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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ARCHETYPES IN WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY'S *VANITY FAIR* AND *THE NEWCOMES*

BY

LIESELOTTE SCHERER

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Archetypes in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and *The Newcomes*" submitted by Lieselotte Scherer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Thackeray, through his extensive use of archetypes, shows that behind the unique lives of his characters lie recurring patterns. His juxtaposition of the random behavior of the individual with the endlessly repeating story is to a large degree responsible for the pervasive irony of his works.

In *Vanity Fair* and *The Newcomes* respectively, Thackeray uses the puppet show and the fabular frameworks to show that his fictions reveal universal truths. His characters have numerous archetypal associations from mythology, the Bible, and other literature. His plot structures rely on the reader's knowledge of the two important intertexts, *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Ecclesiastes. Thackeray's narrative strategy is to suggest the archetype only to frustrate our anticipated completion of the pattern. This constant construction and deconstruction of the text not only creates an ironic effect but also draws the reader into the text. In fact, the reader's involvement in a Thackerayan novel is essential. Thackeray through his allusiveness evokes an abundance of archetypes which the reader is expected to see. The narrator, while telling the story, gives information from widely differing perspectives. His authority is at times questionable so that it is the reader's task to integrate the suggested archetypes and sometimes conflicting evidence to make sense of the text. The reader must judge the characters' behavior as well as his own. Although Thackeray criticizes the class system and materialism of nineteenth-century society, his novels still remain relevant today because every reader is asked to reflect on his own foibles and the society in which he lives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Thackeray is arguably one of the greatest ironic writers of the nineteenth century. In much of his writing he counterpoints experience that is shaped, patterned, recurrent, and archetypal with material that is random, unique, and 'realistic.' By setting up expectations and then frustrating the reader's desires, Thackeray actively engages the reader in the imaginative creation of his fictive world.

Thackeray began his literary career by parodying the novels of heroic romance by such writers as Bulwer-Lytton and G.P.R. James. Although he delighted in reading these novels because they were aesthetically pleasing, he considered it the purpose of the writer to show the uncomfortable but unquestionably valuable truth. Gordon Ray in his biography of Thackeray suggests that in 1846, just as he was beginning to write *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray's experience of trying to reestablish a family life after the insanity and institutionalizing of his wife "made him examine profoundly both the nature of the society in which he lived and his responsibility as a writer describing that society."[1] In a letter to Mark Lemon he comments on "The Snobs of England:"

> What I mean applies to my own case & that of all of us—who set up as Satirical-Moralists—and having such a vast multitude of readers whom we not only amuse but teach. And indeed, a solemn prayer to God Almighty was in my thoughts that we may never forget truth & Justice and kindness as the great ends of our profession. There's something of the same strain in Vanity Fair. A few years ago I should have sneered at the idea of setting up as a teacher at all, and perhaps at this pompous and pious way of talking about a few papers of jokes in Punch—but I have got to believe in the business, and in many other things since then. And our profession seems to me to be as serious as the Parson's own.[2]

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[1]Gordon Ray, *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity (1811-1846)*, (New York: McGraw, 1955) 385.

[2]W.M. Thackeray, *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace*

Although he sets himself up as a preacher, Thackeray is ultimately concerned more with understanding the complexity of people than he is with changing their behavior. In his characterization he shows the repeating pattern in human action, but he often subverts the pattern to reveal the uniqueness underneath. In the same manner he uses the plot conventions of the romance only to thwart the reader's desires for an unqualified happy ending. As well, in his authorial commentary he draws attention to the fictionality of the reality he is creating.

Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell, and Carl Gustav Jung, among others, have all focused on the archetypal nature of man's psyche and the repetition of these archetypes in literature. Jung in his theory of analytical psychology suggests that the mind can be divided into the conscious, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious, the last of which contains the archetypes which appear repeatedly in literature. Joseph Campbell's anthropological studies of the myths of different cultures have led him to similar conclusions about the presence of the same archetypes in widely divergent cultures. Frye, in his encyclopedic work *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, also suggests that literature is essentially mythic and archetypal in nature. Myths are generally stories about gods, but by using the technique of displacement mythic elements are made plausible and morally acceptable in more representational fiction.

In my discussion of archetypes I will use Frye's theoretical framework. An archetype, as defined by Frye, is a "typical or recurring image." It is a "symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to integrate our literary experience."[3] According to Frye, throughout history certain images, character types,

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Thackeray, ed. Gordon Ray. 4 vols. , (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1945) II, 282.

situations, and themes have persisted in the literature of different cultures. Around these recurring elements have developed the conventions and genres of literature, which are shaped in unique ways by the individual writer.

In this paper I will focus on two of Thackeray's best-known novels, *Vanity Fair* and *The Newcomes*. I will look at the archetypal intertextual components of characterization and plot structure, and how Thackeray's narrative technique works to include narrator, characters, and reader in his vision of society.

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[3]Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1966) 99.

II. ARCHETYPAL CHARACTERIZATION IN *VANITY FAIR*

By putting *Vanity Fair* into a puppet show framework, Thackeray explicitly points to the archetypal nature of his characters in the novel. His puppets—the Becky Puppet, Dobbin Figure, Amelia Doll, Wicked Nobleman—will be manipulated by the Manager of the Performance for the duration of the presentation and conceivably used in subsequent shows, or eliminated like the Wicked Nobleman. Becky and Dobbin, for instance, reappear in *The Newcomes*, albeit in cameo appearances.

Although he suggests that his characters are archetypes, that behind the manifold possibilities of human behavior lies a pattern, Thackeray does not portray them as two-dimensional stereotypes. To make his characters truthful, he shows that in life the archetypal pattern is often transformed or subverted or somehow frustrated. Sometimes people choose roles to live by, and model their actions to suit the roles. Much of the vitality of Thackeray's characters results from the tension between the ideal pattern and the actual manifestation, or between the inner reality and the outer pose.

Thackeray's characters in *Vanity Fair* are patterned after characters from myth, legend, fairy tales, the Bible and other literature. Thackeray's multiple allusions force the reader familiar with the literature to readjust his configurative meaning constantly because of the different archetypes juxtaposed in the text. As Wolfgang Iser says, the literary repertoire "reshapes familiar schemata to form a background for the process of communication, and it provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be organized."[1] In this chapter I will discuss the major sources of the archetypes under their respective headings.

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[1]Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 81.

Romance Archetypes: In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray uses the nineteenth-century romance convention of two heroines, one light and one dark, Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp respectively. However, instead of portraying them as stereotypically 'good' or 'bad,' eventually rewarding the one and getting rid of the other, Thackeray shows that when looked at critically the two are really not very different.

Amelia in looks and behavior is the conventional heroine ironically exposed to be less admirable than she first appears to be. She is a "dear little creature" whose "face blushed with rosy health, and her lips with the freshest of smiles, and she had a pair of eyes, which sparkled with the brightest and honestest good-humour, except indeed when they filled with tears, and that was a great deal too often; for the silly thing would cry over a dead canary bird; or over a mouse, that the cat haply had seized upon; or over the end of a novel, were it ever so stupid."[2] When she leaves Miss Pinkerton's Academy she becomes the languishing maiden waiting for her lover to carry her off to live with him happily-ever-after. She is a secular saint, a kind and virtuous friend and daughter, and later devoted wife and mother. But her good qualities are often ambiguously presented, so that the reader must continually reevaluate his attitude toward her. She lacks intelligence and understanding, and her sweetness soon becomes cloying. A.E. Dyson argues that her self-sacrificing nature is more accurately seen as selfishness:

> Her great claim to virtue is the passiveness of self-sacrifice, yet is self-sacrifice, as she practices it, not an insidious self-indulgence in disguise? As a mother she is weakly and harmfully indulgent, as a daughter she fails her parents in their years of need. When George is alive, her love for him is self-willed and self-regarding; when he is dead, the myth of her marriage becomes an evasion of Dobbin's love."[3]

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[2]Citations to *Vanity Fair* in the text are to *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 vols. (London: Oxford UP, 1908) 7-8.

Amelia transforms the real George, who is pompous and stupid, into the stereotypical romance hero. To her, "there never was such a face or such a hero." George has blue eyes, a "pale interesting countenance" and "beautiful black curling, shining whiskers" (57). But his behavior and accomplishments as a hero are questionable: "He was famous in field sports, famous at a song, famous on parade; free with his money, which was bountifully supplied by his father. His coats were better than any man's in the regiment, and he had more of them. . . . He could drink more than any officer of the whole mess . . . and was the best batter and bowler, out and out, of the regimental club" (143). George is a selfish snob who needs encouragement to marry Amelia, and soon after the marriage ignores her. At the night of the ball before Waterloo he proposes to Becky that they run away together. George's enthusiasm for playing the "great game of war" ends when we see him "lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart" (372, 406). Thackeray plays with and undercuts the conventional image of the brave hero who leaves behind a cherished wife to fulfill his duty for the sake of his country. Amelia, having created George as the conventional hero, creates herself as the conventional heroine to complement him. She becomes the loving wife who for fifteen years remains faithful to her dead husband. The reader, however, sees her vanity and foolishness in rejecting Dobbin's honest love.

Becky Sharp, the 'dark' heroine, and the more complex and interesting of the two, has little of the 'goodness' that characterizes Amelia. She shamelessly uses those around her to aid her in achieving her desired ends. As the novel begins she is leaving Miss Pinkerton's Academy to begin the adult journey of her life. She is an orphan, so

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[3]"An Irony Against Heaven" in *Thackeray: Vanity Fair: A Casebook*, ed. Arthur Pollard (London: Macmillan, 1978) 170.

in her quest for a husband cannot rely on parents but must take the initiative herself. She takes on various roles and becomes a consummate actress in her determination to use her wit and charm to gain a place in society.

Becky is the heroine's rival in the conventional romance. She comes between George and Amelia, and throughout her career of climbing the social ladder and living on "nothing a year" she is callous about destroying people if they come between her and her goals. She is a deceiving wife and a cruel mother. Although Thackeray never shows her siren tail above the water, his hints of her unsavory behavior stimulate the imagination to produce a horrible picture. But in spite of all her moral failings, Thackeray's depiction of her vitality and resilience make her an attractive character. By juxtaposing her with the insipid and cloying Amelia, Thackeray diminishes her reprehensible qualities. Kathleen Tillotson suggests that in Becky, Thackeray is portraying "a wholly new kind of heroine . . . . Becky is one of those characters—like Chaucer's Pardoner—who can fully engage our aesthetic sympathies while defying most of our moral ones."[4]

In the end, Thackeray offers us a transformed Dobbin as the true gentleman and hero of the novel. To begin with, Thackeray depicts him as "a very tall, ungainly gentleman, with large hands and feet, and large ears, set off by a closely cropped head of black hair, and in the hideous military frogged coat and cocked hat of those times," and his unflattering pictorial illustration reinforces this description (58). Both George and Amelia think meanly of him. But his unselfishness, his love and generosity toward those around him, bring about a change of attitude toward him. Thackeray asks us to reevaluate those who deserve our admiration:

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[4] *'Vanity Fair' in Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (London: Oxford UP, 1954) 235.

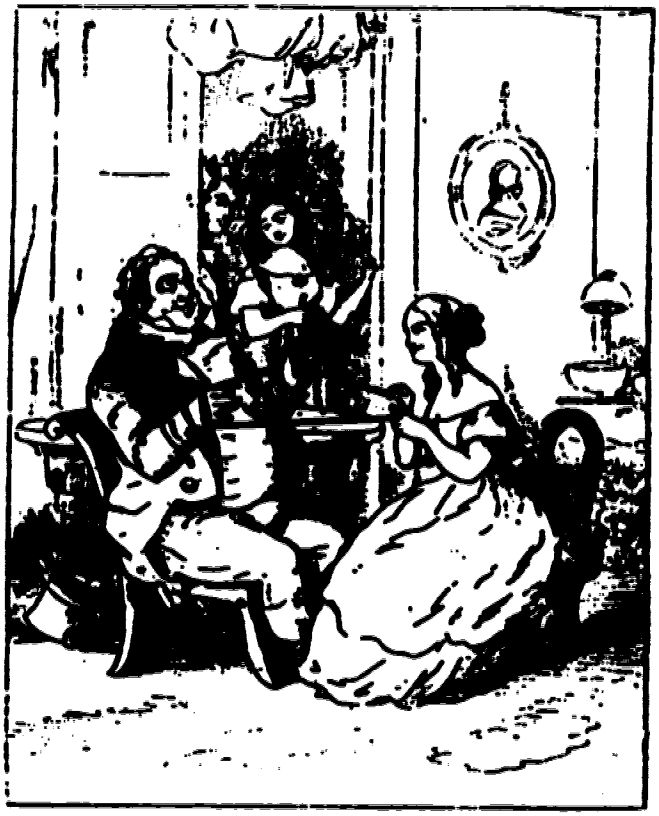
> . . . men whose aims are generous, whose truth is constant, and not only constant in its kind, but elevated in its degree; whose want of meanness makes them simple: who can look the world honestly in the face with an equal manly sympathy for the great and the small[.] We all know a hundred whose coats are very well made, and a score who have excellent manners, and one or two happy beings who are what they call, in the inner circles, and have shot into the very centre and bull's-eye of the fashion; but of gentlemen how many? Let us take a little scrap of paper and each make out his list.
>
> My friend the Major I write, without any doubt, in mine. He had very long legs, a yellow face, and a slight lisp, which at first was very ridiculous. But his thoughts were just, his brains were fairly good, his life was honest and pure, and his heart warm and humble. He certainly had very large hands and feet, which the two George Osbornes used to caricature and laugh at; and their jeers and laughter perhaps led poor little Emmy astray as to his worth. But have we not all been misled about our heroes, and changed our opinions a hundred times? (792)

So instead of the dashing George, Thackeray gives us the steadfast Dobbin as the true hero who deserves the reader's admiration.

Although Thackeray uses archetypal romance characters in *Vanity Fair*, he abuses the convention consciously to show the absurdity of admiring the likes of George and Amelia, the traditional hero and heroine. Becky is in many ways the stock villain, but ultimately she is not so different from Amelia, and Dobbin, in spite all of his good qualities, is a "spoony." Thackeray makes certain that every character who at one point enjoys a position on a pedestal has it chipped and cracked, and some pedestals, like Amelia's, eventually crumble altogether.

Mythological Archetypes: The character with the most mythological associations in *Vanity Fair* is Becky because she defines herself in the numerous roles she plays in her struggle to penetrate the innermost circles of polite society. In her attempt to carry off

Jos Sedley, Amelia's vain and fat but wealthy brother, she is Omphale enslaving Hercules. As soon as she arrives at the Sedley household for a week-long visit, she begins netting her green silk purse for him. In a pictorial illustration entitled *Mr. Joseph Entangled*, Thackeray shows a self-satisfied Jos holding the skein while



MR. JOSEPH ENTANGLED

Becky, with a smirking smile on her face, works the silk. She plays the ingénue for him, and when he escorts her to the dining room for the first time, she is "very modest, and holding her green eyes downwards. She was dressed in white, with bare shoulders as white as snow—the picture of youth, unprotected innocence, and humble virgin simplicity" (29). The use of the word "picture" is apt, since Becky is neither innocent nor humble. But the stupid and vain Jos is captivated by her flattery and singing. Thackeray's depiction of Jos as Hercules is ironic. Jos's feats as collector of Boggley Wollah in Bengal consist of getting a lucrative salary and drinking excessively, so after complaining of a liver ailment, he is sent back to England for rest and recuperation, where he continues to indulge his eating and drinking habits. In an attempt to gain a measure of self-worth, Jos tells imaginary stories of his courage

during a tiger hunt in India. In Brussels, hearing rumours of an English defeat at Waterloo, Jos ignominiously runs away, but afterwards reinvents his involvement with fictitious accounts of his loyal service to the Duke of Wellington. He is mortally afraid of women, especially those of his own class, flirting with servant girls but boasting of being pursued by ladies in India and Cheltenham. It is Jos's pathological fear of women that denies Becky her prize. Jos is flattered by her constant attention to him, but at Vauxhall he drinks too much rack punch to bolster his courage in anticipation of popping the question. Embarrassed by George about his drunken behavior, Jos retreats to Cheltenham. However, at the end of the novel Becky does get her prey. Jos again becomes her slave, and she travels throughout Europe with him.

Becky is also Clytemnestra. The first time Thackeray portrays her as such is at the charades at Gaunt House. At this point, Becky has reached the pinnacle of her social success, having been invited by Lord Steyne to one of his intimate dinner parties. In the charade she chooses to play the role of Clytemnestra beside Rawdon as Agamemnon. Thackeray emphasizes her acting ability in this episode, but he also wants us to see how well she plays the roles she chooses for herself in real life. At Gaunt House during the charade, "The darkness and the scene frightened people. Rebecca performed the part so well, and with such ghastly truth, that the spectators were all dumb" (646). Immediately after Clytemnestra's triumph, Agamemnon is captured on his way home and put into jail so that she and Aegisthus can be alone. The charade on the stage is the charade played out in real life. The unsuspecting Rawdon does not realize that he is being manipulated by the key players, Becky and Lord Steyne. The bailiffs have been alerted to the whereabouts of their victim, and Rawdon is taken to a spunging house until he pays his debt. Briggs, Becky's moral sheepdog,

has been safely transferred to one of Lord Steyne's country houses. Little Rawdon, through the patronage of Lord Steyne, is away at school, and is not due for a visit. The servants have been dismissed for the evening. And so the scene is set for the adultery to occur:

> A little table with a dinner was laid out—and wine and plate. Steyne was hanging over the sofa on which Becky sat. The wretched woman was in a brilliant full toilette, her arms and all her fingers sparkling with bracelets and rings; and the brilliants on her breast which Steyne had given her. He had her hand in his, and was bowing over it to kiss it, when Becky started up with a faint scream as she caught sight of Rawdon's white face. At the next instant she tried a smile, a horrid smile, as if to welcome her husband: and Steyne rose up, grinding his teeth, pale, and with fury in his looks. (675)

Up until this point Lord Steyne and Becky have been in complete control of the production: they are the principal actors and joint directors, and Steyne is also the producer. The money he has paid is in Becky's secret desk, and now he wants some returns for his investment. With Rawdon's return, the charade is up. The disillusioned husband never sees his wife again, and the wrathful Steyne takes up with the Countess of Belladonna.

Unlike Agamemnon's, Rawdon's death takes longer to carry out. Ironically, Rawdon is appointed Governor of Coventry Island in the West Indies as a result of Lord Steyne's patronage. The appointment, although paying three thousand pounds annually, is a death warrant because of the unhealthy climate, and Rawdon dies a few years after his arrival.

Becky's second appearance as Clytemnestra occurs near the end of the novel in a pictorial illustration showing a terrified Jos appealing to Dobbin for help while a vicious-looking Clytemnestra, dagger in hand, hides behind the curtain. Jos dies after a

lengthy illness during which he is 'nursed' by Becky. Although there is no explicit verbal corroboration, Thackeray suggests that Becky murdered Jos for his life insurance money. The solicitors of Jos's insurance company are named Burke, Thurtell, and Hayes, notorious murderers of Thackeray's day. Although the Greek Clytemnestra murders her husband out of passion for her lover and revenge for the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia, Becky's motives center on money and the power which money can bestow. Nina Auerbach, using a feminist approach, suggests that Becky becomes a "demon" because of her quest for power. Auerbach sees Becky, Blanche Amory, and Beatrix Castlewood as "attractive demons" because "they forge lives in full realization of their humiliating dependence."[5] In a similar vein, Maria DiBattista in a detailed commentary on the charades argues that Becky's appropriation of the Clytemnestra role is a "sweeping and majestic gesture of feminine revenge."[6] Her humiliating position as an orphan from the lower classes prompts her to behave in an aggressive manner. Lord Steyne and Jos provide Becky with an entrance into society and money, both of which this nineteenth-century Clytemnestra desires.

Further mythic associations with Becky are that of Circe and the siren. She is a siren who uses her singing to captivate men and then destroy them. The first evening that Becky meets Jos she sings for him the song of the orphan boy lost on the bleak moor who is briefly given shelter by a kind family, but who in the morning must leave to continue his lonely journey. Jos "was in a state of ravishment during the performance of the song, and profoundly touched at its conclusion. If he had had the courage; if George and Miss Sedley had remained, according to the former's proposal,

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[5] *Women and the Demon* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982) 90.

[6] "The Triumph of Clytemnestra: The Charades in *Vanity Fair*," *PMLA* 95 (1980): 831.

in the farther room; Joseph Sedley's bachelorhood would have been at an end" (42). In the headletter for Chapter 63 Thackeray portrays Becky as Circe waving her magic wand. In this chapter Becky meets Jos at the gambling tables in Pumpernickel and uses her charms to win him again. Rawdon, too, is enchanted by Circe, but instead of turning him into a swine as Circe did Odysseus's men, Rawdon's transformation improves him. Rawdon changes from a rosé to a loving husband and devoted father.

Rawdon's unselfish love for Becky ennobles him. Nowhere is this more clear than just before he leaves to fight at Waterloo:

> Captain Rawdon himself was much more affected at the leave-taking than the resolute little woman to whom he bade farewell. She had mastered this rude coarse nature; and he loved and worshipped her with all his faculties of regard and admiration. In all his life he had never been so happy, as, during the past few months, his wife had made him. All former delights of turf, mess, hunting-field, and gambling-table; all previous loves and courtships of milliners, opera-dancers . . . were quite insipid when compared to the lawful matrimonial pleasures which of late he had enjoyed. . . . he had found his house and her society a thousand times more pleasant than any place or company which he had ever frequented from his childhood until now. And he cursed his past follies and extravagances, and bemoaned his vast outlying debts above all, which must remain for ever as obstacles to prevent his wife's advancement in the world. (365)

He makes an inventory of his possessions, and wears his "oldest and shabbiest uniform and epaulets" in case he should be killed in action. When he returns from the battle and is promoted to Colonel as a reward for his bravery in action, he continues meekly to follow Becky's orders, "glad to be employed of an errand: to go and make inquiries about a horse or a servant; or to carve the roast mutton for the dinner of the children" (578). His unquestioning devotion to Becky eventually turns him into another Hercules enslaved by Omphale: "He was beat and cowed into laziness and submission. . . . The

bold and reckless young blood of ten years back was subjugated, and was turned into a torpid, submissive, middle-aged, stout gentleman" (578).

Although Pitt, Rawdon's older brother, is not immune to Becky's charms, he never allows his desires to control his behavior. Becky flatters Pitt shamelessly, praising his pamphlet on malt, his oratorical skills, his appearance. In return, Becky gets diamonds, food from Queen's Crawley, and a sponsor at Court. But Pitt is too concerned about his own respectability to compromise himself in his relationship with Becky.

Dobbin is the only major character in the novel who does not fall prey to Becky's charms. He is intuitively repulsed by her when he first meets her at Vauxhall with George, Jos, and Amelia. He can see the siren's tail beneath the water where she "writhes and twists about like a snake" (352). Unlike the others, he can separate the actress from the role she is playing. At the opera in Brussels, where she shares a box with General Tufto, she visits Amelia in her box. After she leaves, Dobbin tells George: "What a humbug that woman is . . . . All the time she was here, didn't you see, George, how she was acting at the general over the way?" (352). George, of course, didn't see.

The large number of sirens in Thackeray's fiction is matched by the large number of satyrs. There are especially many in *Vanity Fair*. Most of them are lascivious old men who are only too anxious to trade money for sex. The most prominent are Lord Steyne, Sir Pitt, and General Tufto. General Tufto becomes insanely jealous when Becky flirts with George at the opera. As the two leave his opera box together, the "curses to which the general gave a low utterance . . . . came from the general's heart" which was full of "lust and fury, rage and hatred" (351). "The reeling

old Silenus of a baronet," Sir Pitt, does not even wait until his dead wife is buried before he proposes to Becky:

> I'm an old man, but a good'n. I'm good for twenty years. I'll make you happy, see if I don't. You shall do what you like; spend what you like; and 'av it all your own way. I'll make you a settlement. I'll do everything regler. Look year!' and the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her like a satyr. (178)

He takes up with Miss Horrocks, the butler's daughter, on his return to Queen's Crawley. Lord Steyne tries to avoid facing the skeleton in his closet, madness, in debauched living. Perched at the top of the social ladder, he gives Becky thousands of pounds to divert his attention from the sword of Damocles hanging over his head. After George marries Amelia, Old Osborne proposes to Miss Swartz not out of lecherous motives, but because she brings in eight thousand pounds a year. With him, it's all a question of money on one side or the other.

Headletter for Chapter 13

The relationship between George Osborne and Amelia Sedley suggests the myth of Narcissus and Echo. George is called Don Juan, Apollo, Cupid, and Adonis throughout the novel, and he himself is inordinately fond of his physical appearance. The headletter for Chapter 13 shows George admiring his reflection in the mirror, and in a full page illustration on the next page where George is seen lighting his cigar with one of Amelia's love letters, he seems to be admiring himself in the mirror. Just before they leave for Vauxhall, Becky catches George stealing a look in the mirror as they are

discussing Dobbin's awkwardness:

> 'There's not a finer fellow in the service,' Osborne said, 'nor a better officer, though he is not an Adonis, certainly.' And he looked towards the glass himself with much *sang-froid*; and in so doing, caught Miss Sharp's eye fixed keenly upon him, at which he blushed a little, and, Rebecca thought in her heart, '*Ah, mon beau monsieur!* I think I have *your* gauge.' (58)

George admires himself, and Amelia admires him. He is her prince, and she his Cinderella. She worships him: "He was her Europe: her emperor: her allied monarchs and august prince regent. He was her sun and moon . . . . She had never seen a man so beautiful or so clever: such a figure on horseback: such a dancer: such a hero in general. . . " (137-38). When her idol is with her, Amelia is cheerful and bubbly and full of life; when he is not there, she pines away. And George prefers to spend his time playing billiards, going to the theatre, or dining with his friends from the mess hall. Once Dobbin gives George money to buy Amelia a present, but instead George buys a diamond pin for himself. It is Dobbin who woos Amelia vicariously through George.

When the marriage is broken off after the collapse of the stock market and the loss of Mr. Sedley's fortune, Amelia "pined silently; and died away day by day" (216). Only Dobbin's fear for Amelia's life brings George and Amelia together again. He was the "promoter, arranger, and manager of the match between George Osborne and Amelia. But for him it never would have taken place" (235). And it is not love for Amelia that prompts George to marry her, but self-love, which is a response to Amelia's worship of him:

> This prostration and sweet unrepining obedience exquisitely touched and flattered George Osborne. He saw a slave before him in that simple yielding faithful creature, and his soul within him thrilled secretly somehow at the knowledge of his power. He would be generous-minded, Saint as he was, and raise up this kneeling Esther and make a

> queen of her: besides, her sadness and beauty touched him as much as her submission, and so he cheered her, and raised her up and forgave her, so to speak. All her hopes and feelings, which were dying and withering, this her sun having been removed from her, bloomed again and at once, its light being restored. (237)

Thackeray's criticism of the stereotypical male / female relationship is obvious in the use of his diction here, but Amelia herself is to blame for the degrading way she is treated. Her identity hinges on her relationship with a superior male. George, for his part, goes through with the marriage because he is angry at his father's insistence that he marry "that mulatto woman," Miss Swartz. Amelia fools herself when she thinks George is "noble . . . to give up everything and stoop down to me!" (297).

The cycle of pining away and being restored to life continues until Waterloo when George's departure leaves Amelia "white," "wild," and "despair-stricken" (371). After his death Amelia herself lapses into a death-like state. She is a "poor prostrate soul" shut up in a "dark chamber" (447). She comes to life again with the birth of her son, Georgy. Like Narcissus reborn as a flower, George is reborn through his son. The baby is "as beautiful as a cherub," and has George's eyes. Amelia comes to life again: "love, and hope, and prayer woke again in her bosom as the baby nestled there. . . .This child was her being. Her existence was a maternal caress. She enveloped the feeble and unconscious creature with love and worship" (447-48). The son becomes a clone of his father: good-natured, vain, selfish.

Fairy Tale Archetypes: The nineteenth-century interest in fairy tales is reflected in the abundant use of the motif in popular romance. Although Thackeray frequently uses the fairy tale in the aesthetic design of his novels, he often superimposes a moral pattern which undercuts it. Thackeray gives an ironic depiction of the Cinderella fairy tale in

showing Becky's rise from a poor orphan to the drawing room of King George IV and the inner sanctums of Gaunt House. As the illegitimate child of a dissipated Bohemian artist and a French opera singer, Becky's lowly origins in a society founded on a hierarchical social system leave her clearly at a disadvantage. She is dependent on charity after the death of her parents, but unlike the mythic Cinderella does not meekly accept her lot in life. Through her intelligence and wit and ingenuity she begins the arduous and sometimes painful struggle for a respectable position at Miss Pinkerton's Academy, where she gives music lessons for her keep. Once released from her prison, she is helped along the way by the kindnesses of Amelia, who gives her clothes and some money as she begins her role as governess at Queen's Crawley. The prince that she marries along the way is Rawdon who, instead of sweeping her off her feet, turns out to be rather a bad investment since he is burdened with debts and loses his inheritance when he marries his princess. The wives and daughters of the nobility—Sir Huddleston Fuddleston's daughters, Lady Gaunt, Lady Bareacres, and so on—who are jealous of her success with men, are her wicked stepsisters. Lady Jane functions as a somewhat reluctant fairy godmother, but she nevertheless acts as Becky's sponsor when she is presented to the august King George IV at Court. Riding in her golden coach,

> Becky felt as if she could bless the people out of the carriage windows, so elated was she in spirit, and so strong a sense had she of the dignified position which she had at last attained in life. . . .And as she went to Court . . . she adopted a demeanour so grand, self-satisfied, deliberate, and imposing, that it made even Lady Jane laugh. She walked into the royal apartments with a toss of the head which would have befitted an empress, and I have no doubt had she been one, she would have become the character perfectly. (600-1)

With the stamp of approval now on her, Becky is sanctioned to enter the houses of the

aristocracy. In another ironic inversion, the Marquis of Steyne becomes her fairy godmother as he is "paternally superintending the progress of his pupil" (635). Because of her association with the bald and lecherous Lord, she is accepted into the homes of the aristocratic and allowed to live on "nothing a year" by her landlord, Raggles, and others to whom she owes money.

But Thackeray's Cinderella predictably does not live happily-ever-after. Whereas in the fairy tales the princess is disguised as a servant or someone in a similar lowly position, Becky is a rogue disguised as a princess. After her fall her fairy godparents and prince desert her, and she becomes an outcast once again. As in Thackeray's manipulation of other archetypes, the ideal patterns or romance jostle ironically with realism.

Biblical Archetypes: In the pattern of the virile husband betrayed by a sexually powerful wife, Rawdon and Becky's relationship evokes the Samson and Delilah archetype. When he meets Becky, Rawdon is a "heavy dragoon with strong desires," but he is gradually beaten into submission by his seductively treacherous wife (180). Like Delilah, Becky uses her sexual attractiveness to betray her husband for money. But unlike the biblical original, Rawdon is blind until his eyes are opened on his unexpected return from his prison. His death while Governor of Coventry Island lacks the victory-in-defeat that Samson's had.

The David and Goliath archetype is suggested near the beginning of the novel with the fight between Dobbin and Cuff. Dobbin, to defend his friend George, fights the school bully and defeats him. Jack P. Rawlins, in his extensive treatment of the

episode, shows Thackeray's ironic treatment of the biblical myth.[7] After his victory Dobbin is respected, not because of a moral victory, but because he happened to be physically stronger and because children like to be on the winning side. Cuff apologizes and gains supremacy again, and Dobbin becomes the slave of George for the rest of George's life.

Dobbin is portrayed as the Good Samaritan throughout the novel. For him, money is a means to an end, not a symbol of power, so he is generous both with his money and his gestures of kindness. George borrows freely from him, and after George's death Dobbin supports Amelia for years until Old Osborne offers to raise little Georgy. Dobbin buys Amelia's piano at the bankruptcy sale and gives it to her. His motives are always altruistic. Near the end of the novel he goes to Brussels to help Jos. In the full page illustration entitled "Becky's second appearance in the character of Clytemnestra," a picture of the Good Samaritan helping the injured wayfarer is on the wall. Jos pleads to Dobbin for help, but it is Becky who wins and after Jos's death pockets the insurance money.

Sacrifice is a recurring motif in *Vanity Fair*. Its meaning is embodied in the large clock "surmounted by the cheerful brass group of the sacrifice of Iphigenia" in the drawing-room of the Osborne mansion (149). The myth is emblematic of much of the action of Old Osborne. Angry because George has refused to marry Miss Swartz and her eight thousand pounds a year, Mr. Osborne disowns his son. He goes into his study, and

> took down the great red Bible . . . —a pompous book, seldom looked at, and shining all over with gold. There was a frontispiece to the volume, representing Abraham sacrificing Isaac. . . . Taking a pen, he carefully obliterated George's name from the page; and when the leaf

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[7] *Thackeray's Novels: A Fiction that is True* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974) 4-7.

> was quite dry, restored the volume to the place from which he had moved it. Then he took a document out of another drawer, where his own private papers were kept; and having read it , crumpled it up and lighted it at one of the candles, and saw it burn entirely away at the grate. It was his will . . . . (284)

Mr. Osborne sacrifices George to the God Mammon, and no angel comes to intervene. Instead, George dies at Waterloo before a reconciliation takes place.

Jane Osborne and Amelia fall alike under Mr. Osborne's knife. Caught in an unsanctioned relationship with the artist Smee, Jane is condemned to hear the relentless ticking of the Iphigenia clock as she contemplates her empty life. And without her ten thousand pounds, Amelia is worthless to him, and he forbids George even to speak her name in the house. In the world of Vanity Fair compassion is not a valuable commodity.

Parent and Child Archetypes: Thackeray, in his depiction of parent and child relationships, anticipates many of the findings of Freud and other twentieth-century psychiatrists. He presents the psychological interaction at a subliminal level, but rarely comments on the behavior in his capacity as a self-conscious narrator.

In his depiction of father and son relationships, Thackeray reveals the sexual rivalry beneath the surface.[8] One of the first in the novel, and probably the one most blatantly described, is that between Sir Pitt and Rawdon for the attention of Becky. Married to the sickly Rose, Sir Pitt soon finds the "pretty little hussy" Becky indispensable as a tireless secretary (90). But when Rawdon comes to pay court to his aunt's money during her illness at Queen's Crawley, the antagonism between father and

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[8]See Juliet McMaster's extensive treatment of the subject in *Thackeray: The Major Novels* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1971) 191-93.

son is exacerbated by Becky's role as nurse to Miss Crawley:

> Captain Rawdon got an extension of leave on his aunt's illness, and remained dutifully at home. He was always in her antechamber. (She lay sick in the state bedroom, into which you entered by the little blue saloon.) His father was always meeting him there; or if he came down the corridor ever so quietly, his father's door was sure to open, and the hyena face of the old gentleman to glare out. What was it set one to watch the other so? A generous rivalry, no doubt, as to which should be most attentive to the dear sufferer in the state bedroom. Rebecca used to come out and comfort both of them; or one or the other of them, rather. Both of these worthy gentlemen were most anxious to have news of the invalid from her little confidential messenger. (163-64)

Becky smiles on both equally while she silently ponders with whom the greater advantage lies; the two seethe in their hatred for each other as they vie for Becky's favors. Although both desire Miss Crawley's money, Thackeray's irony in the above passage shows clearly that the sexual jealousy is paramount. Banking on Miss Crawley's imminent demise, Becky secretly marries Rawdon and weeps "some of the most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes" when Sir Pitt pops the question soon after Lady Crawley's unexpected death (177). Sir Pitt reacts to Becky's news that she is already married with good-humoured admiration of her cunning nature. But when he learns that she is married to Rawdon, he is "wild with hatred and insane with baffled desire" (199). Thwarted in his lust by his son, he blindly lashes out at Becky when, on his return to Queen's Crawley, "he burst like a madman into the room she had used when there—dashed open her boxes with his foot, and flung about her papers, clothes and other relics." He sees neither of them again.

A similar relationship of frustrated jealousy is evident between Lord Steyne and little Rawdon. The struggle here is the Freudian Oedipal one. Little Rawdon's father is not a threat, but Lord Steyne becomes a father figure who has the attention of Becky

that the boy desires. Rawdy is usually confined to his room in the garret, where Becky rarely deigns to go. So his father brings him delicacies from the dessert table and fills his room with toys. But it is his mother that little Rawdon loves: "She was an unearthly being in his eyes, superior to his father—to all the world: to be worshipped and admired at a distance" (477). Rawdy unconsciously knows the "bald-headed man with the large teeth" is to be feared (561). Lord Steyne, too, considers the boy a threat:

> When they met by mischance, he made sarcastic bows or remarks to the child, or glared at him with savage-looking eyes. Rawdon used to stare him in the face, and double his little fists in return. He knew his enemy; and this gentleman, of all who came to the house, was the one who angered him most. One day the footman found him squaring his fists at Lord Steyne's hat in the hall. (562)

To get him out of the house, Lord Steyne pays for his schooling. Although the father is heart-broken, Becky readily acquiesces because the boy is a reproach to her, a constant reminder of her guilt.

John Sedley and Mr. Osborne, although also fathers with sons, do not have the same jealous rivalries with their sons because they are more concerned with acquiring material goods than sexual gratification. Mr. Sedley is indifferent to whom Jos gets married. Mr. Osborne forbids George to marry Amelia because she will not bring any money into the family, and wants him to marry Miss Swartz instead. He lusts after the money, so when he finds that George has already married Amelia, he proposes to Miss Swartz himself.

Thackeray's treatment of mother and son relationships is best exemplified through the children of Amelia and Becky. They both treat their sons as they do their husbands. Amelia idolizes George and is subservient to him, and follows the same pattern of idolatry with her son. She hangs their pictures on the wall in her bedroom at

Fulham and worships them.

Becky as mother is simply another role she plays, and with little practice, it is not a role she plays well. She ignores Rawdy for the most part, but when she "wished to be particularly humble and virtuous," she would start "hemming a shirt for her dear little boy. . . . It had got to be too small for Rawdon long before it was finished, though" (557). She ignores him at home, but demonstrates affection for him in public. Little Rawdon's innocent honesty foils her performance as mother. While visiting Queen's Crawley at Christmas, he responds to her kisses by saying, "You never kiss me at home, mamma" (572). The boy is raised by servants and Miss Briggs, Becky visiting the rooms to which he is confined once or twice a week. As her guilt about her treatment of Rawdy increases, so does her hatred. She boxes his ears when she catches him listening to her singing for Lord Steyne. When he, to get Rawdy out of the house, offers to pay for his schooling, Becky is elated. She does not enjoy playing the mother role, and fails at it miserably; it is not surprising that as Clytemnestra she has much better success.

Lady Jane, Sir Pitt's wife, is one of the few mother figures whom Thackeray portrays positively. As in her behavior toward adults, she treats children with kindness and respect, falling somewhere midway between Amelia's worship and Becky's hostility. Rawdy sees in her a mother figure and, in effect, he becomes her son after his father's death, and eventually marries her daughter, Jane.

Thackeray, unlike Dickens, for instance, is not sentimental in his portrayal of children. He weeps no maudlin tears over the deathbed of little Pitt, Lady Jane's son. Parents are often doting and excessively fond of their sons and daughters, whereas the children are much more likely to react with equanimity a parting from their parents.

Amelia agonizes and weeps over Georgy's departure, but he goes cheerfully to live with the stern Grandfather Osborne and the cold Miss Osborne. New clothes, a pony, and guineas jingling in his pockets more than make up for the separation from his mother. Little Rawdon, too, does not have his father's heavy heart as he leaves for school. In an authorial comment Thackeray states: "If people would but leave children to themselves; if teachers would cease to bully them; if parents would not insist upon directing their thoughts, and dominating their feelings— . . . small harm would accrue" (51). To Thackeray, children are not the sweet and innocent beings of fairy tale. Little Red Riding Hood could not differentiate her grandmother from the big bad wolf, but Georgy sees through the humbug of Mr. Osborne and Jos. In Pumpernickel when he meets Becky wearing a mask at the gaming tables, he recognizes the face behind the mask the next day, and conspires with her to keep the truth from Amelia.

The recurrence of character archetypes helps to give literature its imaginative structure and shows that all literary works can be organized into a unified whole. But although all of the stories we read are recognizably old, they seem new because of the ways writers manipulate the patterns for their own purposes.

In his extensive use of character archetypes, Thackeray addresses a reader steeped in the Bible and classical literature. The reader must imaginatively link Thackeray's unique character creations to their archetypal manifestations in other literature. The archetype creates expectations which, however, are found to be illusory because the characters often deviate from their patterns. For instance, although Becky evokes the Cinderella archetype, Thackeray changes the ending and destroys the illusions we have fabricated. The reader consequently becomes much more involved than he would in a conventional romance where his expectations are continually

fulfilled. At least part of Thackeray's greatness lies in his forcing the reader to become engaged in a rewarding endeavor—participation in the creation of a literary work.

III. ARCHETYPAL PLOT IN *VANITY FAIR*

Northrop Frye sees literature as a body of interrelated texts, in which every text contains within it intertexts that must be recognized and decoded. In his theory of poetics he shows that literature has evolved from myth to legend to comedy and tragedy and finally irony, depending on the power of the hero.[1] Modern deconstruction theorists in their emphasis on intertextuality have gone beyond Frye to focus on literature as a system of signs. But whereas Frye presupposes an evolutionary model of literary history, they suggest that literature is rather a synchronic system in which both past and future texts are intertextual possibilities.

It is not my intent in this paper to look at the many and diverse interpretations of intertextuality by such exponents as Julia Kristeva, Gerard Genette, John Barthes, Michael Riffaterre, among others. However, intertextual theorists contend generally that literature reflects not so much reality as it reflects other literature. According to Julia Kristeva, "Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text."[2] Literature, then, is a collage of language, of other writing, and of literary tradition that is distorted or displaced in some way. As Frye says, "Poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels."[3]

The two intertexts of *Vanity Fair* which I will focus on in this chapter are John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Ecclesiastes. I will look at how the two texts are submerged and transformed by Thackeray for his purposes of portraying a society

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[1]*Anatomy*, 5-6.

[2]Jeanine P. Plottel and Hanna Charney, eds., *Intertextuality: New Perspectives in Criticism* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1978) xiv.

[3]*Anatomy*, 97.

"living without God" in the world.

The Pilgrim's Progress as an Intertext of *Vanity Fair*

Thackeray's title *Vanity Fair* is a visible depiction of intertextuality which links his novel to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and thematically also to Ecclesiastes. Thackeray was justifiably delighted with his title which came to him in a flash in the middle of the night: "I jumped out of bed and ran three times round my room, uttering as I went, 'Vanity Fair, Vanity Fair, Vanity Fair.'"[4] The title encapsulates his vision of the novel as a satire on English society from approximately 1810 to 1830.

Bunyan's town of Vanity with its year-round Fair is a microcosm of Thackeray's world. Although in Bunyan's allegory Christian's quest for salvation is the major focus, Bunyan also satirizes his contemporary society using the basic romance pattern of the struggle between good and evil. Bunyan makes fun of the corrupt institutions of his society when Christian and Faithful pass through the town of Vanity. The values of the townspeople revolve around transitory, material possessions. The fair, "a thing of ancient standing," offers for sale "all sorts of Vanity:"

> at this Fair are all such Merchandise sold as Houses, Lands, Trades, Places, Honours, Preferments, Titles, Countries, Kingdoms, Lusts, Pleasures, and Delights of all sorts, as Whores, Bawds, Wives, Husbands, Children, Masters, Servants, Lives, Blood, Bodies, Souls, Silver, Gold, Pearls, Precious Stones, and what not .[5]

These same pleasures are readily bought and sold in Thackeray's world as well. Although Christian and Faithful must pass through the town on their way to the Celestial City, they are not tempted by these wares because they are searching only for

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[4]Ray, 385.

[5]John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1954) 89.

"Truth." Angered by their rejection of the goods, the authorities falsely accuse the two of causing a disturbance. Their subsequent trial is a sham in which the oppressive leaders and prejudiced jurors condemn the two to death, and Faithful becomes a martyr, but Christian continues his journey. Bunyan's dual purpose of showing Christian's moral righteousness and criticizing his society's hypocrisy is Thackeray's as well.

For Thackeray, the entire world is Vanity Fair, and the allegorical figures of Bunyan's dream become the archetypal characters of his puppet show. In his names and depiction of character, Bunyan distills the essential moral nature of his creations. Pliable and Good Will and Fair-speech and Enmity are what their names suggest. Thackeray is more subtle in his choice of names, but there is usually a hint of the person behind the name: witness, for instance, the Crawleys, Bareacres, Steynes, O'Dowds, Macmurdo, Wagg, not to mention Sharp and Dobbin. Thackeray rejects allegory but his search for the truth is as steadfast as Christian's. In comparing himself to Dickens, Thackeray writes in a letter to a friend:

> I quarrel with his Art in many respects: w^h^ I don't think represents Nature duly; for instance, Micawber appears to me an exaggeration of a man, as his name is of a name. It is delightful and makes me laugh: but is no more a real man than my friend Punch is: and in so far I protest against him . . . holding that the Art of Novels *is* to represent Nature: to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality—in a tragedy or a poem or a lofty drama you aim at producing different emotions: the figures moving, and their words sounding, heroically: but in a drawing-room drama a coat is a coat and a poker a poker; and must be nothing else according to my ethics, not an embroidered tunic, nor a great red-hot instrument like the Pantomime weapon.[6]

So to convey the "sentiment of reality" Thackeray transforms Bunyan's allegorical characters into the recognizably archetypal yet unique portrayals of Becky and Amelia and others. John Bunyan, himself a preacher, wants his readers to "interpret" his

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[6]Ray, 772-73.

dream and "such things to find, / As will be helpful to an honest mind."[7] Thackeray, too, holds up a mirror for his readers to see themselves because he sees the role of the writer "to be as serious as the Parson's own."[8]

Bunyan's metaphor of life as a journey has numerous intertextual reverberations, including that of Homer's *Odyssey* and the Bible. Thackeray's heroines begin their journey as they leave Miss Pinkerton's Academy. But whereas Christian leaves the worldly City of Destruction and his family to seek redemption, Amelia and Becky enter the world in search of love and a secure position in society. Christian's journey follows the quest theme of romance, and Christian has to struggle between the forces of good and evil in a linear pattern. With the help of Evangelist and Faithful and Hopeful he is ultimately successful in reaching the Celestial City.

Thackeray's treatment of Becky's journey suggests an implicit contrast with Christian's. Hers is the demonic version of the quest: her Celestial City is the decaying Gaunt House. To escape the humiliation of a life of poverty Becky sets out on a campaign to snare a husband whose money and social position will allow her to sample the wares of Vanity Fair freely. Her first victim is Jos Sedley, a fat, vain and stupid man, whom she nevertheless pursues because of his purported wealth. Becky fails in her assault through no fault of her own; Jos's psychotic fear of women and George's snobbery in not wanting a governess for a sister-in-law defeat her. In her second campaign she targets Rawdon Crawley, an inarticulate rake who has aristocratic roots and the possibility of inheriting the lion's share of his aunt's seventy thousand pounds. With the malicious designs of Mrs. Bute Crawley to back her up, Becky is successful

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[7] *Pilgrim's Progress*, 162.
[8] *Letters*, II, 282.

in catching Rawdon and elopes with him. Ironically, by marrying Becky, Rawdon forfeits his aunt's indulgence and loses his expected inheritance. Although she now has her desired entrance into society, she lacks the money necessary, so in her next campaign in Brussels just before Waterloo she takes inventory of her and Rawdon's possessions. She sells Rawdon's charger and her horse, a gift from General Tufto, to Jos for a small fortune. Wherever she goes, she garners admirers so she can wring money from them. Her downfall occurs when Rawdon wounds Lord Steyne. In the headletter for Chapter 64, we see Becky as Napoleon standing on

Headletter for Chapter 64

the shore and conceivably planning her assault to return to England after her banishment on the Continent. Inherent in the depiction is the suggestion that she will eventually meet her Waterloo. After years of wandering in exile in Europe, the last we see of Becky is sitting at a booth in a charity bazaar. Unlike Christian, Becky does not want the truth, but the appearance of respectability. Religion in Thackeray's world is just another booth in Vanity Fair.

Thackeray's criticism of religion in the novel is seen most clearly in his satirical portrayal of Pitt, Rawdon's brother, Lady Southdown, and Mrs. Bute Crawley. Pitt is a hypocrite who is concerned with saving his aunt's soul only when he thinks she will not leave him any of her money. Lady Southdown spouts cant as she administers quack medicines. Mrs. Bute Crawley writes her husband's sermons while he is off hunting or nursing a hangover.

Amelia's journey, in comparison to the scheming Becky's, is characterized by passivity. Unlike Becky, who makes the moral choice of lying and cheating to attain her goal, Amelia follows a narrower path simply because she does not act—rather, she accepts what fate doles out to her. She languishes in the Slough of Despond when she is separated from George, both before her wedding and after his death. She is not concerned with her soul but with nourishing her deluded love for George.

In depicting Christian's quest, John Bunyan follows the wish-fulfillment dream of Frye's definition of romance. Christian is at last allowed to enter the gates of the Celestial City, and Ignorance goes to Hell. The good are rewarded and the evil punished. The last we hear, however, is not of celestial choirs welcoming Christian; instead we see Ignorance bound hand and foot taken away: "Then they took him up, and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the Hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to Hell even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. So I awoke, and behold it was a Dream."[9] Thackeray's ending of *Vanity Fair* is more ironic. Although Dobbin finally marries Amelia after fifteen years of devotion and constant love, Thackeray does not deliver the idealized conventional ending.

Thackeray makes it clear from the subtitle, *A Novel Without a Hero*, that he is not writing the traditional romance. He admonishes Jones, his hypothetical reader, that if he "admires the great and heroic in life and novels" he "had better take warning and go elsewhere" (8). Inherent in the romance form are expectations that Thackeray is unwilling to fulfill because of his insistence that his writing reveal the truth. But although Thackeray rejects the idealized romantic pattern, he does not do without it

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[9]*Pilgrim's Progress*, 162.

completely. He teases the reader with hints of a delightfully pleasing romantic ending, only to take away that pleasure by interjecting the uncomfortable and unsatisfying image of the parasite choking the oak.

Thackeray again defies conventional pattern when his heroines marry near the beginning of the novel, rather than at the end. He knows very well, as Mrs. Mackenzie does, "that the real story often begins afterwards. My third volume ended when I was sixteen, and was married to my poor husband. Do you think all our adventures ended then, and that we lived happily ever after?"[10] For Becky, her struggle to remain within the social milieu that she finds herself in after her marriage with Rawdon calls forth all her ingenuity because of her impecunious situation. And it is after Amelia's short marriage and George's death at Waterloo that we follow Amelia's hero worship of her dead spouse and Dobbin's long unrequited love which culminates in their union at the novel's end:

> The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last. There it is with its head on his shoulder, billing and cooing close up to his heart, with soft outstretched fluttering wings. This is what he has asked for every day and hour for eighteen years. This is what he pined after. Here it is—the summit, the end—the last page of the third volume. Good-bye, colonel—God bless you, honest William!—Farewell, dear Amelia—Grow green again, tender little parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling! (871)

Thackeray, who has always portrayed Dobbin as a spoony, reverses his tone toward him in using the metaphor of the "rugged old oak." The opposite is true in his attitude toward Amelia. The "tender little parasite" is the most devastating epithet from one who had always couched his criticism in gentle irony. Amelia has the same misgivings as Dobbin after nine days of marriage to George: "Was the prize gained—the heaven of

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[10]Citations to *The Newcomes* in the text are to *The Oxford Thackeray*, ed. George Saintsbury, 17 vols. (London: Oxford UP, 1907) 286.

life—and the winner still doubtful and unsatisfied? (319). Real life, Thackeray says, does not allow unqualified happiness, and from his own experiences with Isabella he could certainly attest to that.

Ecclesiastes as an Intertext of *Vanity Fair*

It is clear that Ecclesiastes is an intertext of *Vanity Fair* not only in the direct quotations sprinkled throughout the novel, but also in the stance of the preacher, its ironic tone, and its theme. The writer of Ecclesiastes is an old teacher looking back over his life and evaluating its meaning and goals. He goes against conventional wisdom and doubts many of the clichés and proverbs by which the superficial and pious live, saying that experience has taught him otherwise. He is disillusioned by the injustices of the class system and the oppression of the poor, and by the dishonesty of politicians and academics. For him, the answers to life's fundamental questions are elusive: "He searched the whole front of human existence—the wisdom sector; the power and possession sector; the sectors of self-indulgence and toil: and found nowhere any adequate balance between life's longings and its fugitive and shadowed harvests."[11]

The tone of Thackeray's narrator in *Vanity Fair* is remarkably similar. He tells the story long after the events have happened. This retrospective vision allows him a distance from the immediacy of the action that gives his writing a nostalgic tone. Experience teaches that life does not always happen the way we want it, that it will not be shaped by the desiring mind. Thackeray questions the values of the society he is

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[11]Nolan B. Harmon, gen. ed., " Ecclesiastes," *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures in the King James and Revised Standard Versions*, vol. 5 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) 22-23.

describing and criticizes the emphasis on a selfish accumulation of money and what it can buy at the expense of love and compassion. But although he sees himself as a preacher and moralist, he does not set himself up as having all the answers. He does not chastize one group and hold another up for emulation; everyone—narrator, characters, reader—must wear the donkey's ears.

Both the writer of Ecclesiastes and Thackeray's narrator involve the reader in a substantial way by their narrative techniques. The reader in each text plays an important role. We are asked to examine our lives in the context of what is going on in the text. We are also asked to reevaluate what is being said continually. For instance, in Ecclesiastes the writer often makes a statement inviting us to react in a certain way, and then turns it on its head by following it with a statement which ridicules it. The reader must be careful to avoid such traps. To give an example: "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (Eccl. 7:1, King James Bible). In the first half of the proverb the writer suggests that relative good does exist in the world, and that the moral reputation of a person is more important than a physical object of desire. In the second half, however, he implies that life is not worth living at all. As well, throughout Ecclesiastes, the writer insists that "All things come alike to all" (9: 11), but at the end of the book he contradicts himself when he warns everyone: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. / For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (12: 13-14). So in the end, the way one behaves does matter after all.

A similar example in *Vanity Fair* occurs after Sir Pitt has a stroke and "was

tended by Miss Hester, the girl upon her promotion, with constant care and assiduity. What love, what fidelity, what constancy is there equal to that of a nurse with good wages? They smooth pillows: and make arrow-root: they get up at nights: they bear complaints and querulousness: they see the sun shining out of doors and don't want to go abroad: they sleep on arm-chairs, and eat their meals in solitude . . ." (512). Thackeray's satire in this paragraph focuses on the fact that money can buy devotion. However, in the next passage Thackeray calls this interpretation into question by showing us how Hester treats her charge in private: "When the door shut upon her [Lady Jane] he [Sir Pitt] would cry and sob—whereupon Hester's face and manner, which was always exceedingly bland and gentle while her lady was present, would change at once and she would make faces at him, and clench her fist, and scream out, 'Hold your tongue, you stoopid old fool,' and twirl away his chair from the fire he loved to look at—at which he would cry even more" (512). Here Thackeray shifts his focus on the insincerity of love that is bought, and we are not meant to admire the little minx after all.

Thackeray's narrator is often even more slippery. To show the unreliability of what is often being said the narrator takes on various cor. dictory roles. He is not only the preacher, the Manager of the Performance, Tom .l, but also a bachelor, then a husband with a wife (Julia) and two children, and so on. This shifting of perspective forces the reader to become more involved in the events to try to determine what 'really' is going on.

One of the major themes in Ecclesiastes that Thackeray repeats in his novels is the recurring pattern of human behavior: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under

the sun" (1: 9). The old stories of life and death and good and evil and love and hatred keep repeating themselves, just as the performance at the fair is repeated over and over for different audiences. One of the ways that Thackeray emphasizes the repetition of old stories is through his many intertextual references to writers from Homer to his contemporaries. Another way is to include the reader in his story so that he sees that the events occurring on the page apply to him as well. In a letter to his mother Thackeray says, "What I want is to make a set of people living without God in the world. . . greedy pompous mean perfectly self-satisfied for the most part and at ease about their superior virtue."[12] And by holding this mirror up in front of them he wants his readers to see their moral failings in the story he is presenting—"*de te fabula*, meaning the reader is the subject of the tale," as Jack Rawlins argues.[13]

One of the recurring patterns that Barbara Hardy points out in her book on Thackeray is the main characters' discovery of limitations in themselves and others.[14] For instance, Becky discovers in the confrontation scene between Rawdon and Lord Steyne that her ability to manipulate and deceive has its boundaries. Rawdon, whom she has always treated with good-natured contempt, reveals powers that she never knew he had when Steyne accuses him of complicity in Becky's schemes:

> Rawdon Crawley springing out, seized him by the neckcloth, until Steyne, almost strangled, writhed, and bent under his arm. 'You lie, you dog!' said Rawdon. 'You lie, you coward and villain!' And he struck the peer twice over the face with his open hand, and flung him bleeding to the ground. It was all done before Rebecca could interpose. She stood there trembling before him. She admired her husband, strong, brave, and victorious. (676) .

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[12] *Letters*, II, 309.

[13] *A Fiction that is True*, 13.

[14] *The Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray* (London: Peter Owen, 1972) 29.

Thackeray himself told a friend that he was delighted with the psychological insight and terse writing style of the last sentence. Ironically, when she finally sees something in Rawdon to admire he refuses to see her again. Another person whom she has undervalued is Lady Jane. Becky is scornful of her "sweetness and kindness," and tells Lord Steyne, "I have no taste for bread and butter" when she caricatures her sister-in-law for his amusement (575-76). Again it is ironic that Lady Jane is at least partly responsible for Becky's undoing. She rushes the money needed to gain Rawdon's release from the spunging house, even though Pitt is put "to great inconvenience" because of it (680). And when after her fall from grace Becky charms Pitt and convinces him of her innocence, Lady Jane becomes vehement in her refusal to allow Becky to come into her home. Jealous of her husband's partiality for Becky, she shows little Christian forbearance for her rival:

> 'I declare that I will not bear that—that woman again under my roof: if she enters it, I and my children will leave it. She is not worthy to sit down with Christian people. You—you must choose, sir, between her and me;' and with this my lady swept out of the room, fluttering with her own audacity, and leaving Rebecca and Sir Pitt not a little astonished at it. (697)

Although Becky perseveres for some time, she is ineffectual in bringing about a reconciliation, and is eventually forced to live in exile on the Continent.

Amelia, too, must face George's shortcomings before she can accept Dobbin's love. She must stop seeing him as her knight in shining armor and thinking that she is "not worthy of him" (297). During her widowhood she transforms him into the perfect hero whose picture she worships: "All her husband's faults and foibles she had buried in the grave with him: she only remembered the lover, who had married her at all sacrifices; the noble husband so brave and beautiful, in whose arms she had hung on

the morning when he had gone away to fight, and die gloriously for his King" (581). Not until she sees the letter he wrote Becky asking her to run away with him does she believe his fallibility. Only after the "idol of her life was tumbled down" can she say "I may love him [Dobbin] with all my heart now" (866, 869). Dobbin's disillusionment takes the same course. He falls in love with Amelia at first sight when they go to Vauxhall, and persists for fifteen years in worshipping her:

> Very likely Amelia was not like the portrait the Major had formed of her: there was a figure in a book of fashions which his sisters had in England, and with which William had made away privately, pasting it into the lid of his desk, and fancying he saw some resemblance to Mrs. Osborne in the print, whereas I have seen it, and can vouch that it is but the picture of a high-waisted gown with an impossible doll's face simpering over it—and, perhaps, Mr. Dobbin's sentimental Amelia was no more like the real one than this absurd little print which he cherished. (549)

Like Becky and Rawdon in their confrontation scene with Lord Steyne, Dobbin and Amelia confront each other with Becky as the catalyst. Dobbin reevaluates his love for Amelia and finds the object of his desire wanting:

> 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 in you. You are very good-natured, and have done your best; but you couldn't—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. (852-53)

Dobbin replaces the fiction with the real, and is no less disillusioned than Rawdon.

Both scenes of discovery are necessary and inevitable, but they have widely

different consequences. For Becky it leads to banishment in Europe, and death for Rawdon in the West Indies. Dobbin and Amelia's confrontation has more positive consequences, and for the first time it is Amelia who takes the initiative and calls Dobbin back.

Another intertextual trace of Ecclesiastes in *Vanity Fair* is Thackeray's theme of vanity. Thackeray defines 'vanity' in the biblical sense. The Hebrew word for vanity is *hebbel* which means 'vapor' or 'breath,' suggesting the fleeting nature or futility of human endeavor.[15] The writer of Ecclesiastes, as does Thackeray, says that life is a constant round of activities in the pursuit of goals and objectives which always prove unsatisfying. Beneath the veneer of success and achievement there inevitably lurks doubt and fear. The charge of cynicism has been applied to both the writer of Ecclesiastes and Thackeray, but Thackeray defends his position. In a letter to a critic he discusses the purpose of his book:

> It is to indicate, in cheerful terms, that we are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people 'desperately wicked' and all eager after vanities. Everyone is you see in the book,—for instance if I had made Amelia a higher order of woman there would have been no vanity in Dobbins falling in love with her. . . I want to leave everybody dissatisfied and unhappy at the end of the story—we ought all to be with our own and all other stories.[16]

Thackeray in his role as preacher wants us to be aware of our vanities, knowing at the same time that our behavior will not change much.

The person who is most emblematic of the futility of worldly pursuits is Lord Steyne. His money and titles make him envied by all, but he is perfectly miserable in private. The dilapidation of "dreary" Gaunt House reflects the moral decay of the

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[15]Harmon, 27.

[16]*Letters*, II, 423.

inhabitants inside (588). Lord Steyne is estranged from his saintly wife, hated by his daughters-in-law over whom he tyrannizes, and living in constant fear of the sword of Damocles of madness hanging over his head. "He tried to lay the horrid bedside ghost in Red Seas of wine and jollity," and pays readily and dearly to be amused by Becky (596). Like Becky, the other inhabitants of Vanity Fair are only too glad and honored to be invited by the great Steyne.

In *Vanity Fair* everyone is necessarily guilty of vanity, but Thackeray shows us Becky's pursuit in greatest detail. Although Lord Steyne tells her "Everyone is striving for what is not worth the having," it is her conscious and determined goal to raise herself up. However, she is honest enough to question whether it is worth it in moments of quiet contemplation. She is the toast of Paris after the Battle of Waterloo, but she soon grew "tired of this idle social life: opera-boxes and restaurateur dinners palled upon her: nosegays could not be laid by as a provision for future years: and she could not live upon knick-knacks, laced handkerchiefs, and kid gloves. She felt the frivolity of pleasure, and longed for more substantial benefits" (457-58). "Substantial benefits" to Becky means Consols accruing interest in the three percent range, and so she puts away her nest egg in the secret drawer of the desk she got from Amelia, only to have Rawdon dash open the drawer and take the money.

All social classes, whether upper or lower, are guilty of vanity. Raggles is brought to ruin because of his sycophantic, snobbish behavior: "It was the sight of the Marquis of Steyne's carriage-lamps at her door, contemplated by Raggles, burning in the blackness of midnight, 'that hup' him up,' as he afterwards said; that even more than Rebecca's arts and cunnings" (563). Betsy Horrocks's ribbons become increasingly more colorful as she becomes more and more confident that she will

succeed the "ironmonger's daughter" as Lady Crawley, and practises writing her name as such in her copy-book. Hester, the kitchen-maid, praises her superior's discordant playing on the piano with "Lor, mum, 'tis bittiful," but does not hesitate to turn on her after Sir Pitt's stroke when there is more to be gained from Mrs. Bute Crawley (505). And the little girl with the penny has friends she never knew existed.

Although Thackeray's emphasis in his novel is on the biblical meaning of the word 'vanity,' another definition which is applicable is from Webster's Dictionary: "inflated pride in oneself or one's appearance." For Thackeray, the moral worth of a person is inversely proportionate to his interest in clothes. Those who are the most vain of their personal appearance lack inner strength and moral integrity. Jos wears Hessian boots and rich silk scarves and expensive waistcoats to hide that he is essentially hollow at the core. George also likes to wear flashy clothes and diamond pins and is always admiring himself in the mirror. Becky, whenever she can, dresses in the height of fashion, albeit in stolen lace and brocade when she is presented to the King. Miss Swartz, to impress George, bounces around in her frilly dresses. In contrast, Amelia places little emphasis on clothes for herself. Rawdon wears his oldest uniform when he leaves to fight at Waterloo so that Becky can sell his new one in case he is killed. And good old Dobbin wears the same coat at the end of the novel as he had at the beginning.

Like the writer of Ecclesiastes, Thackeray suggests that life must be enjoyed in moderation. Dobbin comes closest to doing this. He is kind to everyone and is loved and respected by all.

One of the romance conventions that Thackeray attacks in *Vanity Fair* is that of poetic justice. Thackeray does not mete out rewards and punishments according to the characters' deserts. A quotation from Ecclesiastes shows the similarity in outlook of

the two: "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all" (9: 11). To exemplify his idea that the endings of popular romances are fictions, Thackeray uses contrasting characters who eventually have very similar endings.

The two most obvious are, of course, Becky and Amelia. The two begin their journey together as they leave Miss Pinkerton's. Amelia for the next fifteen years harms no one intentionally, and avoids thinking evil thoughts if she can help it. Becky admits that "I'm no angel" and proves her statement as she manipulates and lies and cheats her way into society (15). At the novel's end the two are again brought together, and who is to say that one is happier than the other? Amelia admits that Dobbin is more concerned about their daughter, Jane, and his *History of the Punjaub* than he is about her. Lady Crawley, as she calls herself, lives in Bath and Cheltenham surrounded by "a very strong party of excellent people [who] consider her to be a most injured woman" (877).

Old Osborne and John Sedley are also contrasted, a fact emphasized by their deaths in the same chapter. Mr. Osborne, probably more than anyone else, reveals the emptiness behind the façade of vanity and financial success. To assuage his guilty conscience after his son dies, he lavishes his money on little George, but is neither loved nor respected by him. One daughter invites him to her second-rate parties, and the other sits in stony silence while he slurps his turtle soup. Mr. Sedley, although impoverished after the return of Napoleon because of the crash of the stock market, is lovingly cared for by Amelia at the end of his life. To argue that one or the other is

happier would be difficult.

The contrast in character and changing fortunes of Rawdon and Pitt Crawley is one of the underlying story lines of the novel. They are first introduced when Becky chooses to dream of Rawdon when she sleeps at Sir Pitt's town house in Great Gaunt Square. Rawdon, spoiled by his aunt who promises to leave him her money when she dies, looks with disdain on his older brother, Pitt. Pitt masks his jealousy by assuming a sanctimonious demeanor. After his marriage to Becky and consequent poverty, Rawdon redeems himself by his love for his wife and son. Pitt remains a selfish prig, but inherits not only his father's estate, but also Miss Crawley's money. Their deaths occur in close proximity. Rawdon dies three years after he arrives in the West Indies separated from his son and the kindnesses of Lady Jane, whereas Sir Pitt dies as a prestigious baronet married to a wife he does not respect and children he cannot show love to. "Ah *Vanitas Vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?" (878).

For a meaningful reading of his novel, Thackeray asks his readers to follow the traces of his intertexts, particularly *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Ecclesiastes. The two texts form the background for the recurring plot patterns against which his own characters' actions are brought into sharp relief.

IV: ARCHETYPAL CHARACTERIZATION IN *THE NEWCOMES*

Whereas in *Vanity Fair* Thackeray uses the metaphor of the puppet show, in *The Newcomes* he puts his story into a fabular framework. As in his earlier novel, Thackeray here questions the nature of what is 'real,' and suggests that reality in fact consists of fictions, that 'art' and 'life' are intertwined. By his wide allusiveness and use of archetypes, Thackeray shows that literature consists of characters and images and themes that are endlessly recurring. Thackeray expects his reader to be in the know about the literature to which he alludes, for it is the reader's task to integrate the multiple allusions into a consistent whole.

In this chapter I will look at the various character archetypes that Thackeray exploits in his *Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family*.

Sir Charles Grandison and Sir Roger de Coverley: Colonel Newcome is modeled after these two heroes of eighteenth-century fiction. The Colonel reads Richardson's novel and the *Spectator* because, he says, "I like to be in the company of gentlemen" (49). Sir Charles epitomizes the perfect hero and Christian gentleman. His behavior toward everyone he touches is exemplary. After he rescues Harriet Byron from being kidnapped by Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, he attempts to reform the errant nobleman by dealing kindly, yet firmly, with him. He is magnanimous and generous with money, especially toward his sisters, and gives each a handsome dowry on her marriage. Although he falls in love with the beautiful Miss Byron when he sees her nobility of character and strength of mind, he does not declare himself until he has been honorably released by Lady Clementina della Porretta, who is madly in love with him. Sir Charles

is, of course, too good to be true, but by evoking the archetype Thackeray is inviting a comparison with Colonel Newcome. The Colonel is generous with money too, not only toward Clive, but also toward Charles and Martha Honeyman, Fred Bayham, and J.J. Ridley, to mention only a few. As well, he is kind and noble in his behavior toward his friends, but, unlike Sir Charles, he is disappointed in love. His Harriet Byron, Mademoiselle Léonore de Blois, dutifully resigns herself to an arranged marriage. Nevertheless, when the Colonel visits Madame de Florac in Paris, Clive describes their meeting as "an elderly Sir Charles Grandison saluting a middle-aged Miss Byron" (274). Pendennis equates the "gracious dignity" of the Colonel's greeting of Laura with Sir Charles's "beautifullest bow to Miss Byron" (670). But Colonel Newcome at times falls short of his hero's behavior. When confronted with Barnes's duplicitous behavior, and dejected by Clive's unwillingness to enter Parliament, he becomes vindictive toward his nephew when he contests the parliamentary seat at Newcome. As well, although his motives are clearly altruistic, he is tainted by the materialism of the society in which he lives, and on his return from India a rich man, tries to buy Ethel for Clive.

Sir Roger de Coverley, the fictitious hero of Addison and Steele's essays in the *Spectator* from 1711 to 1712, is the archetype of the kind and well-meaning, if rather eccentric, country gentleman. He is a disappointed bachelor, in love with a widow, who, according to her admirer, "has certainly the finest Hand of any Woman in the World."[1] Thackeray, in his lecture on Addison in *The English Humourists*, says of Sir Roger de Coverley:

> We love him for his vanities as much as his virtues. What is ridiculous is delightful in him: we are so fond of him because we laugh at him so.

[1]Donald F. Bond, ed., *The Spectator*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 463.

> And out of that laughter, and out of that sweet weakness, and out of those harmless eccentricities and follies, and out of that touched brain, and out of that honest manhood and simplicity—we get a result of happiness, goodness, tenderness, pity, piety .[2]

Thackeray might well be describing his own creation, Colonel Newcome, with the above words. At the Colonel's first party in the house he has rented in Fitzroy Square, his "guileless and childlike trustfulness" when talking to his friends prompts Clive to say, "Wouldn't he do for Sir Roger de Coverley?" (235). Sir Roger, Sir Charles, and Colonel Newcome as well belong to what the Colonel sees as the Golden Age of the eighteenth century. They help to show how the Colonel's values and behavior are in sharp contrast to those of his contemporaries. Major Pendennis, Pen's cynical uncle, is the Colonel's nineteenth-century equivalent.

Don Quixote: Thackeray was reading the Cervantes novel when he was writing *The Newcomes*, and Colonel Newcome is in many ways the archetypal quixotic hero. Like Sir Charles and Sir Roger de Coverley, the Don is one of Colonel Newcome's literary heroes, and in India he is known as Don Quixote; the headletter for Chapter 66 shows him as such. Not only does he look like the tall and lanky Knight of the Woeful Countenance, but also his odd yet dignified behavior is similar in many respects to his predecessor's. Although he does not see it his mission in life to right the wrongs of the

Headletter for Chapter 66

[2]*The Oxford Thackeray*, vol. 11, 539-40.

world, he is idealistic and naive in his dealings with others. Cervantes uses his hero to satirize the Spanish chivalric romances, and Thackeray uses his hero to satirize the Victorian society. It is the clash of the Colonel's gentlemanly, generous personality with the selfish, materialistic values expounded by his Newcome relatives that shows us a society devoid of moral integrity.

To portray Colonel Newcome as the quixotic hero, Thackeray juxtaposes the archetype of the Golden Age with that of his present, fallen world. After the Overture in Chapter 1, Pen, too, as middle-aged narrator, looks longingly to the past of his own youth:

> There was once a time when the sun used to shine brighter than it appears to do in this latter half of the nineteenth century; when the zest of life was certainly keener; when tavern wines seemed to be delicious, and tavern dinners the perfection of cookery; when the perusal of novels was productive of immense delight, and the monthly advent of magazine-day was hailed as an exciting holiday; . . . when the women of this world were a thousand times more beautiful than those of the present time . . . . It was in the days of my own youth, then, that I met one or two of the characters who are to figure in this history. . . . As I recall them the roses bloom again, and the nightingales sing by the calm Bendemeer. (6-7)

The clash between the ideal as represented by Colonel Newcome and the real world is seen as soon as the Colonel is introduced when he takes Clive to the Cave of Harmony, a tavern which had been famous in the Colonel's youth because it was frequented by wits. The Cave of Harmony is a metaphor for the innocent world that the Colonel expects to find. Having returned to England after thirty-five years in India, Colonel Newcome enjoys the pleasant company of Pen and his friends as they drink sherry and sing sentimental songs. This idyllic setting is shattered when the inebriated Captain Costigan comes in and sings ribald songs and "wicked baldeedash." Outraged by the

Captain's "tipsy howl," the Colonel tells him to "Go home to your bed, you hoary old sinner!" and angrily leaves the "bacchanalians," whom he had taken for gentlemen (13).

Colonel Newcome confronts harsh reality again as he comes face to face with the materialism of the society into which he has been transported when he goes to visit his half-brothers, Brian and Hobson Newcome, at their bank. Thinking that he will be welcomed warmly on his return after so many years, he rushes to see them: "He astonished those trim quiet gentlemen by the warmth of his greeting, by the vigour of his handshake, and the loud high tones of his voice, which penetrated the glass walls of the parlour, and might actually be heard by the busy clerks in the hall without" (75-6). A homecoming is not allowed to disrupt the business affairs of such a respectable family.

Colonel Newcome's inability to accept reality is revealed as well in his hope that Clive may marry Ethel. He persists in this illusion, but is corrupted by the values of the world in which he must now battle. Although his "benevolent spirit grants him a certain moral authority," Ina Ferris argues that the "'noble' Colonel is no moral paradigm; on the contrary, he is a thoroughly human figure bewildered by the confusion of human existence who stumbles and falls and recovers."[3] When he finally realizes that money is a criterion in the selection of a husband for Ethel, he offers Barnes sixty thousand pounds on Clive's behalf. Again rebuffed, and angered by Barnes's lying about Ethel's whereabouts, the Colonel's wrath is unleashed. He denounces Barnes in public and turns against Ethel. Although it is his dream that Clive should go into Parliament, when Clive refuses, he wages a vindictive battle against Barnes as the two contest the seat for Newcome. The headnote for Chapter 69

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[3]*William Makepeace Thackeray* (Boston: Twayne, 1983) 76.

ironically depicts two knights fighting. Clive muses on his father's misguided election promises with Pen: "He knows nothing about it . . . his politics are all sentiment and kindness, he will have the poor man paid double wages, and does not remember that the employer would be ruined . . . when he comes out armed *cap-à-pie*, and careers against windmills in public, don't you see that as Don Quixote's son I had rather the dear brave old gentleman was at home?" (874-75).

Just as Don Quixote is disillusioned by "all fabulous and absurd stories of knight errantry," so the Colonel loses his naivety and innocence.[4] His fond dreams for Clive are shattered as he witnesses Clive's unhappiness with Rosey, and he himself is hastened to an early grave through the collapse of the Bundelcund Bank and the diabolical actions of the Campaigner. "By bringing a figure like the Colonel into the bourgeois, materialistic world of mid-Victorian England," says Ferris, "Thackeray can explore both the realities of society and the unrealities inherent in the models constructed by the human imagination."[5] Like Cervantes, Thackeray uses his hero to explore the role of illusion and reality in life. The Colonel's view is a romantic one of what life should be like; the real world, in the end, refuses to be manipulated by his desiring mind.

Fairy Tale Archetypes: Thackeray, in his depiction of Clive and Ethel as the hero and heroine of his novel, invites the reader to see them as the Prince and Princess of fairy tale. When Colonel Newcome first meets Ethel she is only thirteen years old, but immediately he builds castles in the air for them. For Clive's benefit he later speculates

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[4]Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. J.M. Cohen, (Bungay, Suffolk: The Chaucer Press, 1984) 940.

[5]*Thackeray*, 79.

in the Bundelcund Banking Company: "His desire was to see his son endowed with all the possible gifts of fortune. . . . To see Prince Clive ride in a gold coach with a princess beside him, was the kind old colonel's ambition; that done, he would be content to retire to a garret in the prince's castle, and smoke his cheroot there in peace" (673). However, Thackeray's use of the fairy tale archetype is ironic. Clive and Ethel are not Prince and Princess, and they do not live happily-ever-after. Instead, Thackeray gives us the 'real' Prince and Princess Montcontour. The Prince is a dissolute gambler and the Princess a fat, homely woman of sixty, and although they are united at the end of the novel, their union is not blessed with happiness and fulfillment.

In appearance, however, both Clive and Ethel qualify as prince and princess. Clive has blue eyes and blond hair; even Lady Kew admits that he is the most handsome youth in London (304). Ethel, too, with her dark hair and fair skin eclipses all her rivals for the attention of the most eligible bachelors. She is a proud and haughty princess whose rejection of her suitors, Lord Kew, Lord Farintosh, and Clive, results in punishment, the most hurtful being the withdrawal of Colonel Newcome's love when she scorns Clive's attention.

Lady Kew is the bad Fairy or wicked Witch of the fairy tale who, because of her wealth and position in the peerage, is invited to all the feasts. She herself says that she is a witch (398), and is depicted as such in three chapter headletters (38, 52, 54). She has schemed to carry out her plan of marrying Ethel to her cousin, Lord Kew, when they were still in their cradles, so that the money she has hoarded will be passed on to her favorites and stay in the family. But her powers are limited. After Lord Kew refuses to be reconciled with Ethel, she simply alters her target and pursues Lord Farintosh, not because he is handsome or good or loving, but because he happens to

head the list of the eligible nobility. It is power and social standing that she desires. Her spells, however, do not have the desired effect. In spite of all her money and force of character, she cannot alter fate. Her death results only in the postponement of the marriage of Ethel and Lord Farintosh; it is Ethel herself who later rejects Farintosh because she sees the results of a marriage without love when Lady Clara runs away with Lord Highgate.

J.J. Ridley is Thackeray's male version of the Cinderella archetype. In appearance he is "all but hunchbacked; long and lean in the arm; sallow, with a great forehead, and waving black hair, and large melancholy eyes" (164). From an early age, he is cruelly treated by almost everyone: "The boys jeered at him in the streets—some whopped him, spite of his diminutive size. At school he made but little progress. He was always sickly and dirty, and timid and crying, whimpering in the kitchen away from his mother; who, though she loved him, took Mr. Ridley's view of his character, and thought him little better than an idiot" (157). Miss Cann, the piano teacher, becomes his fairy godmother and helps to transform him into a successful artist. J.J. listens to Miss Cann play the piano and in his imagination translates the sounds into forms: "knights in armour" and "noblemen with flowering ringlets" and "fierce banditti" and "countenances with O such large eyes and cherry lips" (157-58). She recognizes his talent and tells J.J.'s father, "I tell you that boy is a genius. I tell you that one day the world will hear of him. His heart is made of pure gold. One day . . . he shall get the prize at the Royal Academy, and be famous, sir—famous!" (157). As a result of her interest, Colonel Newcome pays for drawing lessons which J.J. takes with Clive. She also suggests that the money the Colonel pays to the Ridleys after Honeyman's

bankruptcy be spent on J.J.'s travelling to Europe with Clive. In Rome, he works diligently, and is rewarded by having his pictures accepted by the Royal Academy. The subjects of his paintings come invariably from romance and fairy tale. He draws scenes from the *Arabian Nights*, and enters a "sweet and fanciful" picture of Oberon and Titania in the exhibition of the Royal Academy. J.J. does not ride off with the princess in a golden coach, but, like Pygmalion, creates her in his art and worships her beauty. When Clive is destitute and cannot sell any pictures, J.J. becomes his patron. He is faithful to his sublime mistress, his art, and his metamorphosis from a despised, sickly boy to a respected artist is complete when he becomes a member of the Royal Academy. Clive says of his friend, "Of all the pieces of good fortune which can befall a man, is not this the greatest: to have your desire, and then never tire of it?" (661). One of the last pictures we have of him is as a conquering knight, his palette his shield and brushes his weapons (850). Unlike Clive's, J.J.'s story has a fairy tale ending.

Mythological Archetypes: Although Colonel Newcome would like to see Ethel as the Princess of his fairy tale, she belongs more to myth as a Diana figure. The epithets "haughty," "cruel," and "chaste" may be appropriately applied to both. Not only the men, but also the "May Fair nymphs were afraid of this severe Diana, whose looks were so cold and whose arrows were so keen" (308). She reminds Clive of the statue of the "Huntress Diana at the Louvre, whose haughty figure and beauty the young lady indeed resembled" (700). After the break-up of Ethel and Lord Kew's engagement, "Diana and Diana's grandmother hunted the noble Scottish stag" who was at last "brought to bay and taken by the resolute pursuers" in Paris. But after Furnivash, the prize, is gained, he is spurned. And because Lady Kew is dead and Ethel is no longer

dragged from one party to the other in search of prey, Ethel devotes herself to raising Clara and Barnes's children.

Clive's frustrating relationship with Ethel can best be understood by a close look at Thackeray's use of the Diana and Venus archetypes in the novel. When Clive and his father take the Continental Tour prior to the Colonel's return to India, Clive visits the Louvre and is enchanted by the statue of the Venus of Milo. The letter he writes to Pen deserves to be quoted at length:

> I had not been ten minutes in the place before I fell in love with the most beautiful creature the world has ever seen. She was standing silent and majestic in the centre of one of the rooms of the statue gallery; and the very first glimpse of her struck one breathless with the sense of her beauty. I could not see the colour of her eyes and hair exactly, but the latter is light, and the eyes I should think are grey. Her complexion is of a beautiful warm marble tinge. She is not a clever woman, evidently; I do not think she laughs or talks much—she seems too lazy to do more than smile. She is only beautiful. This divine creature has lost her arms, which have been cut off at the shoulders, but she looks none the less beautiful for the accident. . . . Her name is the Venus of Milo. O Victrix! O lucky Paris! . . . How could he give the apple to any one else but this enslaver,—this joy of gods and men? at whose benign presence the flowers spring up, and the smiling ocean sparkles, and the soft skies beam with serene light! I wish we might sacrifice. I would bring a spotless kid, snowy-coated, and a pair of doves, and a jar of honey . . . and we would acknowledge the Sovereign Loveliness, and adjure the Divine Aphrodite. Did you ever see my pretty young cousin, Miss Newcome, Sir Brian's daughter? She has a great look of the huntress Diana. It is sometimes too proud and too cold for me. The blare of those horns is too shrill, and the rapid pursuit through bush and bramble too daring. O, thou generous Venus! O, thou beautiful, bountiful calm! At thy soft feet let me kneel!—on cushions of Tyrian purple (272).

Clive's juxtaposition of the Venus and Diana archetypes in relation to Ethel gives us insight into his unhappy relationship with her. The two goddesses are foils to each other: Venus is voluptuous and sensual, Diana cold and chaste. Clive, who is always

drawing sketches of Ethel, is enchanted by her beauty, but intimidated by her actions, her behavior towards him. When Ethel is seventeen, and he nineteen years, and after she has been presented at Court, Clive describes her to Pen as follows:

> As for Ethel, anything so high and mighty I have never seen . . . . Going to Court: and about to parties every night where a parcel of young fools flatter her, has perfectly spoiled her. By Jove, how handsome she is! How she turns with her long neck, and looks at you from under those black eyebrows! If I painted her hair, I think I should paint it almost blue, and then glaze over with lake. It *is* blue. And how finely her head is joined on to her shoulders! . . . She would do for Judith, wouldn't she? Or how grand she would do as Herodias's daughter sweeping down a stair—in a great dress of cloth of gold like Paul Veronese—holding a charger before her with white arms, you know—with the muscles accented like that glorious Diana at Paris—a savage smile on her face and a ghastly, solemn, gory head on the dish—I see the picture, sir, I see the picture! (314)

As in his description of the statue of the Venus of Milo in Paris, Clive focuses on Ethel's sexual attractiveness and on her cruelty. She is Venus, but she is also also Diana, Judith, Salome. At this point he does not yet realize that he loves Ethel. He tells Pen that if "his father wanted him to marry, he would marry that instant. And why not Rosey? . . . The shadows in Rosey's face . . . are all pearly tinted. . . . the grey round her eyes, and the sort of purple bloom of her cheek[.] Rubens could have done the colour" (314). But whereas Ethel inspires awe, Rosey needs protection: "I look at her like a little wild flower in a field . . . . She is like a little songbird . . . a tremulous, fluttering little linnet that you would take into your hand . . . and let it perch on your finger and sing" (315).

Clive's confusion about Ethel is caused by Ethel's adoption of the Diana persona because of her inherent revulsion from the marriage market. Ethel is cold and haughty when Lady Kew is present, and when she is conscious of her complicity in the

sordid business of bartering her beauty for a title. With children, with the Colonel, and with her mother she is gentle and loving. While Clive is travelling in Germany with J.J. Ridley and he meets Ethel with her siblings and her mother, she shows only her loving nature. They meet at Bonn, Ethel riding a donkey and carrying a bunch of wild flowers. It is here that Clive falls in love with Ethel because she is not wearing her Diana mask. But after the arrival of Lady Kew, Clive, conscious of his fruitless love for Ethel, retreats:

> Only three weeks since, when strolling careless about Bonn he had lighted upon Ethel and the laughing group of little cousins, he was a boy as they were, thinking but of the enjoyment of the day and the sunshine, as careless as those children. And now the thoughts and passions which had sprung up in a week or two, had given him an experience such as years do not always furnish; and our friend was to show, not only that he could feel love in his heart, but that he could give proof of courage and self-denial and honour. (386-87)

When Clive says goodbye to her in Lady Kew's presence, Ethel "looked rather pale, but her expression was haughty—almost fierce" (401). And after Clive has gone, and she is paraded out at the various balls in Baden, she is "haughty, very haughty, and of a difficult temper" (424). Her cruelty is especially directed toward Lord Kew, who is ignorant of the reasons for her "wanton ill humour," but whom she treats with contempt because she does not love him. When Lady Kew suggests that she is "hankering" after the "drawing-master," Ethel in a rage burns Clive's drawings and viciously turns on her grandmother: "We are sold . . . we are as much sold as Turkish women; the only difference being that our masters may have but one Circassian at a time. No, there is no freedom for us. I wear my green ticket, and wait till my master comes. But every day as I think of our slavery, I revolt against it more" (425). But again when she writes to Clive after her broken engagement with Lord Kew, her letter "was affectionate, simple,

rather melancholy; . . . spoke . . . of the children; of Clive's father; and ended with a hearty 'God bless you', to Clive, from his sincere Ethel" (517). Ethel is Diana when she pleases; she renounces the role after she rejects Lord Farintosh. The persona is one behind which she can conceal her mortification of allowing herself to be sold to an English sultan.

While Ethel and Lady Kew are pursuing Lord Farintosh, and Farintosh condescends to call on Ethel and escort her to the ball or opera, Clive follows Ethel around in a manner reminiscent of Hercules enslaved by Omphale. Although he insists angrily, "*I* won't be made a fool of," his behavior of running after Ethel belies his assertion. "She seems to expect everybody to bow to her, and moves through the world with her imperious airs. . . . I feel inclined to tumble down and feel one of her pretty little feet on my neck and say, There! Trample my life out. Make a slave of me. Let me get a silver collar and mark 'Ethel' on it, and go through the world with my badge" (567).

Although Clive is clearly the hero of the novel, Thackeray often portrays him in such a manner that his heroic qualities are called into question. He at times mocks Clive's boyish attempts at defending the rights and honor of others. At school, Clive fights "Wolf Minor (his opponent), [who] had been bullying a little boy, and . . . he (the gigantic Newcome) wouldn't stand it" (46). He throws a glass of wine in Barnes' face for insulting the Colonel's singing at his dinner party, and is taken by his father's hand the next morning to apologize. An amusing incident is described by Pen as narrator:

> Coming from the Derby once—a merry party—and stopped on the road from Epsom in a lock of carriages, during which the people in the carriage ahead saluted us with many vituperative epithets, and seized the

> heads of our leaders,—Clive in a twinkling jumped off the box, and the next minute we saw him engaged with a half-dozen of his enemy: his hat gone, his hair flying off his face, his blue eyes flashing fire, his lips and nostrils quivering with wrath, his right and left hand hitting out . . . . (304)

Although laudable, his deeds of heroism are often ludicrous.

When he courts Ethel, Clive slavishly pursues her, but his lack of decisive action shows his fear of rejection. Lady Kew will not admit him when he comes to Queen Street, but Ethel tells him "you must call for all that: grandmamma may become more good-humored." A little later she admonishes him: "You must not speak to me all the evening, mind that, sir" (573). He begs invitations to the parties she frequents, and meekly accepts the few words and handshakes and "crumbs of consolation " that this Queen of Lydia condescends to give him (597). In one of his artistic endeavors Clive paints 'Sir Brian the Templar carrying off Rebecca' (696), indicating his unconscious desire in his relationship with Ethel. He pours out his feelings of passion and anger to Pen, who, after one such outburst, asks him, "Have you ever asked her to marry you?" (567). Clive admits that he feels unworthy of her and is afraid to: "Who am I? a painter with five hundred a year for an allowance. Isn't she used to walk upon velvet and dine upon silver; and hasn't she got marquises and barons, and all sorts of swells, in her train? I daren't ask her——." To which Pen quotes a line from Montrose: "He either fears his fate too much, or his desert is small, who dares not put it to the touch, and win or lose it all" (568). Although Clive many times shows his scorn towards the marquises and swells attendant on Ethel, he conveniently uses them as an excuse for inaction when he lacks the courage to confront Ethel. He curses his fate (621, 879) rather than act. Ethel, on the other hand, hides her true feelings behind her obedience to her parents and Lady Kew. So when the opportunity for mutual frank discussion arises

in Paris at the Hôtel de Florac, Clive and Ethel play out their little "comedy" which ends in tragedy. Hercules submits to the demands of Omphale, and the reader scorns him.

Thackeray uses the Duchesse d'Ivry, perhaps more than anyone else, to show the difficulty of determining what is unique and 'real' and what is patterned and recurring. She is the consummate actress, *becoming* the people of the various roles that she plays. Her life is a series of performances: she is Phaedra, Medea, Mary Queen of Scots, Circe, a daughter of the Crusaders, and so on. Her numerous affairs follow the same pattern:

> During the brief season in which gentlemen enjoyed the favour of Mary Queen of Scots, that wandering sovereign led them through all the paces and vagaries of a regular passion. As in a fair, where time is short and pleasures numerous, the master of the theatrical booth shows you a tragedy, a farce, and a pantomime, all in a quarter of an hour, having a dozen new audiences to witness his entertainments in the course of the forenoon; so this lady with her platonic lovers went through the complete dramatic course—tragedies of jealousy, pantomimes of rapture, and farces of parting. (444)

In analyzing her behavior it is often difficult to determine where one role ends and another begins, and what is drama and what reality.

Madame la Duchesse d'Ivry is Phaedra spurned by Hippolytus, because now that he has sown his wild oats and ranged himself, Lord Kew is devoted to Diana, Ethel. As well, she is Medea rejected by Jason who is about to marry Creusa. Significantly, the scene of jealousy and betrayal is Baden, the prettiest booth in Vanity Fair, the watering place par excellence of those engaged in the marriage market. The Duchesse revenges herself on Lord Kew, her former lover, by engineering a duel between him and M. Victor de Castillonnes, who is currently enjoying her favours. In the headletter for Chapter 31 she is depicted as a snake in the grass. Jealous of Ethel's

beauty and that Ethel is about to become Lady Kew, the Duchesse sends her an unsigned letter in which she details Lord Kew's earlier unsavory behavior and romantic escapades. The letter has the desired result and is the cause of the split between Ethel and Lord Kew. Ironically, however, it does not have the tragic ending of its archetypal predecessors. Hippolytus does not die, but marries Henrietta Pulleyn, Clara's sister, and the two live happily-ever-after.

Madame d'Ivry's penchant for role playing involves her so intently that she confuses the drama with the real. She is Mary Queen of Scots as she roams around Europe with her court of disreputable attendants. She resembles the sixteenth-century Scottish femme fatale in her professed Catholicism and her adulterous affairs and devious machinations. Her lodgings become her Lochleven, and in her entourage are Darnley, Rizzio, Bothwell, and John Knox. Her intensely affected histrionics allow her to forget her disastrous marriage with the old and dissipated Duke d'Ivry, so that the fiction becomes her reality.

Another archetypal character that is present in the novel is the siren. The large number of sirens present in Thackeray in general, and *The Newcomes* in particular, reflects his criticism of not only the marriage market so prevalent in Victorian society, but also how women are taught to behave in a society which places outward appearances above all else. For parents to sell their daughters to the wealthiest and the noblest, the daughters must use their seductive wiles to snare them. Mrs. Mackenzie and Rosey tirelessly pursue Clive until he finally gives up the struggle. In the headletter for Chapter 50 the Misses Baines, "those young sirens of Regent's Park," try unsuccessfully to seduce Clive with their singing (659). The Sherrick mother and daughter team are more successful with the Reverend Charles Honeyman, with whom

Headlatter for Chapter 50

the daughter enjoys matrimonial bliss in India. At the gambling tables in Baden are seen many a Calypso and Circe. The Duchesse d'Ivry comes closest to showing her siren's tail above the water. When Clive first arrives in Baden, Florac tells him to "Beware of this haggard Siren, my little Clive—mistrust her dangerous song! Her cave is *jonchée* with the bones of her victims. Be you not one!" (412). Clive escapes her but is enchanted by Ethel and finally netted by Rosey.

Both Ethel and Rosey are sirens, but Ethel is more conscious of the role she is playing than Rosey. Whereas Rosey is always the sweet, simpering, warbling seductress, Ethel wears the siren mask and drops it at will. When Colonel Newcome first sees Ethel at thirteen, she is still innocent of her value in the marriage market. But once initiated, Ethel accepts the terms of bartering her beauty for wealth and power: "I believe in elder sons, and a house in town, and a house in the country" (596). She follows Lady Kew in the pursuit of the asinine Lord Farintosh because she has been bred to do so: she considers it her duty. She rebels occasionally, but her rebellion is an emotional outburst triggered by her love of Clive, rather than a serious and rational repudiation of the social practice of buying and selling husbands and wives. After Clive has returned to Rome after the Congress of Baden, and she has burned his drawings in a fit of pique, she turns on her mentor, Lady Kew: "But what can I be with

my name and my parents? I belong to the world like all the rest of my family. . . . Why are there no convents to which we can fly? You make a fine marriage for me . . . and I would rather be at the plough like the women here" (425-26). Ethel can see her situation only in extremes, in black and white, as a member of the social elite or a peasant woman, which is her way of avoiding any responsibility for her behavior and Clive's unhappiness. She is a coquette who enjoys the adulation of the men and revels in the jealousy of the women. At Baden, she appears one evening in a stunning dress and behaves outrageously in her attempt to make conquests; the next evening she wears a simple white dress and dances one dance with her fiancé, Lord Kew. She is exotic and at times wilfully perverse in her flirtatious behavior toward her suitors, rejecting them once she has enthralled them. Yet she is always kind and loving toward the Colonel, whose good will, more than anyone else's, she desires. Ethel is a siren when she chooses to be. She relinquishes her role as such after she sees the disastrous results of a marriage of convenience, a marriage without love, in that of Barnes and Clara. With Ethel, Thackeray evokes the Venus, Diana, and siren archetypes, and the reader must constantly adjust his interpretation of one of Thackeray's most complex heroines.

Rosey Mackenzie, although also a siren, is a foil to Ethel. She is totally submissive to her mother, smiling constantly in her role as siren, even though she might just have had her ears boxed or been scolded by the Campaigner. She is interested only in coaches and millinery, and "prefers to have her opinions dealt out to her like her frocks" (311). Her behavior as a siren is choreographed by her mother at whose bidding she simpers and sings her repertoire of five songs. She identifies with the role she is forced to play. Although she would probably have been much happier

with her other suitor, Captain Hoby, she rejects him in favor of Clive at her mother's prodding. Jenni Calder, in her discussion of submissive females in Thackeray, sees Rosey as "the most extreme example of Thackeray's parasitic women."[6] Her destructive qualities are not recognized immediately; all think she is sweet and unaffected when they first meet her. Her mother, however, is more to blame than Rosey herself.

Mrs. Mackenzie is arguably Thackeray's most evil creation. She is the archetypal meddling mother-in-law as well as a siren. She must not only help her daughter find a husband, but, as a widow, she must also look after herself. When she first arrives in Fitzroy Square, she openly sets her cap on Colonel Newcome, but "this Circe tempted him no more than a score of other enchantresses who had tried their spells upon him" (286). Unsuccessful on this front, she focuses on winning Clive for Rosey, and the two of them employ their skills to net him. Mrs. Mackenzie is pleasant to everyone because, like Becky, she needs the good will of everyone to get on in the world. She is a good actress, and at first everyone thinks her charming, despite the servants' stories of her cruel behavior toward Rosey in private. Only J.J. Ridley is not deceived by her, and he instinctively recoils from her.

By the end of the novel, the siren has become a monster. When Clive wants to take his son to see his father at Grey Friars, we are given this picture of her: "The door is flung open, and the red-faced Campaigner appears. Her face is mottled with wrath, her bandeaux of hair are arranged upon her forehead, the ornaments of her cap, cheap and dirty, and numerous, only give her a wilder appearance. She is in a large and dirty wrapper" (958). Juliet McMaster has argued convincingly that the transformation of the

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[6] *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1976) 39.

lively and pleasant Mrs. Mackenzie to the Campaigner can be explained psychologically in terms of the sexual rivalry between mother and daughter:

> Inevitably there comes a time when the mother ceases to be able to live a vicarious love affair through her daughter, a time when she finds that her daughter has the young man's whole allegiance and that he has forgotten his sentimental attachment to her and may even actively dislike her. Her reaction, when she finds herself so excluded, is a violent change from her tenderness to hostility.[7]

Clive admits to having loved Mrs. Mackenzie for two days, but when he is unhappily married to Rosey his admiration quickly changes to hatred.

Biblical Archetypes: Thackeray in his portrayal of young men suggests that all are Prodigal Sons, wastrels in their youth, but that they grow up to be respected members of society. He gives us examples from all classes of society. From royalty, he gives us Prince Harry, "son of the austere sovereign who robbed Richard the Second of his crown,—the youth who took purses on Gadshill, frequented Eastcheap taverns with Colonel Falstaff and worse company," but who grew up to become the admired King Henry V (136). As well, the behavior of "young Lord Warwick, Mr. Addison's stepson. . . . was shocking, positively shocking." Even Tom Jones, whose behavior Colonel Newcome finds reprehensible, is "no better than he should be," but "he will end well at last" (137). Undoubtedly the best example of the Prodigal Son in *The Newcomes* is Lord Kew, who as a wild young man sowed his wild oats plentifully, but in later years was "that good landlord and friend of all his tenantry round about; that builder of churches, and indefatigable visitor of schools" (138). Colonel Newcome

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[7]Juliet McMaster, "Thackeray's Mothers-in-Law," in *Thackeray: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alexander Welsh (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 59.

admits to being a young scapegrace, and even Brian and Hobson Newcome are seen at the Opera when their mother thought them safely in bed. Paul de Florac undergoes a similar metamorphosis. Clive is called a Prodigal Son in the book, but he does not follow the archetypal pattern. Although he spends his father's money liberally on cigars and sherry and food and going to the play, he cannot be called a wastrel in that he does not gamble away fortunes, nor does he seem to sow too many wild oats. If anything, he is so fond of his father that he becomes too submissive in trying to please him. He marries Rosey because the Colonel wishes it, not because he loves her. Rosey, too, suffers because she does not stand up to her mother. Ethel fares much better and avoids an unhappy marriage because she has the courage to refuse Lord Farintosh.

Colonel Newcome as the Good Samaritan sets a moral standard by which others are judged and found wanting. He is always generous with his money and good will. Although his brothers and Barnes do not even recognize the existence of Mrs. Mason, the Colonel's relation and nurse when he was a young boy, he supports her generously for years, even after the collapse of the Bundelcund Bank leaves him destitute. Barnes, in contrast, abandons his illegitimate children, who are pensioned by Brian Newcome, his father. After his father's death, Barnes continues to pay the pension, but only because he is afraid of reprisals. Colonel Newcome is a Samaritan to, among others, J.J. Ridley, Fred Bayham, and Charles Honeyman. The help he gives them is appreciated and beneficial. Ironically, it is through giving money, the symbol of his corrupt society, that Colonel Newcome effects a positive change in many people.

Thackeray's massive allusiveness in his portrayal of character is largely responsible for his many memorable fictive creations. Colonel Newcome, arguably

Thackeray's most interesting and sympathetic character, comes to life mainly as a result of the numerous intertextual echoes from other literature: he is the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, Roger de Coverley, Sir Charles Grandison, Don Quixote, and so on. As the reader sifts his memory to recall the significance of the allusions in the context of the foregrounded text, he weaves for himself the meaning of Thackeray's story. As R.D. McMaster says, "Thackeray used and appealed to the well-stocked storehouse of the educated Victorian mind."[8]

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[8]R.D. McMaster, "London as a System of Signs in Thackeray's *The Newcomes*," *Victorian Review* 16.1 (Summer 1990): 19.

V: ARCHETYPAL PLOT IN *THE NEWCOMES*

In this chapter I will focus on the three main intertexts of *The Newcomes*, namely *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Ecclesiastes, and *Vanity Fair*. Although there is a shift of emphasis from the class system to the marriage market from the earlier to the later novel, Thackeray's use of the same intertexts points to his continuing interest in a moral design for his novel.

The Pilgrim's Progress as Intertext in *The Newcomes*

It can be argued that Colonel Newcome is the hero of *The Newcomes*. The novel in a sense commences with his birth and ends with his death, and in between we follow him at various points in his journey.

The romance pattern of Christian's completed quest is suggested at the beginning of Thackeray's novel with the Colonel's father, also Thomas Newcome, coming to London as a poor boy, making his fortune there, and returning home to marry his childhood sweetheart. But lest we get too complacent about the fulfillment of our expectations, Thackeray ends the fairy tale here, because a year later his wife dies giving birth to their son. Soon after the widower marries the wealthy daughter of his former employer, and although he enters into a "serious Paradise," the marriage is not a happy one.

Thomas Newcome, the Colonel of the novel, spends an unhappy childhood rebelling against the strict upbringing of his Dissenting stepmother. He runs away from his paternal home to the cottage of his former nurse, Sarah Mason, "who housed the poor prodigal, and killed her calf for him" (29). On his return his stepmother "read the

parable of the Prodigal in a very low and quiet voice" (29). Although Thackeray depicts him as the Prodigal Son, his use of the parable is ironic. Little Tommy runs away because of the harsh and unfair treatment by his stepmother to a place filled with kindness and understanding. Years later he leaves his paternal home permanently when he goes to India after his ill-fated love for Léonore de Blois, the Catholic daughter of a French emigré. When he returns to England thirty-five years later, his prodigality is again alluded to by his brothers, Brian and Hobson Newcome. But they do not kill the fatted calf for him: "Poor Thomas Newcome was quite abashed by his strange reception. Here was a man hungry for affection, and one relation asked him to dinner next Monday, and another invited him to shoot pheasants at Christmas" (78). The Colonel's prodigality does not consist of a selfish indulgence; instead, he is a figure of generosity toward everyone he meets. But from the materialistic perspective of Brian and Hobson and Barnes, his free spending is seen as wasteful. Rather than the Prodigal Son, the parable which applies more aptly to Colonel Newcome and which Thackeray uses repeatedly is that of the Good Samaritan. As he travels along the road of life the Colonel helps any needy wayfarer: Charles Honeyman, Fred Bayham, J.J. Ridley, among others, are all helped and improved by his kindnesses.

After his return from India, Colonel Newcome's journey resembles the pilgrimage of Christian and Faithful in Vanity Fair. When the latter two arrive there, they are made fun of because of their unusual clothes and speech: "The people . . . made a great gazing upon them: some said they were Fools, some they were Bedlams, and some they are Outlandishmen."[1] People who do not embrace the outward appearances and values of the society in which they find themselves are always suspect.

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[1] *Pilgrim's Progress*, 91.

The same is true of the Colonel. He attracts attention because of his "loose clothes and long mustaches, his brown hands and unbrushed hat" (87). His behavior—his "simplicity" and "generosity" and "honour"— is also very different from most people's as they push on in the crowd. Thackeray uses him as a foil to criticize the selfishness and hypocrisy of the society he finds himself in. The discrepancy between his illusory expectations of life in England and the reality is seen when he and Clive go to the Cave of Harmony. Affected by the dignified presence of the Colonel, the revelers are on their best behavior, but with the intrusion of the drunken Costigan the fantasy is dispelled. He leaves the Cave angrily, but cannot do the same in everyday life because the world *is* Vanity Fair. Although Christian goes through the fair without sampling any of the wares, the Colonel is tainted by the corrupt society, not for his own sake, but in his passionate desire to make Clive happy.

Colonel Newcome follows the conventional pattern of salvation in beginning in a state of innocence, falling as a result of pride, and through suffering regaining his inherent nobility and redemption. We can follow this path from his return to England after an absence of thirty-five years to his death at the end of the novel.

The Colonel's goodness and generosity are evident in his treatment of everyone he meets. Children and adults alike share in his magnanimity. His love for Clive is especially touching. James Binnie tells him, "you're just one of the saints of the earth. If all men were like you, there'd be an end of both our trades; there would be no fighting and no soldiering; no rogues and no magistrates to catch them" (113). When the drunken Barnes makes fun of the Colonel's singing, he tells Clive, "If Barnes laughed at my singing, depend upon it, sir, there was something ridiculous in it, and he laughed because he could not help it. If he behaved ill, we should not" and insists that

Clive apologize for the glass of sherry he threw in Barnes's face (181). Pen as narrator praises the Colonel as well: "He had a natural simplicity, an habitual practice of kind and generous thoughts; a pure mind, and therefore above hypocrisy and affection" (202).

But unlike Christian, the Colonel's goodness becomes tarnished during his sojourn in Vanity Fair. The less he succeeds on his own terms of kind solicitude and gentlemanly honor, the more he resorts to using the weapons of his adversaries. Deeply hurt by Clive's frustrated love for Ethel, and realizing that the medium of barter is money, he invests heavily in the shady Bundelcund Banking Company and subsequently negotiates with Barnes to offer to buy Ethel with sixty thousand pounds. When it becomes clear to him later that Barnes lied in his dealings with him, he becomes ruthless in his revenge and denounces Barnes in public. Worse still, he includes Ethel in his hatred: "With such a traitor, double-dealer, dastard as Barnes at its head, what could the rest of the race be? . . . The girl he and poor Clive loved so was ruined by her artful relatives, was unworthy of his affection and his boy's, was to be banished, like her worthless brother, out of his regard forever" (806-7). When he meets Ethel at Sarah Mason's cottage, he refuses to speak to her. He wages a vindictive battle against Barnes when he contests the seat for Parliament at Newcome, using the unsuspecting and doddering Sarah to garner sympathy votes. The Colonel's corruption is symbolized by the residence he has built for Clive and Rosey:

> The fine house in Tyburnia was completed by this time, as gorgeous as money could make it. How different it was from the old Fitzroy Square mansion with its ramshackle furniture, and spoils of brokers' shops, and Tottenham Court Road odds and ends. . . . Roses and Cupids quivered on the ceilings, up to which golden arabesques crawled from the walls; your face (handsome or otherwise) was reflected by the

> countless looking-glasses, so multiplied and arranged as, as it were, to carry you into the next street. . . . What awfully bad pastels there were on the walls! What frightful Boucher and Lancret shepherds leered over the portières! . . . (825)

In the midst of these sumptuous surroundings Clive becomes more and more separated from his father. The Colonel is angry that despite "every outward appliance of happiness, Clive was not happy" (827).

It is the failure of the Bundelcund Bank and the resulting loss of the Colonel's money that restores his essential simplicity and nobility. The effect of the ruin leads to his suffering and humiliation at the hands of the Campaigner, but by being so humbled his genuine virtue again comes to the fore. The bankruptcy eventually leads him to the Grey Friars school as a Poor Brother.

It is at the almshouse that Colonel Newcome's journey ends. His journey can be seen as both linear and cyclical: linear in the sense that he has reached his Celestial City, and cyclical in that he returns to the innocence of childhood. He attended Grey Friars school as a boy, and because he does not want to be a burden on anyone, returns to it to die. When the Colonel talks to Pendennis, who as an alumnus has given the Founder's Day speech, he tells him that he has found a "home." Very different from the Tybumia mansion, it is a small room, "neat and comfortable, with a brisk fire crackling on the hearth; a little tea-table laid out, a Bible and spectacles by the side of it, and over the mantelpiece a drawing of his grandson by Clive" (954). Although penniless because he has given his allowances and pension to repay those who lost money in the collapse of the bank, he is happier here than he was as the Director of the Bundelcund Bank, when Clive sat glumly beside him. He repents his past sins and forgives those who have wronged him: "Now, as in these early days, his heart was

pure; no anger remained in it; no guile tainted it; only peace and goodwill dwelt in it " (1005). Of Mrs. Mackenzie, who has caused him so much grief, he says, "She too does not mean ill, Pen. Do not waste any of your oaths upon that poor woman" (954). His reconciliation with Ethel is touching and simple: "He embraced her with the warmth of his old affection, uttering many brief words of love, kindness, and tenderness, such as men speak when strongly moved" (986). He would also like to shake Barnes by the hand, but although Ethel gives him the message, Barnes chooses not to see his uncle.

As his death approaches, he becomes a child again, and his memory of the past becomes sharper than the reality of the present. With his gown-boy young friend he would "prattle . . . about Dr. Raine, and his own early schooldays. . . . He would talk French with Madame de Florac, at which time his memory appeared to awaken with surprising vividness, his cheek flushed, and he was a youth again,—a youth all love and hope" (1005). His death occurs in the evening as the chapel bell is tolling: "And just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said 'Adsum!' and fell back. It was the word we used at school, when names were called; and lo, he, whose heart was as that of a child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of The Master" (1007). His journey over, he arrives in the Celestial City.

Ethel and Clive undergo similar voyages of discovery. When the Colonel first meets Ethel, she is thirteen years old and still unconscious of her beauty and charm. The Colonel, when he first meets her, says, "What a frank, generous, bright young creature is yonder! How cheery and gay she is; how good to Miss Honeyman, to whom she behaved with just the respect that was the old lady's due—how affectionate with her brothers and sisters" (204). Three years later when Clive meets her in Bonn

she is still unaffected and fresh, and it is here that Clive falls in love with her. But once she is trotted out in front of the eligible bachelors, and becomes aware of her sexual attractiveness, she loses her innocence. She admits to Madame de Florac:

> —oh, I like admiration! I am pleased when the women hate me, and the young men leave them for me. Though I despise many of these, yet I can't help drawing them towards me. One or two of them I have seen unhappy about me, and I like it; and if they are indifferent I am angry, and never tire till they come back. I love beautiful dresses; I love fine jewels; I love a great name and a fine house (630).

She pursues the Marquis of Farintosh with Lady Kew until he is "brought to bay" (700). Her behavior is despicable, and even the narrator wants to depose her as heroine of the novel. Her salvation comes when she refuses to marry Farintosh, thereby rejecting the sordid practice of bartering beauty for money and titles. She sees the error of her ways when she witnesses the "wretched consequences of interested marriages" in the unhappiness of Barnes and Clara (794). She confesses her sins to her fiancé:

> But before all else I owe you the truth, Lord Farintosh. I never could make you happy; I know I could not: nor obey you as you are accustomed to be obeyed; nor give you such a devotion as you have a right to expect from a wife. I thought I might once. I can't now! I know that I took you because you were rich, and had a great name; not because you were honest, and attached to me as you show yourself to be. I ask your pardon for the deceit I practised on you (795).

Ethel refuses to be molded into the conventional romantic heroine. She knows she could never live happily-ever-after with Lord Farintosh, who is not Prince Charming. In her renunciation of the world's values she gains her redemption and is spared the humiliation of marriage to a man she neither loves nor respects. By admitting to herself and Lord Farintosh the truth about her motives, she can also be more honest in admiring her lowly origins. She tells him she believed the story about her ancestor being the barber-surgeon to Edward the Confessor because she "was a child then, and

liked to believe the prettiest story best." Now she can freely admit that her "grandfather's father was a laborer in Newcome" (796). In Thackeray, the prettiest story is rarely the true one. She becomes the Good Samaritan as she turns her devotion to raising her brother's abandoned children, visiting and caring for Sarah Mason, and helping the poor villagers at Newcome. When the Colonel and Clive's family are destitute, she aids them anonymously and from her own inheritance pays them the money her grandmother left Clive in her will just before her death. In the headletter for Chapter 77, the chapter in which she comes to their aid, there is a picture of the Good Samaritan helping a needy traveller. Her own suffering and seeing the misfortune of others brings out Ethel's latent goodness.

Although Clive's change is not as pronounced, his journey follows a similar pattern. As a youth "he was everything which his parent could desire . . . . he is the picture of health, strength, activity, and good humour." His eyes "sparkle with intelligence and frank kindness" (74-5). He is not a snob, and picks his friends not for their titles, but for their honesty and sincerity. His love for Ethel is honorable, so when he hears of her engagement to Lord Kew he retreats from Baden. Lord Farintosh he treats with the scorn he deserves. In Paris at the Hôtel de Florac he confesses his love and honestly defends his choice of vocation: "my art, Ethel, is not only my choice and my love, but my honour too. I shall never distinguish myself in it: I may take smart likenesses, but that is all. I am not fit to grind my friend Ridley's colours for him . . . . I thought better of myself when I began as a boy; and was a conceited youngster" (634-35). Ethel's rejection of him causes him pain, yet it is the separation from his father that is even more poignant. Reluctant to be the bank manager that his father wants him to be, and intent on pursuing his love of art, Clive suffers in a dilemma from which he

cannot extricate himself: "If I differ from the dear old father, I wound him; if I yield up my opinion, as I do always, it is with a bad grace, and I wound him still. With the best intentions in the world, what a slave's life it is that he has made for me!" (853). Clive does not harbor the animosity toward Barnes that his father does, and tells him, "Let us have peace—and forgive him if we can" (880). He is more relieved than saddened by the failure of the bank, and works diligently at his art to eke out a living. He is "humbled by trial and grief," and the timely legacy from Ethel can be seen as a reward for his moral steadfastness (997). His reconciliation with his father completes the pattern of his salvation.

Ecclesiastes as an Intertext of *The Newcomes*

The theme of Ecclesiastes that all stories repeat themselves is explicitly dwelt on in the overture of the first chapter of the novel. Thackeray's aim is to retell the old story of birth, life, and death in the context of his contemporary society: "There may be nothing new under the sun; but it looks fresh every morning, and we rise with it to toil, hope, scheme, laugh, struggle, love, suffer, until the night comes and quiet" (5). The repeating tale that primarily concerns Thackeray in *The Newcomes* is the common practice of the *mariage de convenance* and its tragic consequences as seen in the lives of many in the novel.

The pattern is set by the marriage of Colonel Newcome and the silly and vain Emma, widow of the dissolute Mr. Casey. It is a loveless marriage entered into by the Colonel because he cannot marry the girl he loves, Léonore de Blois, the Catholic daughter of an impoverished emigré who has been promised to the Comte de Florac, a

man older than her father but of the nobility. The young Romeo is shipped off to India, where he marries the widowed Mrs. Casey out of a sense of pity and loneliness: "He had found her so friendless, that he took her in to the vacant place [his bereaved heart], and installed her there as he would have received a traveller into his bungalow" (67). He indulges her vanity for dresses and entertainments, and admits to Clive the superficiality of their relationship: "I did my duty by her; I denied her nothing. I scarcely ever had a word with her, and I did my best to make her happy" (879). He spends his life loving Léonore who spends her life nursing an old man, equally unhappy as the Colonel is, and who admits to Ethel, "I have been nearly fifty years dying" (629).

Although Colonel Newcome tries very hard to have Clive avoid the mistakes he made in his own life, Clive's story repeats the pattern set by his father. Clive tells his father that although married to Emma, "your heart was with the other. So is mine. It's fatal, it runs in the family, father" (879). Clive's reasons for marrying Rosey are as misguided as his father's reasons for marrying Mrs. Casey: "To please the best father in the world; the kindest old friend [James Binnie] who endowed his niece with the best part of his savings; to settle that question about marriage and have an end of it,—Clive Newcome had taken a pretty and fond young girl" (817-18). Rosey is just as vain and as ill-suited a wife for Clive as Emma had been for the Colonel. Ironically, not only can Colonel Newcome not shield Clive from the mistakes he himself has made, but he is at least partly to blame for the marriage. Only much later, when he sees Clive's misery, does he reflect on his own life: "He thought of his own early days, and how he had suffered, and beheld his son before him racked with the same cruel pangs of enduring grief. And he began to own that he had pressed him too hastily in his

marriage" (880). The Colonel wants only the best for his son, and poignantly admits to him, "I'd kill myself for your sake, Clivy," but the harder he tries to make him happy, the unhappier Clive is (879). After Rosey's death he is left with his son, Tommy, to raise. Pen implies the repeating pattern of fond love lavished on sons by their fathers as he muses:

> It was touching to see the eagerness and tenderness with which the great strong man now assumed the guardianship of the child, and endowed him with his entire wealth of affection. The little boy now ran to Clive whenever he came in, and sat for hours prattling to him. He would take the boy out to walk, and from our windows we could see Clive's black figure striding over the snow in St. James's Park, the little man trotting beside him, or perched on his father's shoulder. My wife and I looked at them one morning as they were making their way towards the City. 'He has inherited that loving heart from his father,' Laura said; 'and he is paying over the whole property to his son.' (1003)

The old story is about to repeat itself, and already we can anticipate Clive's disillusionment.

Another intertextual reference to Ecclesiastes focuses on poetic justice. The preacher who wrote the book exhorts his readers "to eat, and to drink, and to be merry" (8: 15) because "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," but "time and chance happeneth to them all" (9: 11). But by putting his novel in a fabular framework, Thackeray suggests that in the end, everyone gets his due reward or punishment, as the case may be. The chaos in Aesop's and La Fontaine's jungle of animals is sorted out and the "frog bursts with wicked rage, the fox is caught in the trap, the lamb is rescued from the wolf, and so forth, just in the nick of time" (1009). Thackeray's juxtaposition of the intertextual echoes reveals a tension within himself that romance is aesthetically pleasing and reality is uncomfortable but nevertheless the truth.

In the overture Thackeray implies that he is telling a fable:

> All types of all characters march through all fables: tremblers and boasters; victims and bullies; dupes and knaves; long-eared Neddies, giving themselves leonine airs; Tartuffes wearing virtuous clothing; lovers and their trials, their blindness, their folly and constancy. With the very first page of the human story do not love and lies too begin? So the tales were told ages before Aesop: and asses in lions' manes roared in Hebrew, and sly foxes flattered in Etruscan; and wolves in sheep's clothing gnashed their teeth in Sanscrit, no doubt. (5)

A few of the characters have attributes of the animals in the beast fables: Barnes is the sheep in wolf's clothing, Clara the lamb, Lord Farintosh the donkey in the lion's skin, and Mrs. Hobson Newcome has qualities of the owl and the frog. As well, some of the characters' names suggest their natures—Clara Pulleyn, a weak, silly girl lives, at Chanticlere, and her brother Lord Rooster sows his "wild oats plentifully, and scatter[s] them with boyish profusion" (365). By alluding to the fables Thackeray suggests that appropriate rewards and punishments will be meted out, but he frustrates our expectations and agrees with the writer of Ecclesiastes that dreams are seldom fulfilled.

This is probably most clearly seen in the contrasting lives of Lady Kew and Madame de Florac. Lady Kew believes that to get on the world, one must fight:

> To push on in the crowd, every male or female struggler must use his shoulders. If a better place than yours presents itself just beyond your neighbour, elbow him and take it. . . . By pushing steadily, nine hundred and ninety-nine people in a thousand will yield to you . . . . If your neighbour's foot obstructs you, stamp on it; and do you suppose he won't take it away? (95-96)

In this way Lady Kew finds Sir Brian for her daughter, condemns Clara to misery at the hands of Barnes, tries to sell Ethel to Lord Kew, and relentlessly pursues Lord Farintosh. Her motives are governed solely by the worldly standards of social standing and profit.

Madame de Florac's kind concern for her family lies at the other extreme. She

considers it her duty "to soothe, to pray, to attend them with constant watchfulness, to strive to mend them with pious counsel" (607-8). The advice she gives to Ethel, "Better poverty, Ethel—better a cell in a convent, than a union without love," is the antithesis of what Lady Kew teaches (629). But she is not rewarded for her selfless devotion to others. Her "yielding" to her family's wishes and marrying a man older than her father results in fifty empty years of service to her husband and children. Pen as narrator admits, "I do not think that one lady was happier than the other. Madame de Florac's eldest son was a kindly profligate; her second had given his whole heart to the church; her daughter had centered hers on her own children, and was jealous if their grandmother laid a finger on them. So Léonore de Florac was quite alone." Of Lady Kew he says, she "is not less alone. Her husband and son are dead, without a tear for either,—to weep was not in Lady Kew's nature . . . . Her darling schemes fail somehow. She moves from town to town and ball to ball, and hall to castle, forever uneasy and always alone . . . . To be old, proud, lonely, and not have a friend in the world—that is her lot in it" (608). Altruism and egotism are rewarded equally with disappointment.

Thackeray ends his novel with the premature death of Colonel Newcome, one of the most likeable characters in all of literature. The Campaigner hounds him into an early grave with her bitter recriminations about the loss of her fifteen hundred pounds. Clive and Ethel are now free to marry each other: Lady Kew is safely in her grave; Barnes, after his scandalous behavior, would presumably not venture to give much advice to the young couple; Mrs. Mackenzie has been paid off so her rantings, if she chooses to voice them, will be of no avail; and both Clive and Ethel are financially secure. What could be easier than for the author to indulge the reader's romantic

longings and let the hero, still young and handsome, marry the heroine, only more beautiful because she has suffered? But, Thackeray says, in real life such perfect endings do not happen; only in fable land will they live happily-ever-after.

And so Thackeray raises our expectations only to thwart our desires. Bernard Shaw in a similar vein leaves his readers frustrated at the end of *Pygmalion* when Higgins, after he succeeds in transforming the flower girl Eliza into a "consort for a king," does not marry his prodigy.[2] Instead, the marriage that we do get is between Eliza's father and stepmother who are united for the sake of "middle-class morality."[3] In the epilogue Shaw states:

> The rest of the story need not be shown in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imagination were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-me downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its stock of "happy endings" to misfit all stories.[4]

Like Thackeray before him, Shaw refuses to give the desired ending. Eliza does get married, but to "that young fool" Freddy, who, in Higgins's eyes, is a "poor devil who couldn't get a job as an errand boy even if he had the guts to try for it."[5]

John Gay, on the other hand, inverts the pattern at the end of *The Beggar's Opera* to please his audience. In the following scene the Player and Beggar are discussing the ending:

> *Play.* But honest friend, I hope you don't intend that *Macheath* shall be really executed.
>
> *Beg.* Most certainly, Sir.—To make the piece perfect, I was for doing strict poetical Justice.—*Macheath* is to be hang'd; and for the other personages of the Drama, the Audience must have suppos'd they were

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[2]*Four Major Plays: Pygmalion* (New York: Rinehart, 1960) 190.
[3]Shaw, 185.
[4]Shaw, 192.
[5]Shaw, 190.

> all either hang'd or transported.
> *Play*. Why then, friend, this is a down-right Tragedy. The c...astrophe is manifestly wrong, for an Opera must end happily.
> *Beg*. Your objection, Sir, is very just; and is easily remov'd. For you must allow, that in this kind of Drama, 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about—So—you rabble there—run and cry Reprieve—let the prisoner be brought back to his wives in triumph.
> *Play*. All this we must do, to comply with the taste of the town.[6]

Thackeray, however, refuses to comply with the "taste of the town," and ends the novel with the death of the Colonel. But in the epilogue he returns to the fabular framework suggested in the overture and metes out poetic justice to his characters just as in the fable the "frog bursts with wicked rage, the fox is caught in his trap, the lamb is rescued from the wolf, and so forth" (1009). Thackeray understood the power of romance to satisfy the reader's longings so Barnes marries a wife who "bullies" him, Mrs. Mackenzie magnanimously leaves her savings to Clive's son, and "in fable-land somewhere, Ethel and Clive are living most comfortably together."

Vanity Fair as an Intertext of *The Newcomes*

In *The Newcomes* some of the characters which figured prominently in *Vanity Fair* make brief appearances. General Tufto, one of Becky's lewd admirers in Brussels prior to Waterloo, serves as Barnes's "military friend" in his altercation with Colonel Newcome regarding the proposed marriage between Clive and Ethel (711). Lady Kew, we hear, is Lord Steyne's sister, and we are given many opportunities to see the family resemblance. Although not mentioned by name, Dobbin makes an appearance at the Colonel's dinner party in which Clive throws a glass of wine into Barnes's face:

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[6]"The Beggar's Opera," *The Poetical Works of John Gay*, ed. G. C. Faber (London: Oxford UP, 1926) 531.

> The tall greyheaded Englishman, who had been in the east too . . . came and talked with Clive; 'I knew your father in India,' said the gentleman to the lad; 'there is not a more gallant or respected officer in that service. I have a boy too, a stepson, who has just gone into the army; he is older than you, he was born at the end of the Waterloo year, and so was a great friend of his and mine, who was at your school, Sir Rawdon Crawley.'
>
> He was in Gown Boys, I know,' says the boy; 'succeeded his uncle Pitt, fourth baronet. I don't know how his mother—her who wrote the Hymns, you know, and goes to Mr. Honeyman's chapel—comes to be Rebecca, Lady Crawley. His father, Colonel Rawdon Crawley, died at Coventry Island, in August, 182—, and his uncle, Sir Pitt, not until September here. I remember, we used to talk about it at Grey Friars, when I was quite a little chap; and there were bets whether Crawley, I mean the young one, was a baronet or not.' (172-73)

Delicious bits of information here, interwoven so casually with the fabric of the present action. Dobbin's praise of the Colonel is high praise indeed, and Georgy, as expected, follows in his father's footsteps. But of more interest is Clive's innocent comments about Becky. Even though we have the picture of Becky at the end of *Vanity Fair* minding the charity bazaar, her writing hymns like Emily Hornblower, Lady Southdown's daughter, and sitting demurely in her pew watching Honeyman's theatrics, are highly amusing. For the second time Becky gets oh so close to being Lady Crawley in reality, not just in name. By having his characters spill over from one novel to another, Thackeray implies that, as in life, the characters have a life independent of the part they play in the novel, making them more life-like. Pen, while narrating the action of *The Newcomes*, is living his own *Bildungsroman*, but we have to read *Pendennis* to hear that story. The technique suggests first of all the arbitrary nature of what is included in a novel, and secondly that Thackeray's fictive world is coterminous and parallel with the world of the reader.

In another intertextual echo, Thackeray implicitly compares the pattern of the

marriage of convenience of *The Newcomes* to the love marriage pattern established in *Vanity Fair*. Although the reader's abhorrence of the degrading barter of women is clearly one of Thackeray's objectives, by comparing the two marriage patterns we find that neither one is inherently far superior.

In *The Newcomes*, unhappy marriages abound. Colonel Newcome marries Mrs. Casey because he cannot marry his true love; Clive marries Rosey to please his father. Madame de Florac's marriage is arranged by her parents, and her son Florac marries Miss Higg of Manchester for money. Sir Brian and Lady Ann in their nuptial agreement merge money and aristocratic blood; their son Barnes marries Lady Clara for the same reasons. The sordidness and, in the case of Barnes and Clara, devastating outcomes of these transactions are satirized by Thackeray. But when we compare these marriages to those in *Vanity Fair*, there is not that much difference; here too, marital bliss eludes the participants. Rawdon, Amelia, and Dobbin are all eventually disillusioned in their love interests. The love is usually one-sided, as the narrator comments: "Some cynical Frenchman has said that there are two parties to a love-transaction: the one who loves and the other who condescends to be so treated" (148).

Lord Kew seems to be Thackeray's spokesman when he remonstrates against Clive for criticizing the marriage between Barnes and Clara:

> And as for this romance of love . . . this fine picture of Jenny and Jessamy falling in love at first sight, billing and cooing in an arbour, and retiring to a cottage afterwards to go on cooing and billing—Pshaw! what folly is this! It is good for romances, and for misses to sigh about; but any man who walks through the world with his eyes open, knows how senseless is all this rubbish. I don't say that a young man and woman are not to meet, and to fall in love that instant, and to marry that day year, and love each other till they are a hundred; that is the supreme lot—but that is the lot which the gods only grant to Bancis and

> Philemon, and a very, very few besides. As for the rest, they must compromise; make themselves as comfortable as they can, and take the good and the bad together. And as for Jenny and Jessamy, by Jove! look round among your friends, count up the love matches, and see what has been the end of most of them! (392)

And indeed, most of them have met dismal ends. Even Jack Belsize and Clara are miserable after they are finally united: Jack "does not like home except for a short while in the hunting season," and when he is at home, "he is away all day" (776). Thackeray's own marriage with Isabella probably contributed to his jaundiced view of the transitory nature of young love. Thackeray's allusion to the archetypal eternally happy couple, Baucis and Philemon from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, links this text to the conclusion of *Vanity Fair*. At their deaths, Baucis was transformed into an oak tree and Philemon into a linden tree, their branches intertwining at the top. But in the human story the oak is strangled by the parasitic vine.

The vanity of all human desire is a theme foregrounded in *Vanity Fair*, but it is also important in *The Newcomes*. The ending of the novel with the death of Colonel Newcome, although depicted as a conventional Victorian death scene, appropriately emphasizes the vanity of human endeavor. In both novels death is treated in an unsentimental, matter-of-fact way. In *Vanity Fair*, the discussion about death elicited by the passing of John Sedley, as Juliet McMaster has pointed out, is directed at the reader to contemplate his own death, not specifically at Mr Sedley.[7] George's death is relegated to a subordinate clause: "Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart" (406). Mrs. Sedley, John Osborne, Pitt and his young son, and Rawdon are similarly disposed of unceremoniously. In *The Newcomes*, too, most deaths are dismissed coldly as mere plot information. We hear

[7] *Thackeray: The Major Novels*, 6-8.

of Major Pendennis's death by the way long after it has occurred. Of James Binnie, the Colonel's good friend, Pen says that he "passed into the Campaigner's keeping, from which alone he was rescued by the summons of pallid death" (842). Sir Brian has his last seizure while Ethel is in Paris, who quickly returns home, but "A few hours after her arrival, all the vanities of the world were over for him: and Sir Barnes Newcome, Baronet, reigned in his stead" (638). Lady Kew's and Rosey's deaths are given in newspaper announcements. Lady Kew's death is significant only because it postpones the marriage of Ethel and Lord Farintosh; Ethel shows no grief at parting from her. In the headletter for Chapter 55, the chapter in which Lady Kew dies, a crocodile

Headletter for Chapter 55

is seen crying over the grave of a loved one. The narrator is philosophical when he apostrophizes Rosey after her passing: "Not many tears were there to water her lonely grave . . . . Poor little harmless lady! no more childish triumphs and vanities, no more hidden griefs are you to enjoy and suffer; and earth closes over your simple pleasures and tears!" (1003). The deaths help to exemplify the repeating pattern that after a life of vanity the grave awaits us all: "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? / One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever" (Eccl.1: 3-4). This theme is made explicit when, after Sir Brian's death, Lady Ann rents out Park Lane:

> . . . Park Lane is the best situation in London, and Lady Ann's means were greatly improved by the annual produce of the house in Park Lane: which, as we all know, was occupied by a foreign minister for several

> subsequent seasons. Strange mutations of fortune; old places; new faces; what Londoner does not see and speculate upon them every day? Celia's boudoir, who is dead with the daisies over her at Kensal Green, is now the chamber where Delia is consulting Dr. Locock, or Julia's children are romping: Florio's dining tables have now Pollio's wine upon them: Calista, being a widow, and (to the surprise of everybody who knew Trimalchio, and enjoyed his famous dinners) left but very poorly off, lets the house and the rich, chaste, and appropriate planned furniture, by Dowbiggin, and the proceeds go to keep her little boys at Eton. The next year, as Mr. Clive Newcome drove by the once familiar mansion . . . alien faces looked from over the flowers in the balconies. He got a card for an entertainment from the occupant of the mansion, H.E. the Bulgarian minister; and there was the same crowd in the reception room and on the stairs, the same grave men from Gunter's distributing the refreshments in the dining-room, the same old Smee, R.A. (always in the room where the edibles were) cringing and flattering to the new occupants; and the same effigy of poor Sir Brian, in his deputy-lieutenant's uniform, looking blankly down from over the sideboard, at the feast which his successors were giving. (640-41)

The allusions to Petronius's *Satyricon* emphasize the endlessly repeating pattern, and Colonel Newcome's death must be seen in this same light. The vanity of his days are over, and he will be remembered for a little while, and then forgotten.

VI: ARCHETYPAL NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND THE UNCERTAIN NARRATOR IN *VANITY FAIR* AND *THE NEWCOMES*

Thackeray is what in metafictional terms today is called a self-conscious or self-reflexive novelist. His purpose is not to draw the reader into the illusion of reality depicted in his novels and have him identify with his characters; in fact, Thackeray continually draws the reader's attention to the fact that he is reading fiction, that the narrative is an artifice created by the writer. One of the most important narrative techniques that Thackeray uses to involve the reader and to draw attention to the fictiveness of his text is that of the intrusive, but frequently uncertain, narrator, the narrator in cap and bells.

Just as Thackeray's juxtaposition of romantic archetypal character and plot patterns with ironically realistic ones creates a sense of dislocation in the reader, so his use of the unreliable or mystified narrator in place of the conventional omniscient narrator forces the role of interpreter on the reader. Whereas the omniscient narrator usually takes the reader by the hand and guides him in how to interpret the text before him, Thackeray's narrator provides no such facile aid. In fact, the narrator's protean nature and frequent admission of ignorance disrupts the text and places the onus on the reader to complete the narrative.

The roles of the narrator and reader are crucial to the way Thackeray wants his novels to be read. By placing his narrator between the characters and the reader, Thackeray creates a distancing effect which allows the reader not only to judge the actions of the characters, but also to reflect on his own behavior in similar situations. This interplay of text and reader response is to a large degree responsible for the dynamic nature of Thackeray's novels. As Juliet McMaster says, "the life of the novels

comes not just from the vitality of the characters and actions depicted in them, but from the tone and reactions of the man who tells the story; and more—from the reader's own personal responses, elicited, though not determined, by his."[1]

The role of the reader is also important in Thackeray's fiction. As Wayne Booth points out, "The author creates . . . an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement."[2] The 'implied' reader in Thackeray's novels must be constantly alert to the vagaries of the narrator, and as such must be a willing, active participant during the reading process. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray ironically depicts a 'real' reader in the hypothetical Jones:

> All which details [of the fond farewells of Amelia's friends before she leaves Miss Pinkerton's Academy], I have no doubt, Jones, who reads this book at his Club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish, trivial, twaddling, and ultra-sentimental. Yes; I can see Jones at this minute (rather flushed with his joint of mutton and half-pint of wine), taking out his pencil and scoring under the words 'foolish, twaddling,' &c., and adding to them his own remark of *'quite true'*. Well, he is a lofty man of genius, and admires the great and heroic in life and novels; and so had better take warning and go elsewhere (8).

The equivalent of Jones in *The Newcomes* is the critic, Solomon, who "sits in judgement over us authors and chops up our children" (4). What Thackeray wants in his reader is not someone who will dismiss the narrative categorically, but someone who will question, analyze, deduce, and so on, in an effort to discover the meaning inherent in the text.

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[1] *Thackeray: The Major Novels*, 2.

[2] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961) 138.

Thackeray, self-consciously drawing attention to his narrative as a work of art, does not try to "represent reality itself, but aims rather at producing an idea of how reality can be experienced."[3] The organizing principle that Thackeray uses is to present the characters, actions, and events from different perspectives, which the reader then must try to integrate into a consistent pattern. This pattern he then projects on to the text and also applies to his own life.

Thackeray's fascination with the difficulty of knowing the truth lies behind his use of the unreliable narrator and his "authorial intrusion" into the fictive world of his characters.[4] By giving the reader multiple perspectives of characters and events, and by assuming a narrative voice that is congenial and coaxing, addressing the reader confidentially as "dear reader," "friendly reader," and the like, Thackeray hopes to gain from the reader the complicitous participation required for a full understanding of the meaning of the text.

In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray uses a narrator whose reliability is, at times, questionable. Like the characters whose story he tells, he assumes different roles, from Manager of the Performance to reporter to a fellow traveller of Dobbin and Amelia in Pumpernickel. His protean nature is not only useful in allowing for different perspectives, but also reflects Thackeray's preoccupation with identity, with the fragmentation of the human psyche. The role of the reader, then, is to determine what is true behind the pose of both characters and narrator, to look beyond the illusions of masks and roles to the real.

The meaning of a Thackerayan novel lies in the "convergence of text and

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[3]Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 104.

[4]*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 42.

reader."[5] The reader in a sense co-creates the literary work by taking the kaleidoscopic views presented to him by the narrator and working out a consistent pattern. With the aid of the narrator, he 'discovers' the meaning of the text.

But the narrator cannot always be trusted. He will sometimes lure the reader into making a self-righteous moral judgment and then chastise him for doing so. Pen himself draws attention to this ironic technique in *The Newcomes* when he comments on Ethel's treatment of Clive:

> Calling him back after she had dismissed him, and finding pretext after pretext to see him—why did the girl encourage him, as she certainly did? I allow, with Mrs. Grundy and most moralists, that Miss Newcome's conduct in this matter was highly reprehensible; that if she did not intend to marry Clive she should have broken with him altogether . . . . But coquetry, but kindness, but family affection, and a strong, very strong partiality for the rejected lover—are these not to be taken into account, and to plead as excuses for her behaviour to her cousin? The least unworthy part of her conduct, some critics will say, was that desire to see Clive and be well with him: as she felt the greatest regard for him the showing it was not blameable; and every flutter which she made to escape out of the meshes which the world had cast about her, was but the natural effort at liberty. . . . See! I began by siding with Mrs. Grundy and the world, and at the next turn of the see-saw have lighted down on Ethel's side, and am disposed to think that the very best part of her conduct has been those escapades which—which right-minded persons most justly condemn. (694)

Thackeray shows us two ways of evaluating Ethel's behavior, and although it is difficult to dismiss either, the reader must select the one that fits the configuration of his interpretation, realizing at the same time that his choice eliminates a viable alternative. Sometimes the complexity and ambiguity of Thackeray's rhetoric makes it difficult to arrive at a clear interpretation of what it all means. As Rawlins has argued in reference to the narrators' commentaries in Thackeray's novels, "irresolution . . . is the basic

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[5] *The Implied Reader*, 275.

pattern of Thackeray's lectures—an argument, a change of mind, and a final turn of the screw that reduces everything to uncertainty."[6] Indeed, much of Thackeray's irony goes beyond meaning the opposite of what the textual language suggests.

The reader, confronted with different perspectives that inevitably interact with each other, is forced to move forwards and backwards constantly in trying to make sense of the text. As Iser says, "during the process of reading, there is an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection."[7] In *Vanity Fair*, the narrator reacts to Amelia's behavior when George comes to see her after having been chastized by Dobbin for his long absences:

> . . . she went fluttering to Lieutenant George Osborne's heart as if it was the only natural home for her to nestle in. Oh, thou poor panting little soul! The very finest tree in the whole forest, with the straightest stem, and the strongest arms, and the thickest foliage, wherein you choose to build and coo, may be marked, for what you know, and may be down with a crash ere long. What an old, old simile that is, between man and timber! (147)

The narrator's depiction of George as the "finest tree in the whole forest" is, of course, ludicrous. The passage anticipates George's death at Waterloo where he is brought "down with a crash." The bird and tree imagery looks ahead to the ending: "The bird has come in at last. There it is with its head on his shoulder, billing and cooing close up to his heart, with soft outstretched fluttering wings. . . . God bless you, honest William!—Farewell, dear Amelia—Grow green again, tender little parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling" (871). The irony in the first selection is directed mainly at George, and the narrator's attitude toward the "poor panting little soul" is rather one of sentimental sympathy for such helplessness. However, with each repetition of "dear little prize" (156), "poor little Amelia" (170), "gentle little heart"

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[6] *A Fiction that is True*, 172.

[7] *The Implied Reader*, 282.

(214), "poor little creature" (319), and so on, it becomes clear that the narrator is making fun of Amelia. With every use of "little" Amelia sinks further in the reader's regard, and the "tender little parasite" leaves no doubt about the narrator's attitude toward her. Although the oak at the end is Dobbin, not George, the reader has already discovered in Dobbin's idolatry of Amelia that "the major was a spoony" (844). As he creates illusions of what is to come and looks back to past actions and imagery, the reader is constantly reevaluating his judgment of the characters.

Thackeray's purpose in both *Vanity Fair* and *The Newcomes* is not to emphasize the dramatic intensity of the stories he is telling, but to involve the reader in examining his own values and beliefs. The novels are still read today, not only because of their historical significance in the panoramic view they give of the Regency and Victorian societies, but also because the reader must judge himself and his modern society. Thackeray's technique of moving from the specific actions of the characters to the reader is seen in numerous examples throughout both novels. In "Before the Curtain" in *Vanity Fair* the narrator asks that his reader have a "reflective turn of mind" so that he can turn the insights gained from his observances of the Fair onto himself (1). He returns to the same theme a little later when he addresses the reader directly:

> O brother wearers of motley! Are there not moments when one grows sick of grinning and tumbling, and the jingling of cap and bells? This, dear friends and companions, is my amiable object—to walk with you through the Fair, to examine the shops and the shows there; and that we should all come home after the fairs, and the noise, and the gaiety, and be perfectly miserable in private. (227-28)

So Thackeray does not want his reader to lose himself in the action of the story and identify with the characters, but rather to remain at a distance and judge them, using what he has learned about the characters to become more self-aware of his own

behavior.

In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray begins a paragraph by talking about Becky's hypocrisy in her relationship with Rawdon, and ends by indicting all women:

> 'If he had but a little more brains,' she thought to herself, 'I might make something of him;' but she never let him perceive the opinion she had of him; listened with indefatigable complacency to his stories of the stable and the mess; laughed at all his jokes . . . . When he came home she was alert and happy: when he went out she pressed him to go: when he stayed at home, she played and sang for him . . . . 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 . . . . Who has not seen a woman hide the dullness of a stupid husband, or coax the fury of a savage one? We accept this amiable slavishness, and praise a woman for it: we call this pretty treachery truth. (208)

The reader willingly accepts the narrator's pointing an accusing finger at Becky's deception because we have seen her do it before, and besides, Rawdon is himself a cheat. We can judge her from a safe distance and chuckle as we picture her in the role of the perfect housewife. But when the narrator in a serious vein goes on to condemn all housewives for hypocrisy, the picture changes to a more disquieting one. The rhetorical question, "Who has not seen a woman hide the dullness of a stupid husband, or coax the fury of a savage one?", not only confronts every reader with the husbands and wives of his own circle, but also asks every wife to examine her relationship with her husband and vice versa.

The death of Sir Pitt in *The Newcomes* follows the same rhetorical pattern:

> The members of the family and servants of the house kept away from the gloomy spot, where the bones of the descendant of an ancient line of knights and gentlemen lay, awaiting their final consignment to the family crypt. No regrets accompanied them, save those of the poor woman who had hoped to be Sir Pitt's wife and widow, and who had fled in disgrace

> from the Hall over which she had so nearly been a ruler. Beyond her and a favourite old pointer he had, and between whom and himself an attachment subsisted during the period of his imbecility, the old man had not a single friend to mourn him, having indeed, during the whole course of his life, never taken the least pains to secure one. Could the best and kindest of us who depart from the earth, have an opportunity of revisiting it, I suppose he or she . . . would have a pang of mortification at finding how soon our survivors were consoled. And so Sir Pitt was forgotten—like the kindest and best of us—only a few weeks sooner. (529-30)

Very few readers, I presume, would feel very sorry for Sir Pitt's wretched demise. And the only reason Miss Horrocks feels regret is because she is disappointed that her efforts reaped such a meager harvest. The cliché that dog is man's best friend in this context is humorous rather than pathetic. So we heartily agree with the narrator's assessment of Sir Pitt's death, and do not feel the need to chastise the callousness of his survivors. But when Thackeray asks us to look forward to our own inevitable deaths, the judgment which we gave so easily on Sir Pitt's account somehow does not seem appropriate. We feel we deserve better, and look suspiciously on our friends and family for their anticipated cold and unsympathetic behavior. Thackeray's repeated pattern of moving from the realm of the narrative action to the reader's life effectively draws the reader into experiencing the novel.

Through Thackeray's narrative technique, the reader bridges the gap between the fiction of the characters' lives and the reader's own life. But having been shown that the characters create fictions to live by, that their overt behavior consists of role playing, the reader, by examining his conduct, confronts his own illusions, and sees that his behavior is a sham too. What Thackeray succeeds in doing in his novels is to show that fiction and reality are not very different.

VII: CONCLUSION

No one who has read *Vanity Fair* and *The Newcomes* ever forgets Becky Sharp and Colonel Newcome. A friend of mine tells a story of an irate classmate admonishing her male professor who she thought had praised Becky too highly in his lecture on *Vanity Fair*. "How would you like to be married to Becky?" she asked in an indignant voice. Unperturbed, and without hesitation, he answered, "How do you know I'm not?"

The anecdote points to the archetypal nature of Becky; in fact, many of Thackeray's fictive creations have archetypal associations from mythology, the Bible, classical literature, fables, and so on. Yet Thackeray creates unique, unforgettable characters by juxtaposing different patterns in the same person, and by sometimes inverting the pattern instead of completing it.

Thackeray's ironic technique is especially noticeable in that he sets up expectations in his narrative patterns, only to frustrate the reader's desires. He gives us romance endings, a wedding in *Vanity Fair* and a death scene in *The Newcomes*, but without the conventional satisfying conclusions. If a good read for a reader means passively being allowed to escape into the fantasy world of the fiction, Thackeray denies his reader such a pleasure. The reader of Thackeray's novels is constantly taken up short and must of necessity become involved in the action. As the reader follows the various perspectives offered by the text and relates the different views and patterns to one another he becomes an active participant in the creation of the literary work.

Thackeray's allusiveness helps to puncture the belief that literature reflects reality. That what the reader is reading is an illusion created by the author is a point that Thackeray makes often in his novels. On the other hand, the realistic details included in

the literary work reflect on and flesh out the archetypes which have been evoked. A study of the intertextual matrices of Thackeray's novels shows that he expected his readers to be well versed in the literature of the past as well as be aware of the cultural and social currents of his own day. Only then does the reader have the satisfaction of participating in a universal experience.

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