

**WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY:
A MALE CHAUVINIST**

BY

PATRICIA LOUISE VALENTE

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in Education

by

Patricia Louise Valente

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Patricia Louise Valente entitled "William Makepeace Thackeray: A Male Chauvinist." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education with a major in English.

Edward E. Irwin
Major Professor

Accepted for the Council:

Wayne E. Stamps
Dean of the Graduate School

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A review of recent literature dealing with nineteenth century British fiction reveals that William Makepeace Thackeray, the man and the writer, continues to receive critical attention from noted scholars. Twentieth century critics have traced Thackeray's development as a writer, analyzed his style, and discussed his role as a social critic. In addition, recent scholarship includes studies of Thackeray's personal life and correspondence which offer insight into the author's work. John Dodds in Thackeray: A Critical Portrait traces the development of Thackeray and provides some biography.¹ A. E. Dyson considers Thackeray's skill as an ironist in his essay "Vanity Fair: An Irony Against Heroes."² In a consideration of Thackeray as a social critic, Barbara Hardy discusses his use of the themes of "rank, class, trade, commerce, money, insincerity and artifice, the corruptions of hospitality, fellowship and love."³ Both John Loofbourow and Percy Lubbock provide comment on Thackeray's narrative technique. Loofbourow explores "the expressive elements of Thackeray's style to indicate their significance and to show how they fuse in his major novels to create both form and content."⁴ Lubbock analyzes Thackeray's panoramic method.⁵ In a study entitled Thackeray: The Major Novels, Juliet McMaster offers a defense of Thackeray and states that he "is a consummate artist very much in control of what he is doing, whose major novels are works of thematic coherence and aesthetic integrity; and that he is also a highly skilled ironist, exploiting to the full the potential of the various personae he adopts, and introducing ambiguity deliberately, to sharpen our moral perception and to evoke the complexity of experience itself."⁶

Gordon Ray has provided a major contribution to Thackeray scholarship. His studies include collecting and editing The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray. His work, The Buried Life, reveals the parallels between many of the fictional characters in Thackeray's novels and personal acquaintances and events in Thackeray's own life.⁷ Ray has also written a two volume biography of Thackeray which includes critical comments of the author's work.⁸

Contemporary scholars also continue to offer their interpretations of Thackeray's characters, especially Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley in Vanity Fair. In his study, E. D. Johnson finds a relationship between Thackeray and Fielding and points out many parallels of characters and situations between Fielding's Amelia and Thackeray's Vanity Fair.⁹

J. Y. T. Greig points out in a brief chapter that Thackeray depicts the mother-in-law as "always selfish, grasping, interfering, snobbish, domineering, ruining the peace of her daughter's household. . . ." ¹⁰ Although many other critics have touched on Thackeray's portrayal of women, no scholar has undertaken a detailed analysis of Thackeray's treatment of women. Elizabeth Drew points out that Thackeray's idea of a "good woman" differed from that of the typical Victorian attitude:

It is impossible as we read Thackeray not to be convinced that he had the greatest contempt for the opinion of his day, as to what made a "good woman."¹¹

However, Gordon Ray makes little comment on Thackeray's attitudes toward women other than to refute Miss Drew's statement. Ray correctly points out that an examination of Thackeray's personal life proves the statement false.¹² Unfortunately, Ray fails to provide any proof. Since previous critics have neglected this significant aspect of Thackeray's writing, further amplification is needed. I shall, then, offer my

interpretation of Thackeray's attitude toward women as revealed in Vanity Fair, Henry Esmond, and The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray.

For his portrayal of women, William Makepeace Thackeray deserves a place of honor in the Male Chauvinist Hall of Fame. Since Thackeray's stated purpose in Vanity Fair was to satirize human vanities, one might conclude that the preceding statement is false. However, a consideration of both Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond reveals that the two novels have a startling similarity of viewpoints concerning women. In fact, Thackeray uses this approach of admonishing all vanity in Vanity Fair as a guise to be as abusive toward women as he can possibly be. It is true that Thackeray also ridicules men, but each novel contains a gentleman who has few faults if, indeed, he has any at all. These paragons of manly virtue are William Dobbin in Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond, whose name provides the title of the novel in which he appears so advantageously.

Thackeray uses two devices to present his image of woman's ideal role. The first is the presentation of contrasting feminine characters. Ostensibly, Amelia Sedley (Vanity Fair) and Rachel Esmond (Henry Esmond) are the good, demure, motherly, housewifely models of womanhood while Becky Sharp (Vanity Fair) and Beatrix Esmond (Henry Esmond) embody a wealth of undesirable feminine characteristics; ambition, boldness, and independence. Yet, a closer examination reveals that neither Amelia nor Rachel is suitable as a symbol for the ideal woman. Thackeray makes this clear not only through the characters' actions and thoughts, but also through comments of other characters and direct comment by the narrator. In Vanity Fair, the narrator is omniscient, although he includes himself as one of the players in the world of the novel. On the other hand, in

Henry Esmond the narrator recounts his own life in the third person without appearing to tell his own story.

If one accepts the interpretation of Amelia Sedley that many critics advance, then one can only conclude that she is the epitome of the unliberated woman. Gordon Ray suggests that Amelia's story reveals what should replace the standards of *Vanity Fair*: "the life of personal relations, the loyalty and selflessness inspired by home affections."¹³ However, in her role as the ideal woman, Amelia comes out rather poorly as a person in her own right. Even Ray admits ". . . the handicap of Amelia's utter passivity is in the end insurmountable; she does nothing, she merely endures or enjoys as circumstances dictate."¹⁴ However, McMaster points out that "a closer scrutiny of her goodness in operation reveals that, in her very passivity, she wreaks havoc in the lives of the people nearest her. As a daughter she is insensitive: she is unaware of her father's extremity and she quarrels with her mother. . . ."¹⁵

Furthermore, Amelia's education in Miss Pinkerton's school does not prepare her for anything that is not directly related to her proper role as the slave of man. Accomplishments in music and dancing are of the utmost importance because, after all, is it not the function of women to entertain the men? She acquires skills in needlework and embroidery to assist her in her function as a homemaker. However, because woman is also to be a decorous object for the benefit of her master, Amelia uses the backboard to facilitate "the acquirement of that dignified deportment and carriage, so requisite for every young lady of fashion."¹⁶ Amelia also has instruction in the principles of religion and morality because it is the place of the woman to exert a moral influence in the home.

When Amelia returns home from Miss Pinkerton's worthy school, she

directs all of her thoughts and attentions toward George Osborne. This is only natural since marriage and procreation are woman's main functions, and the single girl's main preoccupation is getting a man. Because a woman's status is not based on her own merit but is totally dependent on the economic position of her father or husband, Amelia's social position declines in direct proportion to her father's financial failure. When her father loses his fortune in a business failure, old Osborne no longer considers Amelia a suitable mate for his son.

As is proper for a woman of her station, Amelia is always sheltered. She has no opportunity for growth as a person. After she marries George, he is her only concern. In her love for George, she deludes herself and will not admit that he is not worthy of her love. "She blinds herself to his faults and (more seriously perhaps) refuses to see that he does not love her; duty and dignity are thrown overboard in the pursuit."¹⁷ After George's death, she continues to worship his memory, but she also transfers this affection to her son. Thackeray presents her as the devoted mother, but she is overly indulgent and "her very tenderness and submissiveness develop aggressiveness and a sense of superiority in her child."¹⁸

Unable to cope with any crisis, no matter how minor, Amelia cries over everything. Thackeray consistently characterizes her as the clinging vine; Dobbin is the oak to which she clings. Indeed, after Amelia and Dobbin finally decide to marry, the narrator disparagingly says:

Grow green again, tender little parasite, round
the rugged oak to which you cling! (VF, p. 724)

Thackeray also uses Becky Sharp, the contrast of Amelia, to comment

on woman's role. Laurence Brander considers her "the most remarkable character in Thackeray's long series of female portraits. She is eternally energetic and always scheming. She is provocative, inspiring, and dangerous as fire."¹⁹ Because she does not have Amelia's advantages of social position and money, Becky actually has only two alternatives: ". . . the passive one of acquiescence to subjugation or the active one of independent rebellion. . . . She will not submit to perpetual slavery and humiliation within the governess trade. And so she uses consciously and systematically all the men's weapons plus her one natural material asset, her sex, to storm the men's world."²⁰ If she has developed the anti-social qualities of greed, selfishness, unscrupulousness, heartlessness, disloyalty, and deceit, it is because the world has forced her to develop these traits for survival. Yet, Dyson points out that "Thackeray goes out of his way to blacken her character in his opening pages, as though he entirely shares the standards by which she is judged."²¹ One may consider Dyson's "as though" to be weak, but evidence from Thackeray's letters does substantiate his statement.

Becky is obviously superior in intelligence to her husband Rawdon. But, even though Thackeray may suggest that a woman may be intellectually superior to her mate, by no means does he allow her to openly display her intellect. She must use devious, underhanded methods and always flatter the man. One of Becky's major flaws is the lack of love and concern she has for her son. After all, is not childrearing a duty of the wife? However, the most unforgivable sin that Becky commits is adultery. It is all right for a man to philander as George Osborne does, but a woman must be true to her mate. Becky's flirtation with Lord Steyne leads to her demise when her husband discovers them together. It

makes no difference that Becky is forced to bleed money from Steyne because her husband fails to provide for her. Becky, now labeled a scarlet woman, is a social outcast. Thackeray, through Becky, shows his aversion to the liberated woman who possesses ambition, resourcefulness, independence, and self-reliance. These qualities are obviously undesirable for a lady to possess, and they lead to Becky's fall in society. Although she does finally acquire a booth in Vanity Fair, she also assumes the religious and charitable activities which are the only acceptable alternatives to marriage for a respectable woman. On the other hand, Amelia ". . . weeps and suffers and wins--wins Dobbin and solvency and neighborhood prestige and a good middle-class house with varnished staircases."²²

Becky's fall in society appears insignificant when one considers Beatrix's misfortunes in Henry Esmond. Even though she is a dazzling beauty, Beatrix possesses that quality that Thackeray apparently finds most undesirable in a woman: physical coldness. In addition, Brander points out that she possesses "the tragic quality of the mistress who is fatal to the men she loves."²³ Beatrix's scheming, ambition, and coquetry lead her to nought. She suffers the worst possible fate: she loses her beauty as she ages. On the other hand, Beatrix's affectionate, self-sacrificing mother Rachel, who accepts her wifely, motherly roles, never loses her beauty. Rachel finally ends up with her heart's desire, but Beatrix ends up with the least desirable of men: Tom Tusher. As the narrator, Henry Esmond comments on Beatrix and her mother:

She (Beatrix) was imperious, she was false, she had no reverence in her character; she was in everything, even in beauty, the contrast of her mother, who was the most devoted and the least selfish of women.²⁴

One can easily ascertain, then, that Rachel's characteristics, according to the narrator, are the more desirable ones for a woman to possess. Since Thackeray often refers to himself as Henry Esmond in his letters, one can validly consider that the narrator represents Thackeray's views.

Even though Henry Esmond eventually marries Rachel, he does not hesitate to point out her faults. He judges her to be a dissembler when she hides her emotions. He also accuses her of cruelty and haughtiness, especially in her relations with Beatrix. Her husband Lord Castlewood makes this comment about her purity: "She neither sins nor forgives." (HE, p. 155) Jealousy is also a dominant trait in Rachel's personality. She overindulges her son and is jealous of his love for other people. She is jealous of other people's love for her two daughters. Even though she is usually dignified, she is "apt in her 'wild' moments to lose control and become hysterically calumnious, lachrymose, or tremulous. . . ." ²⁵ Thus, one can see that Thackeray endows his ideal women with characteristics that are less than ideal by anyone's standards.

The second device that Thackeray employs in his attack is direct comment of the narrator concerning the nature of woman in general. Many of these comments are, of course, satirical. Yet, if these statements concerning woman's position in society are ironic, why does Thackeray have the two women (Becky and Beatrix) who do show independence and spirit either suffer social ostracism or a fall in position? Perhaps Thackeray recognized the injustice of woman's position in society, but he was not willing to give up the masculine superiority that a change in that position would bring. At any rate, both novels contain a passage in which the narrator comments on men's attitudes toward women and the roles that women must play. One hopes that the second passage is ironic;

surely, Thackeray doesn't actually mean that a woman should calmly accept the submissive role. In Vanity Fair, the narrator makes the following comment after Amelia realizes that George is unworthy and unfaithful, but she refuses to acknowledge this fact:

We are Turks with the affections of our women; and have made them subscribe to our doctrine too. We let their bodies go abroad liberally enough, with smiles and ringlets and pink bonnets to disguise them instead of veils and yakmaks. But their souls must be seen by only one man, and they obey not unwittingly, and consent to remain at home as our slaves--ministering to us and doing drudgery for us. (VF, p. 172)

A passage in Henry Esmond contains a similar observation made by the narrator when he realizes that Lady Castlewood is disguising her unhappiness with her husband by constantly smiling:

'Tis a hard task for women in life, that mask which the world bids them wear. But there is no greater crime than for a woman who is ill used and unhappy to show that she is so. The world is quite relentless about bidding her to keep a cheerful face; and our women, like the Malabar wives, are forced to go smiling and painted to sacrifice themselves with their husbands; their relations being the most eager to push them on to their duty and, under their shouts and applauses, to smother and hush their cries of pain. (HE, pp. 118-19)

With the exception of these two passages, the narrators' comments on women are either sarcastic statements which depict woman as a lowly despicable creature or helpful hints on how a man can win control over a woman. In Henry Esmond, the narrator suggests that a man can give a woman no greater pleasure than to ask her to sacrifice her jewels for him:

Few fond women feel money-distressed; indeed you can hardly give a woman a greater pleasure than to bid her pawn her diamonds for the man she loves; and I remember hearing Mr. Congreve say of my Lord Marlborough, that the reason why my lord was so successful with women as a young man, was because he took money of them. "There are few men who will make such a sacrifice for them," says Mr. Congreve, who knew a part of the sex pretty well. (HE, p. 152)

In Vanity Fair, the narrator says all women are hypocrites and then has the audacity to say he got this information from his grandmother:

The best of women (I have heard my grandmother say) are hypocrites. We don't know how much they hide from us: how watchful they are when they seem most artless and confidential: how often those frank smiles which they wear so easily, are traps to cajole or elude or disarm--I don't mean in your mere coquettes, but your domestic models, and paragons of female virtue. (VF, p. 167)

Thackeray expands this theme and continues to picture woman as a dissembler:

To know nothing, or little, is in the nature of some husbands. To hide, in the nature of how many women? O ladies! how many of you have surreptitious milliner's bills? How many of you have gowns and bracelets, which you daren't show, or which you wear trembling?---trembling, and coaxing with smiles the husband by your side, who does not know the new velvet gown from the old one, or the new bracelet from last year's, or has any notion that the ragged-looking yellow lace scarf cost forty guineas, and that Madame Bobinot is writing dunning letters every week for the money! (VF, p. 495)

This same idea of the dissembling woman continues in Henry Esmond. The narrator comments about Rachel's ability to hide her jealousy of Beatrix and Esmond:

She had schooled herself so as to look quite inscrutably, when she had a mind. Amongst her other feminine qualities she had that of being a perfect dissembler. (HE, p. 421)

Thackeray makes his most biting statements about women when he describes their relationships to each other. He presents them as creatures who are extremely jealous of other members of their own sex. The intensity of this jealousy is directly proportionate to the beauty of the other women and their popularity with the men. In fact, the narrator in Vanity Fair avows that the greatest compliment one woman can give another is to despise her and see nothing in her. Furthermore, the behavior of a fine lady toward a humbler woman is, the narrator points out, extremely

cruel. Thackeray illustrates this in the snobbish treatment Lady Bareacres and her daughter give Amelia when George invites the Bareacres to dinner:

And so, determined to cut their new acquaintance in Bond Street, these great folks went to eat his dinner at Brussels, and condescending to make him pay for their pleasure, showed their dignity by making his wife uncomfortable, and carefully excluding her from the conversation. This is a species of dignity in which the high-bred British female reigns supreme. To watch the behaviour of a fine lady to other and humbler women is very good sport for a philosophical frequenter of Vanity Fair. (VF, p. 281)

One can almost hear the contempt in the narrator's voice when one reads the words "fine lady."

Another example that Thackeray cites in Vanity Fair is the slavish submission that Miss Crawley forces on her companion, Miss Briggs. The narrator then generalizes and infers that all poor women suffer at the hands of "the tyrants of their sex." He dramatically asks:

Who has not seen how women bully women? What tortures have men to endure, comparable to those daily-repeated shafts of scorn and cruelty with which poor women are riddled by the tyrants of their sex? Poor victims! (VF, p. 335)

The sarcastic comments continue on the subject of the "really superior woman." Lady Jane Southdown allows herself to be intimidated by her mother and her sister, who have an abundance of pity as befits one of their stature:

. . . and her mama and sister, who were ladies of the most superior sort, managed everything for her, and regarded her with that amiable pity, of which your really superior woman always has such a share to give away. Her mamma ordered her dresses, her books, her bonnets, and her ideas for her. (VF, p. 340)

Even though the narrator has revealed the humiliation and debasement that a woman must quietly and silently accept from a man, he stubbornly insists that the most tyrannical relationship is that of one woman over

another:

As they say the persons who hate Irishmen most are Irishmen; so, assuredly, the greatest tyrants over women are women. (VF, p. 507)

Thoroughly convinced that he has the right notion concerning women's relationships with each other, Thackeray repeats the same concept in Henry Esmond. The narrator again uses one woman to represent all women when he finds fault with Rachel because of her cruelty to Beatrix:

. . . but there are some moments when the tenderest women are cruel, and some triumphs which angels can't forego. (HE, p. 461)

Obviously patting himself on the back for such a clever observation, Thackeray carries his sarcasm a bit too far when he adds this footnote, supposedly added to the memoirs by Henry's daughter Rachel:

This remark shows how unjustly and contemptuously even the best of men will sometimes judge of our sex. Lady Castlewood had no intention of triumphing over her daughter; but from a sense of duty alone pointed out her deplorable wrong.--R. E. (HE, p. 461)

Just in case the reader fails to pick up all of these subtle hints that one finds in both of the novels, the narrator in Vanity Fair explicitly insists that the cruelty of a woman far exceeds that of any man:

Women only know how to wound so. There is a poison on the tips of their little shafts, which stings a thousand times more than a man's blunter weapon. (VF, p. 293)

Thackeray is rather inconsistent, to say the least, in the attitudes he presents. On the one hand, both narrators present woman in her socially imposed role as a slave to man. Passages previously cited point out that man, because of his attitudes toward woman, forces her to hide her true feelings. On the other hand, Thackeray attacks woman for employing those tactics which man forces her to use. It is Thackeray,

the male, who is the hypocrite, not the woman. Thackeray especially shows his true colors in the rather paradoxical view of the man-woman relationship that he presents in Henry Esmond. In one sentence the narrator declares that woman enslaves a man; yet, in the next sentence, he speaks of that same woman as a mere possession of man. Woman, he asserts, is a bauble to be possessed by man, and her value depreciates, or even disappears altogether, after she loses her beauty. He even hints that once this treasure is owned, its desirability declines:

And so it is--a pair of bright eyes with a dozen glances suffice to subdue a man; to enslave him, and inflame him; to make him even forget; they dazzle him so that the past becomes straightway dim to him; and he so prizes them that he would give all his life to possess 'em. What is the fond love of dearest friends compared to this treasure? Is memory as strong as expectancy? fruition, as hunger? gratitude, as desire? I have looked at royal diamonds in the jewel-rooms in Europe, and thought how wars have been made about 'em. Mogul sovereigns deposed and strangled for them, or ransomed with them; millions expended to buy them; and daring lives lost in digging out the little shining toys that I value no more than the button in my hat. And so there are other glittering baubles (of rare water too) for which men have been set to kill and quarrel ever since mankind began; and which last but for a score of years, when their sparkle is over. Where are those jewels now that beamed under Cleopatra's forehead, or shone in the sockets of Helen? (HE, pp. 228-29)

This idea of woman as a sex object to be desired only for her beauty occurs throughout both novels. Rachel verbalizes this degrading notion when she speaks of her relationship with her husband. His love and regard for her decline because her illness mars her beauty:

'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. (HE, p. 85)

Making elderly women look ridiculous seems to be particularly delightful for Thackeray. Through his portrayal of Isabelle (Dowager Viscountess Castlewood) in Henry Esmond, he hints that love is limited

to the young women. He ridicules Isabelle because she reaches middle age without obtaining a husband. Thomas Castlewood, a cousin, finally marries her because of her money, which is her only asset since her beauty has disappeared. (The narrator constantly insinuates that all old women are ugly.) Thackeray lampoons her use of cosmetics: her appearance is so frightening that she instills fear in the villagers who refer to her as Lady Jezebel.

Miss Crawley is Vanity Fair's counterpart to Lady Isabelle. Although Miss Crawley has quite a disagreeable personality, her money makes her beloved everywhere, especially among her relatives. Naturally, she is ugly in her old age but is reputed to have once been a beauty. The narrator sarcastically comments that we all know that all old women were once beautiful. He is, of course, hinting that there is no truth in the statement.

Thackeray apparently uses no planned strategy for the various other disparaging remarks and insults he makes about women, but he occasionally manages to slip them into the narratives of both novels. He never misses the opportunity to present woman as a frivolous, insignificant creature. He intimates that woman can make no significant contribution to society. In speaking of the women's contribution to the war effort in Vanity Fair, the narrator mentions "prayers and fears and griefs unspeakable . . . It taxes both alike, and takes the blood of the men, and the tears of the women." (VF, p. 317) Crying and praying seem to be the only contributions that a woman is allowed to make. Then the narrator sarcastically ridicules the woman by saying her shed tears are a dear sacrifice to the war.

In addition, Thackeray perpetuates the myth that a woman is a rather

obtuse individual whose chief asset is her beauty. When the narrator in Vanity Fair announces that the amusement of charades had come to them from France and was very popular, he states that the game enables ". . . the many ladies amongst us who had beauty to display their charms, and the fewer number who had cleverness, to exhibit their wit." (VF, p. 527) In another passage the narrator insinuates that women cannot even carry on an interesting conversation; he alleges that ladies talk chiefly about their ailments.

Although these previously cited examples provide ample evidence that Thackeray portrays woman in a servile role in the two novels, the most convincing proof is this revision of the golden rule: "Men, tyrannize women before they tyrannize you." Although he doesn't use these exact words, he does say that women are ruthless if a man allows them to domineer. Therefore, if a man is prudent, he will injure the woman and thus keep her his slave. This quotation from Vanity Fair illustrates his theory:

I know few things more affecting than that timorous debasement and self-humiliation of a woman. How she owns that it is she and not the man who is guilty: how she takes all the faults on her side: how she courts in a manner punishment for the wrongs which she has not committed, and persists in shielding the real culprit! It is those who injure women who get the most kindness from them--they are born timid and tyrants, and maltreat those who are humblest before them. (VF, p. 516)

A perusal of Thackeray's letters does reveal that Thackeray had an insight into woman's status, but he preferred the admiring, sentimental creature to the one who was occupied with the "other business of life." Thackeray makes his discrimination perfectly clear in these excerpts from letters to his mother, Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, and to Mrs. Brookfield:

To Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth
1 June 1840

Charlotte [Charlotte Ritchie] we met at Mrs. Ritchies as I suppose Isabella told you, a charming amiable simple creature with just enough sense to be agreeable why is it that one does not like women to be too smart? -- jealousy I suppose! A pretty selfish race we are truly. and Lady Morgan has shown how cruelly the ladies are kept down.²⁶

To Mrs. Brookfield
7-9 October 1848

It was as good as Mrs. O'Dowd to hear Mrs. Sheil interrupt her Richard, and give her opinions on the state of Ireland to those 2 great hard-headed keen accomplished men of the world. Richard listened to her foolishness with admirable forbearance and good-humour--I'm afraid I don't respect your sex enough though. --- Yes I do when they are occupied with loving & sentiment rather than with other business of life. (Letters, II, 438)

Thus, Thackeray clearly states that it is the business of woman to be "occupied with loving and sentiment." This is a point that he repeatedly makes in Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond. His views are that of a Chauvinist who considers woman's role to be subservient to man's. Even before he marries his wife, Thackeray reveals in a letter to her on July 3, 1836, that he thinks she should be more affectionate and presents this plan for curing Isabella's "coldness and indecision":

I think I know of a better plan, dearest, than has hitherto been pursued, to cure these evils, and for this you must have recourse to me, you must love me with a most awful affection, confide in me all your hopes and your wishes your thoughts and your feelings; for I want you to be not a thoughtless and frivolous girl, but a wise and affectionate woman, as you will be, dearest Puss, if you will but love enough. (Letters, I, 316)

Because of Isabella's reaction to the above mentioned letter, Thackeray was forced to offer this explanation which reveals that he expected his wife to be a paragon:

When I said you were frivolous I meant no harm, all women are so I think from their education, and I want my

wife to be better than all women; and then comes the definition of the word, a woman who occupies herself all day with her house and servants is frivolous, ditto she who does nothing but poonah-painting and piano fort , also the woman, who piddles about prayer-meetings, and teaches Sunday schools; into which 3 classes, I think, the race of women are divided but I want my Puss to be a little paragon, and so it is that I am always belabouring her with advice. . . . (Letters, I, 317)

In a letter written to Jane Shawe in July, 1846, Thackeray reveals in these comments about his daughters Anny and Minny his preferences concerning women:

I am afraid very much she is going to be a man of genius: I would far sooner have had her an amiable and affectionate woman--But little Minny will be that, please God. -- and the Sisters love each other admirably. (Letters, II, 240)

One can also find evidence in Thackeray's correspondence to parallel the attitude found in his novels that woman is an ornament. In a letter to Mrs. Proctor on April 26, 1846, Thackeray makes this comment:

He hopes to hear that Mrs. Proctor's indisposition has ceased and that she is restored to that drawing-room of which woman is ever the most elegant ornament in the opinion of Mr. William Thackeray. (Letters, II, 235)

Thackeray reveals similar sentiments in a letter written to Rev. William Brookfield on February 3, 1847. He speaks of Mrs. Brookfield and delights in her "innocence, looks, angelical sweetness, and kindness. . . ." Further, he writes " . . . a sort of artistical delight (a spiritual sensuality so to speak) -- other beautiful objects in Nature so affect me, children, landscapes, harmonies of colour, music, etc." (Letters, II, 271-72)

Thackeray also confesses to be a proponent of the double standard in "affairs of the heart." In a letter written to Mrs. Brookfield on July 22, 1850, he comments:

And you know one does not think the worse of a man of honour for cheating in affairs of the heart-- (Letters, II, 682)

In several of his letters, Thackeray admits that he has a need for female companionship. In fact, a major part of his correspondence was with women. The type of woman that Thackeray seems to prefer is one who is innocent, loving, and subservient to man. He reveals his attitudes in this paragraph from a letter written to his daughter Anne while he was on a lecture tour in the United States:

To Anne Thackeray
3 March 1853

I had the run of a half dozen beauties at Washington-- From 16 to 22 is the age of women here and the girls have it all their own way. But I like the English way best: and wouldn't have you two young fellows forward and commanding as the American girls are--as even Miss Sally Baxter is for wⁿ. I have snubbed her a great deal though she is a noble young creature. . . . (Letters, III, 224)

Miss Baxter, whom Thackeray supposedly snubs, is a beautiful nineteen-year-old girl whom he refers to as Beatrix Esmond. In a letter written to Mrs. Proctor dated December 22, 1852, Thackeray states: "I have found Beatrix Esmond and lost my heart to her." (Letters, III, 154) Yet, he soon spurns her because she is too much like Beatrix. He comments on their relationship in a letter to Mrs. Brookfield on January 21-23, 1853:

" . . . Have You heard that I have found Beatrix at New York? I have basked in her bright eyes but ah, me! I don't care for her, and shall hear of her marrying a New York buck with a feeling of perfect pleasure. She is really as like Beatrix as that fellow William and I met was like Costigan. She has a dear woman of a mother upwards of fifty-five, whom I like the best, I think, and think the handsomest, -- a sweet lady. . . . I can't live without the tenderness of some woman; and expect when I am sixty I shall be marrying a girl of eleven or twelve, innocent, barley-sugar-loving, in a pinafore. (Letters, III, 183)

Thackeray's attitudes toward a woman's beauty as revealed in his letters also seem to correspond with many of the comments he makes in

his novels. He ridicules old women who put bits of plaster on their faces and considers it a catastrophe when a young woman loses her beauty. In a letter to his daughters written in February, 1856, he comments on Sally Baxter's appearance after she has married:

. . . What has happened to Sally? I declare to goodness she looks 30, & is scarcely handsome. Suppose Anny were to marry would she look 30 6 weeks after marriage and lose her beauty, my gentle cheeyeld? . . . (Letters, III, 555)

Even though he probably considers himself being complimentary toward women in a letter to the Baxters written in October-November, 1857, Thackeray reveals another personal attitude toward women that also appears in the two novels when he refers to women as dissemblers:

. . . I am rather better in health I think but becoming more silent & selfish every day. Women know how to dissemble when they are bored, and appear cheerful though they are yawning in spirit. I wish I could be a little more of a hypocrite sometimes. . . . (Letters, IV, 56)

Thus, Thackeray again attributes to the woman the role of the hypocrite.

Finally, in a letter written to Anne Thackeray on June 9, 1853, Thackeray unhesitatingly points out the duty of women when he tells his daughter the roles he expects her and her sister to play in his life. They are to comfort him and make him the center of their lives:

. . . You see every year now as you grow older we shall grow more intimate, at least I hope and think so: and as it is an ascertained fact that I can't live without female friends I shall have a pair at home, in my own women, who'll understand my ways, laugh at my jokes, console me when I'm dismal &c, as is the wont and duty of women in life-- (Letters, III, 276)

In summary, Thackeray has repeatedly praised the sweet, loving, slavish woman and has spurned the independent, ambitious, liberated woman. Both his novels and his personal letters contain discriminatory attitudes toward women and delegate the female the subservient role.

Thus, one can unequivocally pronounce William Makepeace Thackeray a male Chauvinist of the first rank.

¹John Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait (New York: Russell and Russell).

²A. E. Dyson, "Vanity Fair: An Irony Against Heroes," Critical Quarterly, 6 (1964), 11-31; rpt. in A. E. Dyson, The Crazy Fabric: Twentieth Century Interpretations of Vanity Fair: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969).

³Barbara Hardy, The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), p. 14.

⁴John Loofbourow, "Preface," Thackeray and the Form of Fiction (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1964), p. vi.

⁵Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (1921; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1957); rpt. in Alexander Welsh, ed., Thackeray: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 20-21.

⁶Juliet McMaster, "Preface," Thackeray: The Major Novels (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1971), p. vii.

⁷Gordon N. Ray, The Buried Life: A Study of the Relation Between Thackeray's Fiction and his Personal History (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952).

⁸Gordon N. Ray, Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity (1811-1846) and The Age of Wisdom (1847-1863) (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955-58).

⁹E. D. H. Johnson, "Vanity Fair and Amelia: Thackeray in the Perspective of the Eighteenth Century," Modern Philology, 59 (1961), 104.

¹⁰J. Y. T. Greig, Thackeray: A Reconsideration (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), p. 69.

¹¹Elizabeth Drew, The Enjoyment of Literature (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1935), pp. 118-19.

¹²Ray, Buried Life, p. 6.

¹³Ray, Adversity, p. 422.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 425.

¹⁵McMaster, p. 95.

¹⁶William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 2. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text with the abbreviation VF.

¹⁷Dyson, p. 79.

¹⁸McMaster, p. 96.

¹⁹Laurence Brander, Thackeray, rev. ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1964), p. 21.

²⁰Arnold Kettle, "Vanity Fair," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Vanity Fair: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. M. G. Sundell (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 20.

²¹Dyson, p. 80.

²²Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Vanity Fair," The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953); rpt. in M. G. Sundell, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of Vanity Fair: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 30.

²³Brander, p. 21.

²⁴William Makepeace Thackeray, Henry Esmond (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 313. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text with the abbreviation HE.

²⁵Greig, p. 165.

²⁶Gordon N. Ray, collector and ed., The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1945-46), I, 447. Subsequent references will appear in the text with the abbreviation Letters.

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