have shown how with *The Virginians* (1857-59) Thackeray's love motif completes a full cycle, for the last novel, tied thematically to the previous *Henry Esmond* and *The Newcomes* by the reiteration of the immortality of love, bears similarities (in technique as well as theme) to the early *Barry Lyndon* (1844). The early novel makes the point that loveless marriages fail, and so does *The Virginians*. On the other hand, *The Virginians* is technically and thematically a more advanced novel in its use of good examples as well as of bad examples. If *The Virginians* exposes Henry Warrington's bad marriage, it also praises George Warrington's good marriage; *Barry Lyndon* only holds up as a bad
example its narrator and his foolish wife. The earlier novel also lacks the scope of the later novel, in which Thackeray juxtaposes bad and good familial relations, bad and good filial relations, etc. No such juxtaposition is found in Lyndon. As far as the love-as-salvation motif goes, The Virginians is Thackeray's ultimate expression, for he states without qualification that "love seems to survive life and to reach beyond it. I think we take it with us past the grave."5

While this study is not an attempt to restrict Thackeray's genius to the theme of love as salvation, it is an attempt to re-assess an important aspect of his novels that has been ignored or misunderstood. And when love has been discussed, critics interpret it in the light of a pure emotion corrupted by the world. This negative view, in turn, leaves Thackeray open to charges of being unrealistic in depicting a bleak and hopeless human condition when, in fact, both his correspondence and the major novels reveal otherwise. Understanding, then, that Thackeray is realistic and that he includes redemption from Vanity Fair through love should encourage a fairer, more accurate assessment of William Makepeace Thackeray as a great novelist. Further, I hope to have shown that while my topic is highly specific, it is inextricably part of Thackeray's overall art, and that larger thematic concerns (e.g., social satire, anti-materialism satire) as well as form are affected by the important love motif, through which there is indeed hope for Vanity Fair.

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HOPE FOR VANITY FAIR:  
LOVE AS SALVATION IN  
THACKERAY'S NOVELS  

by  
David Wayne Pitre  

(ABSTRACT)  

Although William Makepeace Thackeray is praised by critics for the realism of such characters as Becky Sharp, his novels also prompt complaints about their moral bleakness. It is felt that Thackeray's view departs from the "middle ground" of realism to a depiction of an always-selfish and corrupt mankind. To be sure, Thackeray includes such characters, seen in Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*, Blanche Amory and Sir Francis Claverling in *Pendennis*, Beatrix and Lord Castlewood in *Henry Esmond*, Barnes Newcome in *The Newcomes*, Barry Lyndon in *Barry Lyndon*, and the Earl of Castlewood in *The Virginians*. Few critics perceive, however, that these characters represent only part of Thackeray's view of mankind.  

Even good characters (e.g., Amelia Osborne) have faults, however, appropriate to Thackeray's literary realism. Oftentimes these good characters suffer unduly, while selfish or corrupt characters prosper. This temporary triumph of good over evil perplexes critics, and moves them to complain about the aforementioned bleakness. The purpose of this study is to illustrate that Thackeray's novels do indeed include
a force that raises good characters above evil ones, an escape, as it were, from Thackeray's Vanity Fair. That force is love, and beginning with Barry Lyndon, continuing in Vanity Fair and Pendennis, Thackeray consistently "rewards" with happiness characters who love sincerely and openly. With the last three major novels, Henry Esmond, The Newcomes, and The Virginians, come explicit statements that love is immortal. Through love, there is salvation from Vanity Fair.