

## William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*

### The Complete Absence of the Traditional Hero

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#### Abstract:

This paper aims to study William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* by using an analytical method of the central theme of the novel, its main characters as well as some of the minor, important characters. It begins with a general introduction about the novelist and his age and literary career followed by the first section which is a brief review of the characters and events of the novel. The second section analyses the very details of the novel depending on its plot and the conversations between characters. The third section asserts the hypothesis of the study and the conclusion shows that William Thackeray had managed in achieving a narrative form, unprecedented by any of his contemporaries, in which there is no role for the traditional hero.

**Keywords:** William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, The Victorian Age, Novel.

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## رواية وليم ثاكري "سوق الغرور"

### الغياب التام للبطل التقليدي

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#### ملخص:

يتطرق هذا البحث الى رواية "سوق الغرور" للروائي الإنكليزي وليم ثاكري (1811 - 1863) الذي يعد واحدا من أهم الروائيين في العصر الفيكتوري. وتدور أحداث هذه الرواية في إنكلترا أثناء الحقبة النابليونية. ولأثبات الفرضية العامة للبحث تم اعتماد منهج التحليل الدقيق للشخصيات الرئيسية في الرواية أولا، ثم بعض الشخصيات الثانوية المؤثرة، وموضوعة الرواية المركزية ثانيا. وقد قسمت البحث إلى مقدمة عامة عن الكاتب وانجازة الأدبي وعصره، تلاها الجزء الأول وهو عرض موجز لأحداث الرواية وشخصياتها، ثم الجزء الثاني الذي يحلل الرواية بتفاصيلها الدقيقة اعتمادا على الأحداث والحوار بين الشخصيات وبعده الجزء الثالث الذي يطرح فرضية البحث كما تم التوصل إليها. وقد توصل البحث إلى أن الروائي وليم ثاكري قد نجح في تقديم صيغة سردية لم يسبقه إليها أحد من معاصريه وهي الإلغاء التام لدور البطل الروائي التقليدي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وليم ثاكري؛ سوق الغرور؛ العصر الفيكتوري؛ رواية.

#### Introduction:

Richmond Thackeray, was an official in the British administration in India. After his death in 1815, he left only a son: William. The orphan young man was obliged to go back to England to attend school and then Trinity College in 1828 which he didn't enjoy and left two years later to study law for another two years. He was a talented painter to the degree that he became a professional painter. Many of his early experiments in writing were beautifully

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attached to some of his own paintings. He married an Irish girl in 1836, while studying art in Paris. However, he managed to live in Paris by writing for a newspaper. In 1837, he left his work and Paris also and returned to London to be a hardworking journalist<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is widely agreeable, for all the literary historians, that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was distinguished by the appearance and spread of the magazines as the unique device for culture and publishing, mainly in England and in some other parts of the continent to certain degrees. The magazine was carefully designed to achieve wide interest and agreement for the major sects of common readers in society. Most of the famous Victorian novelists like Dickens, Disraeli, Trollope and Mrs. Gaskell wrote and published their novels serially in weekly and monthly magazines. As for Thackeray, he wrote many literary opinions on many different issues and was noticed as an active reviewer to some famous periodicals in London. He collected these early writings in *Miscellanies*, 4 vol. (1855-57), *Major Gahagan* (1838-39), a fantasy of a British soldier in India; *Catherine* (1839-40), a crime story, *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Diamond* (1841) a sarcastic description of family life shortly after marriage ; *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1856), a historical novel; *The Book of Snobs* (1848), in which he collected some of his contributions in a magazine called *Punch* under the title " The Snobs of England, by One of Themselves"<sup>2</sup>. But it is also agreeable that the serial publication of *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) was the actual cause of both Thackeray's rise and reputation as a novelist, and since that date he announced himself as a well known member in the Victorian literary movement.

#### I. Review of Literature

A great deal of discussion of William Thackeray as one of the notable novelists of the Victorian Age and his novel *Vanity Fair* will be found in early studies. His work had

been well received as reviews in English magazines almost immediately by his contemporaries' comments like those of Charlotte Bronte, John Forster and Robert Bell in 1848 and later in Antony Trollope's comments on the novel and its major characters in 1867.

Pioneer studies on Thackeray and his master piece should be also mentioned here for they had early announced William Thackeray as an observer and critic of the social scene and relations in the Victorian Age. These include W.C. Brownell's *Victorian Prose Masters* (London:1901), Charles Whibley's *William Makepeace Thackeray* (London: 1903) and Percy Lubbock's comments appeared in *Vanity Fair* in *The Craft of Fiction* (London;1921).

Thackeray's distinguished style and themes has been noticed and closely analyzed by modern critics and researchers as well. The critic Kathleen Tilloston in *novels of the Eighties Forties* (Oxford :1954).

discussed Thackeray's approach of the (land) between middle classes and the aristocracy to consider Thackeray as a social novelist and critic more intelligent than many of his contemporaries. Edgar F. Harden in his book, *Vanity Fair* (London:1977) praised the significance of narrative form in the novel, Barbara Hardy in *The Exposure of Luxury* (London:1979), pointed out the social analysis and dramatic sensibility in the novel and A. E. Dyson in *Essays in Irony* (London:1980), considered *Vanity fair* as one of the most important examples of characterization, irony and explicit moralizing in English fiction.

This study has made use of the previous works and depends on some others that closely serve and enhance its main hypothesis as it is shown in the references at the end.

Moreover the study tries to draw a certain way towards its own contribution among the great amount of studies and notable works on the novelist and his work in order to achieve the objective of the study, and to point out William Thackeray's unprecedented method in writing a novel without depending on any central hero. The assumption which is brought out through a close analysis of the theme and characters of the novel.

## II. Characters and Events

For all scholars and students of English literature, *Vanity fair* is considered to be one of the classic books that form the fictional achievement in the Victorian Age and it is necessary to be acquaintance to it as one of the important entrances to the whole age. Its action takes place in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is considered by the historians to be a critical era in England and Europe as well. The narration is deeply involved in covering the contrastive lines of the fortunes of the two ladies: Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp who, although friends since their childhood, have many differences: Amelia is wealthy and wellborn whereas Becky Sharp is poor, scheming, ambitious and amoral. But the careful reader will soon discover that the contrast between the characters of the two women is not a plain, simple one between good and evil as the custom in the early English novels. Putting the subtitle "A novel Without a Hero" declares that the author, deliberately means not to award any of the characters the honor of heroism neither the role of the narrator. Consciously, Thackeray breaks with the conventions that ruled the Victorian novel for a long time: a hero, villain, wicked plots, final marriage and the rest of it. With a clear touch of technical experiment, the narration is not introduced to the reader by one of the characters' scope or voice, it is a calm and neuter narration that keep a fair distance away from all the characters and doesn't belong to any, so the reader is not demanded to take any side. Here, the whole scene of social life is the subject and the field as well. The novel is antiheroic because a certain hero will dominate the circumstances in the

narration, but in *Vanity Fair* Thackeray means to say, and prove at the same time, that every human is dominated by circumstance, in fact "Everyone is the slave of circumstances"<sup>(3)</sup>. The novelist, Thackeray clearly declares the target of his work, it is to say "that we are for the most time... foolish and selfish people...all eager after vanities"<sup>(4)</sup>. Following, in details, many ironies and incidents in the lives of the two women, the novelist smartly managed to uncover the hypocrisy, stupidity and vanity of people from all sections and classes in the English – Victorian - society. The novel evolves themes of depiction and manipulation, as most characters attempt to get personal benefits by exploiting other characters through marriage, business deals or other ways.

Following this contrast through many attitudes and human conditions results what critics used to call " A panorama of early 19<sup>th</sup> century society"<sup>(5)</sup>. It is the vivid movement and color of this panorama that make *Vanity Fair* Thackeray's master piece and great literary achievement. The professional, talented way of narration, the subtle drawing of characters and sincere description also make it "one of the outstanding novels of its period"<sup>(6)</sup>. But we cannot, simply classify *Vanity Fair* as a mere depiction or criticism towards a certain social sample. Rather, the reader of the novel is made conscious, throughout the narration, of the ambivalence of Man desires and motives to the degree to be ready to comprehend the novelist's moral lesson which is delivered, at the end, as a conclusion of the novel: " Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire satisfied?"<sup>(7)</sup>. This tragic and ironic statement makes *Vanity Fair* "a lasting and insightful evaluation of human ambition and experience"<sup>(8)</sup>. It is to emphasize the moral message of the novel that Thackeray borrowed the title of his novel "from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress*"<sup>(9)</sup>. where *Vanity Fair* is the center of human corruption; where earthly pleasures and temptations hinder Man in his sacred way to heavenly salvation.

The novelist, Thackeray, designs the two major, female characters strongly and amusingly contrasted to shed a light on the powerful judgments that affect life in 'Vanity Fair'. The first, Becky Sharp, begins in a low social position to reach a high rank and then come down. However, she gets a satisfactory resolutions at the end. The other, Amelia Sedley, goes in an opposing line, when her friend Becky enjoys a good social position, she deteriorates down the ladder, but finally she gets up. Life throw them apart for many years in which they follow their fortunes, to meet in the last chapters and settle down, the thing that made their contrastive ways so clear.

The narration begins with the two girls leave an academy for young ladies to face the wide world after finishing their school days. Rebecca (Becky) Sharp doesn't feel happy in her childhood. Her father was a careless, drunken, unsuccessful artist and her dead mother was a French singer. She learns to depend on her own gifts to live. Aged seventeen, she is taken to teach French for her food and lodging. She is pale, sandy- haired with green eyes and looks that she had experienced hard times. She is not beautiful but she has a strong fascination. In spite of her being unfriendly, she manages to pretend modesty, simplicity and gentleness. Her social ambition is the great motive force behind all her actions. She sacrifices husband, child and friends to a social position. Beckey decides to occupy a place for herself in the fair and struggles to achieve that aim, to the degree that she turns to be a merciless social climber. Her weapons in the struggle are her witness and intelligence. She never shows her tears to other, but she cannot resist some tears because she says 'No' when the wealthy, old man Sir Pitt Crawley offers to marry her because she has already marries his son, Rawdon. She treats Rawdon Crawley, as merely "an errand-man", and because of her superiority he becomes "Mrs. Crawley's husband" (p.99). Although she has enough money, she does not go to his rescue when he is imprisoned because of debts. When he goes to the war she also doesn't care or

shed a tear, moreover, she estimates her chances to entrap a French Duke in case of his death. She is also heartless as a mother, she shows love and affection for her son only to gain sympathy of others.

Becky's climbing efforts succeeds; she fulfills her ambitions and wins social prestige, rank and power to the degree that she is presented at the Royal Court where she shines brilliantly. But when she is at the climax of her fame and popularity, her decline begins as if she is punished for her ill-treatment of her husband and neglect of her son. She disappears from the London scene after being discovered in a compromising position with Lord Steyne: Her husband returns home out of prison to find her singing, reclining on a sofa, in a beautiful gown, blazing with diamonds, and "Lord Steyne bending over her hand, which he was kissing." (p.190). She begins a wandering in Europe where she sinks into degradation, she drinks and finds loose companions. When fate throws Jos Sedely, Amelia's elder brother, in her path, she obtains the means to end her days respectably that we see her last as a charitable dowager. The critic Tilak finds in the character of Becky "one of the most outstanding characters in the English novel and a triumph of Thackeray's art"<sup>(10)</sup>. Intelligent and revolt, Becky Sharp could also stands for every woman in her circumstances and age; and though a strongly individual character, she is the type of a civilization "a small scale model of a world, a microcosm in which the social macrocosm is subtilized and intensified and made significant"<sup>(11)</sup>.

Unlike Becky, Amelia Sedley lives a happy childhood and enjoys what money and rank position offer in the fair. Protected by her parents, she leads a sheltered existence. She is privileged pupil at Miss Pinkerton's Academy. Amelia Sedley is a lovely and friendly girl, such plain virtue involves some defects. She is considered to be naïve and feeble to certain degree. The character of the gentle and tender Amelia is an obvious example of Thackeray's custom to make his virtuous characters "rather unintelligent, and colorless"<sup>(12)</sup>. With an adorable purity,



she lacks self- confident and ignorance of man's ways. Her most significant role in the novel is to act as a foil to Beckey, in other words, a positive foil to give balance against the negative example of Beckey. When she marries to the wealthy, snob, George Osborne who betrays and deserts her, Amelia shows weak humility and blind loyalty. Old Osborne, the hard- hearted, wealthy merchant disagrees his son's, George marriage to Amelia and disinherits him. George Osborne is killed in the Battle of Waterloo and the beautiful widow realizes, in her grief, that she has been left almost penniless. However, a new hope in life comes to her with her son's birth. Motherhood makes her blossom again, and her being is wholly occupied with little Osborne. Ultimately, we see Amelia as the only character in the novel who achieves self-knowledge, really matures and wins the award for her virtues to serve the moral message of the book. At last she awakens to her own selfish folly and recognizes the generous affection of Major Dobbin, her old devoted lover who appears to save her like the knights in the old romance. She also realizes that it was Major Dobbin who had been supporting her and her parents over the years, that was it was he who persuades old Mr. Osborne to accept and take care of his grandson, little George and he is the only true friend that she has got in the world. It is through marriage with this sincere friend that she achieves at last, security, happiness and prosperity.

The contrast between the two women is clearly the contrast between heartlessness and devotion, between an active and a passive nature. The two friends are simply the opposite of each other in their lives and attitudes. It is too clear that Amelia's simplicity, plainness and trust in others is the actual cause after her being a good model that stands to appose Becky's hateful hypocrisy. It is true that the two young ladies attractive, but it is true also that men have different reasons to follow each of them. As for Becky, they prefer her smart looks besides her beauty. On the other hand, they are attracted by Amelia's gentle nature and beauty of the soul.

Becky, as it is mentioned before, can easily control herself and prevent her tears; whereas Amelia cries over many trivial things such as a death of a bird or melodramatic situation in a novel.

Other characters in the novel are subjected to the same contrast, so that the parallel structure extends to the men who enter Amelia's and Becky's lives; they are similarly oppose each other, similarly self-deceived. George Osborne, Amelia's unworthy lover and husband, is led by egotism and snobbery first to neglect and finally to destroy her genuine devotion. The only son of a wealthy merchant, he gets the best of education, joins the army, and waste money in drinking and gambling. His shallow nature cannot feel a love equal to that of his loyal wife: Amelia, so, he selfishly neglects her for other affairs. However, he undergoes a change of heart at the eve of Waterloo, as if he feels his approaching death, repents his neglect of his wife and asks Dobbin, his close friend to take care of her. On the contrary; Major William Dobbin, is chivalrous and generous. He helps the poor and fights for the weak. He is the only character in the novel, completely embodied Thackeray's opinion of a gentleman, "whose aims are generous, whose truth is constant and not constant in its kind, but elevated in its degree, manly sympathy for the great and the small"(p.107). His love of Amelia is totally unselfish that he helps to bring out her marriage to his friend and schoolmate: George Osborne. Critics of the English novels have criticized the character of Major Dobbin for blind, or a dog-like, love to Amelia. But the critic Arnold Kettle has the view that Major Dobbin serves an important purpose in the novel: " He is not a hero, but he is a rock, or rather an oak, around which the tender parasite clings"<sup>(13)</sup>.

Rawdon Crawley, Becky's husband, is a good natured man but self indulgent. Like George Osborne, he has brought up in wealth and prosperity: son of Sir Pitt, the rich Baronet. He also gambles and drinks. The novelist presents him to be " a heavy dragon with strong

desires and small brains, who had never controlled a passion in his life" (p.181). It is his marriage to Becky that tames him. He accepts her superiority and admires her wit and intelligence. He has absolute faith in her that " he becomes a mere puppet in her hands" (p.182). But his character is clearly developed to prove dignity and self- respecting. When he discovers Becky's treason, he strikes Lord Steyne and challenges him to a duel to avenge his honor. His love for his young son, Rawdon, is the most remarkable thing in his life and while Becky neglects the boy, he becomes both his nurse and playmate.

The minor characters in the novel are similarly contrasted: John Sedley, father of Amelia and Joseph, is kind and self- deceived. He represents the older merchant class in English society, which is, according to the events of the novel, is ruined by the pushing and shrewd, new merchant class in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. After his financial ruin, Mr. Sedley dies in Poverty. This character is put to contrast another wealthy old man: Mr. John Osborne, father of George Osborne and Amelia's father-in-law. He represents the new merchant class in society which is shrewd and calculating. A tuff ruler who imposes fear at his home. A clear example of the vanity fair; He allows the marriage of his son, John to Amelia in one condition: that she has a wealth. Moreover, he disowns his son and tries to force him to marry another wealthy heiress. But, quite long after his son's death in Waterloo, he expresses love and kindness for his little grandson and decides to take him in his custody. In the same way, the cunning, cruel and neglectful to his wife, old Sir Pitt Crawley, who symbolizes the corruption of the landed gentry of England, is contrasted with his stupid egoistic brother Bute. The rich spinster, Miss Crawley, Sir Pett's half-sister is outraged at Rawdon's marriage with a governess (Becky Sharp) and disinherit him. The professedly unworldly Lady Bareacres is absorbed in procuring a rich marriage for her daughter. Even the farcical characters who provide the light relief of the book contribute to illustrate its main thesis. Mrs. O'Dowd is ignorant that everyone does not admire

the glories of her Irish ancestry as much as she does; the humors of Jos Sedley turn on the fact that a fat poltroon can persuade himself that he is an Adonis and a fire-eater. Every member of the large cast of the novel reveals himself in some degree as a victim of his own or other people's deception. Relentlessly the veils are torn away from characters, comic and serious. Without rancor, with pity even, their author exhibits the hidden strings, at the command of which, all unknowing, his puppets dance. And then, "Ah, *Vanitas Vanitatum* he says, which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire or having it satisfied? – come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out." (p.291) Those words are given as the conclusion of the whole narration; as "the curtain falls the puppet – master steps out and openly declares the moral which has hovered behind every sentence of its thousand pages"<sup>(14)</sup>.

### III. Analyzing the Plot

Thackeray ends his narration with a famous quotation from the Holy Book: "Vanitas Vanitatum of vanity of vanities, all is vanity". It is clear that the novelist, like a religious preacher, condemns all earthly ambitions and earthly pleasures and advices, instead, an ascetic life for the good of the soul in the other world. This is, briefly and obviously, the moral lesson of the novel. But Thackeray is not such a preacher," he was rather a realist who observed the faults of men accurately, and a moral satirist whom aim was to correct and improve human society and human institutions. His aim was to correct and not to condemn and denounce"<sup>(15)</sup>. So, he manages to expose and ridicule the false appearance, the self-deceptions, the money values, the snobbery, social climbing and above all: the vanities of vanity fair. The novel explains that the novelist does not mean to scorn the importance of secure life with family, a respectable position in society; but he exposes the deception, of regarding possession and appearance as the very aim of man's struggle on earth. However,

using the phrase: "all is vanity" to close the narration, doesn't reflect that Thackeray means to express a general scorn of all human nature, but of certain desires and weaknesses in it.

Most of the major characters in the novel involve in the race after money and social position which are, in their views, the real treasures and targets of life. It is a materialistic society from top to toe, presenting a glittering surface, under which is a loveless, wicked void. The vast setting of the novel moves from London to Brussels, to pumpernickel. In all these sites, money values and social climbing dominate life. For instance, the wealthy Miss Crawley has "a balance at her bankers which would have made her beloved anywhere" (p.117) and the affections of all her social relations are centered in that balance, not in her personality. The other wealthy, Old Osborne, has no pity for his close friend Sedley when he falls in business, though Sedley has helped him to start his own business. Moreover he planned to marry his son to an illiterate woman from the West Indies, Miss Swartz, only because of the size of her dowry. Old Osborne boasts to his son George: "I don't grudge money when I know you're in a good society, because I know that a good society can never go wrong." (p.166). And, on the Duchess of Richmond's ball on the eve of the battle of Waterloo, the noblemen argue: "The struggles, intrigues and prayers to get tickets were such as only English ladies will employ, in order to gain admission to the society of the great of their own nation." (p.202) At the same time the wealthy are shown as behaving with shocking ill-breeding towards anyone of lower class; none of them will accept the second Lady Crawley, because she is the daughter of an iron-monger, and Rawdon Crawley ignores Major Dobbin, looking upon him as "an underbred city man".

Accordingly, the characters in the novel are self-deceived chasing false ambitions or clinging to false loyalties. And since no one reaches full satisfaction, frustration is their shared fate at the end. The male characters who haunt around the two girls (Amelia and Becky) are the

same self-deceived, equally attracted by the outside glitter and temptation of the vanity fair, and finally equally disappointed. George Osborne, Amelia's husband, led by egotism and snobbery, first neglects her and is fascinated by the charms of her friend, Becky, the thing which, lately, results the destruction of her sincere devotion. Rawdon Crawley is also deceived by his foolishness into considering Becky as an ideal. And major Dobbin is deceived by his absolute love and devotion for Amelia and sacrifices himself for what he finds ultimately an affair not deserving his great lost.

#### IV. The Hypothesis of the Study

It is clearly found that the structural plan of *Vanity Fair* is Thackeray's greatest technical achievement in fiction. Thackeray's subjects, involving an enormous number of heterogeneous characters and diverse incidents and generally more than one plot going on side by side at the same time, present difficult challenges to the writer. He must be able to keep the reader interested in several different characters and different worlds at the same time; yet he must not linger too long over any one of them, the reader must not have time to forget about one group while he is reading about the other. The critic Arnold kettle believes that the novel "has thematic unity and all the characters and incidents have been devised to illustrate the theme"<sup>(16)</sup>. To indicate clearly his theme – the folly and frivolity of life in vanity fair – he has devised an original structure; a structure that so far from being loose and illogical has an operative symmetry. In order to depict the universal feature of the laws controlling the race vanity fair, the novelist shows them to us as exhibited not on a single, traditional hero, as it is familiar, but in the careers of the two girls: Amelia and Becky. It is also clear that if the novel, *Vanity Fair*, is to be a work of art at all it must have a kind of unity of tone. Thackeray manages smartly and professionally to solve these problems. "No one has ever been better at manipulating a huge mass of material." He can make his effects so quickly: indicate a situation,

draw a scene in few words; he had that "unteachable gift for dialogue", which can make a character reveal itself in its lightest phrase<sup>(17)</sup>:

' "Rawdon", said Becky, very late one night, as a party of gentlemen were seated round her crackling drawing – room fire (for the men came to her house to finish the night; and she had ice and coffee for them, the best in London) : I must have a sheep dog."

' " A what?" said Rawdon, looking up from ecarte table. ' " A sheep dog!" said young Lord Southdown. " My dear Mrs. Crawley, what a fancy! Why not having a Danish dog? I know of one as big as a camel-leopard, by Jove. It would almost pull your brougham. Or a Persian greyhound, eh? (I propose, if you please), or a little pug that would go into one of Lord Steyne's snuff-boxes? There is a man at Bayswater got one with such a nose that you might – I mark the king and play – that you might hang your hat on it."

' "What can you want with a shepherd's dog?" the lively little Southdown continued.

' " I mean a *moral*/shepherd's dog" said Becky, laughing and looking up at Lord Steyne.

' " What the devil's that?" said his lordship.

' " A dog to keep the wolves off me", Rebecca continued, " A companion."

' " Dear little innocent lamb, you want one", said the Marquis, and his jaw thrust out, and he began to grin hideously, his little eyes leering towards Rebecca.' (p.199)

Such a passage is fair enough to make the characters of Rawdon, Southdown, Becky and Steyne living to the reader. Thackeray does not take long over his most important scenes: Rawdon Crawley's quarrel with Lord Steyne, when he finds him with his wife, which is the climax of the novel takes only two pages, and other scenes of importance are alike. Whereas the book consists of a huge number of fragments, Thackeray's method of telling the story joins the fragments together smoothly. It was the early English novelist, Fielding, who had initiated the device by which the author tells the story openly in his own person, interrupting the action from time to time to comment on what is taking place; but "Fielding had confined his comments to certain sections of the novel designed to serve his moral purpose"<sup>(18)</sup>; Thackeray develops and extends this method. He tells the reader his story just like an old man tells a fairy tale directly in front of family audience, his focus is on oral narration not on writing; this simple oral method enables him to widen the area of his fiction; instead of establishing a stage, he plays the roles. As soon as he fulfilled the fictional idea, the story-teller changes the attention easily. In this narrative way, Thackeray does not encounter any difficulty in using and moving the raw material in his hands to produce his performance. It is so obvious that he manages "to impose a unity tone on a heterogeneous subject-matter"<sup>(19)</sup>. It is also obvious, that not only the careful critic, but even the reader can perceive Thackeray's fictional touch and distinguished identity. However varied the consequences through which the story moves, it is told to us by the same voice, with same figures of speech to arouse curiosity; however different the crowd of characters and scenes he is drawing, they have the signature of Thackeray's style of draftsmanship. It is a highly individual style, Thackeray's creative imagination is most impressively apparent in the moral order he imposes on experience, but it shows itself in another way of presenting his story. His method of describing scene and character is, to



borrow a phrase from the art critics, a 'stylized' method. He "sedulously selects from Zola and Dickens what he thinks the most significant"<sup>(20)</sup>.

Another remarkable mark of Thackeray's method of presentation is the mood in which he writes. The many, different episodes inside the narration are smoothly interacted without losing their reference to the main atmosphere and belonging to the setting. *Vanity Fair* is not a mere record of facts objectively observed, like a scientific text –book, but of facts seen subjectively through the writer's mood. Thackeray does not allow the readers to present at the episode, they are present in Thackeray's room as he tells them about it later. And as a result, the readers are conscious of a double emotion, that of its actors and, more predominately, that of Thackeray observing them. The "plain positive colours of the drama are refracted through the painted glass of Thackeray's mood"<sup>(21)</sup> We see Sir Pitt Crawley's death, for instance, partly as a matter of grief as it seemed to Sir Pitt, partly as a matter of congratulation as it seemed to his heir, but predominantly as a matter for satiric irony as it seemed to Thackeray.

Thackeray depends a lot on the use of irony. He can appear to the reader as a dramatic, pathetic, comic and didactic: but all these elements are streaked with the same irony. "Thackerayan irony", says the critic Alexander Welsh "owing something sentimental in it to Sterne, something virile to Fielding, but essentially unlike either, warm and powerful", it is the irony of the elderly, experienced man surviving from his armchair in the evening of his days his long memories of man in vanity fair<sup>(22)</sup>.

So that, Thackeray's diction is clearly influenced by his fondness of irony. This feature brings us to his other remarkable talent, his style. Thackeray's style is in a complete unity with the rest of his work. It seems "negligent enough, full of colloquialism and digressions and exclamations"<sup>(23)</sup>. But in reality it is highly conscious affair. In spite of its negligent, it is

beautifully adapted to express his gentle reminiscent mood. Its most colloquial expressions are picked, its easiest rhythms calculated, every chapter, every paragraph works up from chosen and effective opening to a final telling sentence. And "it reaps the reward of its conscientiousness. Its apparent ease makes it flexible enough to cover without awkwardness all the vast variety of mood and incident which Thackeray's subject- matter entails" and to pass easily from one scene to the other. As in the novels of many conscious artists, the narration never gets between the reader and the subject.<sup>(24)</sup> Thackeray "can soar and drop and brood and perorate and weep and laugh with equal ease"<sup>(25)</sup>. His style is at home and as much itself whether broadly laughing at the character of Jos Sedley or glowing to romantic eloquence over the attractiveness of Amelia.

The study could sum up about Thackeray's style that its eloquence has the precision and felicity of the real stylist, the careful sense of words that makes the most trifling page living and significant and pleasing. And it is a style that enables him to rise to an effect of beauty; the sunset serenity "as of a long and stormy day coming to a tranquil end, windless air, fading mellow sky" in which he narrates the last two pages of *Vanity Fair*, that sad, passionate meditations over old friends, old days, gone for ever, which stirs within him<sup>(26)</sup>.

Still, for all his achievement, William Thackeray is not the most successful Victorian novelist, to some critics. He is an open to criticism as Dickens, and more damaging criticism. For instance, the critic Elton says that it is because "one thing he is among the writers, like Tennyson, whose executive talent was on a greater scale than his creative inspiration"<sup>(27)</sup>. Some inconsistencies, here and there, in characters are Thackeray's most apparent fault. But the careful judgment cannot consider that as a serious fault for they are due to the influence of the age in which he lived. The militant moral views that ruled every aspect of Victorian life with so tyrannical rule, were not ultimately consistent with the moral order whose creation is the center

of Thackeray's artistic achievement. And he modified his material to suit the age perfectly. Naturally enough this shows first of all whenever his story brings him up against sex, especially in its more unrealized manifestations like the scene in chapter 53 when Rawdon discovers his wife Becky alone at night with Lord Styne in her house. Sexual aberration, for some reason or other, is always the most agitating topic to moralists; few can keep their heads when they come to speak of it; and the typical, revered Victorians were no exception. It was the sin over which they showed themselves the most militant. They did not really like it mentioned in fiction at all; if it had to be mentioned it "must be in a tone of solemn reprobation, without a hint of flippancy"<sup>(28)</sup>. Later critics have complained a great deal about this; later novelists have done their best to make sure that no such complaint can be made of them. But, as a matter of fact, to the majority of the great Victorian novelists these strict regulations were not nearly of such consequence as might be supposed. Most of the Victorian novelists are not interested nor inspired by it at all; Thackeray's inspiration is rooted in the universal weaknesses of mankind, the temptations of money and social rank. "His easy-going, disillusioned, ironical view of life, skeptical of any heroic high-flown view of human virtue" says the critic John Cary "envisaging man as a mundane, earth bound, frail sort of creature, whose best virtues were instinctive virtues"<sup>(29)</sup>. The instinctive virtues are the best things about human nature.

### Conclusion:

In his lifetime, and for three or four decades after, the Victorian novelist, William Thackeray shared the kingdom of Victorian fiction "with Dickens, with whom he was paired as inevitably as Browning with Tennyson in Victorian poetry"<sup>(30)</sup>. It is impossible not to see him in competition with the pioneer novelists like the British Fielding, the Russian Tolstoy, and even with the French Proust. In his master piece *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray was consciously attempting an unprecedented achievement and fame. In writing *Vanity Fair*, he plans and follows a realistic

path. He produces a fictional work which presents a close understanding of people living around us in their daily concerns in social life. The fruit of his extraordinary work was a marvelous performance from inside the English society and some of its classes during the first decade of the nineteenth century. The novelist puts a sub-title of the novel indicating that it is "without a hero". Doing that, he means seriously to attract his reader to his fictional adventure without any slice appearance of a hero of the traditional concept, not through one but from many points of view, lives and attitudes. The researchers assume that Thackeray had amusingly won the challenge. The huge site colored and enhanced by faithful painting of fictional persons. For instance, Becky Sharp, is one of the most remembered in English and world fiction as well. Such is the case for the character of Rawdon Crawley, her husband. Other characters like Amelia Sedley and Major Dobbin are not of less fame. Thackeray conveys the passage of time, in his narration, cleverly in a unique, professional method rarely found in his contemporaries. The narration covers a period of about ten years without any sudden shift in the lives of characters; they are not fridge, but flexible to the pressure of incidents over the years. They grow older in their creator's active mind. There are great episodes and effective scenes, the greatest of the account of the Battle of Waterloo (Against Napoleon in 1815). There is brilliant humor and light comedy, but reality always dominates. Characters can be seen and realized through the run of the easy stream of the narrator's voice. The reader accept the change from a scene to another with great satisfaction, looking at life as he lives and watches around; people struggle and fight after money, to collect and spend. People are busy in contracting business, planning marriages and follow their social ambitions. All of that happens in a sense of realism, nothing is incredible because it is the narration of close relevant to life. So that the critic Walter Allen states that "the only analogue to the novel is (Tolstoy's) *War and Peace*." which also covers the Napoleonic period in Russia<sup>(31)</sup>.

In writing *Vanity Fair* Thackeray presents extended conversations to explore people as they are planning and acting. Thackeray, an experienced man and author who has known life closely and clearly, is addressing his audience: "This is life as I have known it" ; he delivers his notes on the action and the cast, like Fielding in *Joseph Andrews* in the traditional way, as he continues narration, gives moral speeches and embodies his thoughts through a significant incident, a piece of conversation to push the action forward. In its age, such a way of producing a fictional work, is well accepted without any sort of objection<sup>(32)</sup>. Everything is open and above board and the readers are shown with the events by presented with action and the novelist's dialogue sprigs in fluency.

The critic Walter Allen states also that "no novelist of genius has given us an analysis of man in society based on so simple, clear view of life. This is implicit in the very title *Vanity Fair* which has a different meaning for Thackeray from that of other writers"<sup>(33)</sup>. The meaning of vanity, and its contains, for Thackeray, changes. No longer it is void or illusion. Rather, it becomes to mean more mature knowledge of inner soul and the wide world. The novelist shoots the real cause and end of Man's daily conflict on Earth. Selfishness is closely attached to human being in his race towards social position, it is the major force which moves him. English society of the Victorian Age was widely dominated by hypocrisy and wicked plots along side with the spread of wealth and social climbing. In depicting those remarkable features, Thackeray proves to an accurate observer of social behavior in the Victorian Age.

In his own, distinguish way of writing, Thackeray proves to be one of the most sincere observers of the thoughts and attitudes in the Victorian social scene. And his master piece; *Vanity Fair*, unlike the majority of the Victorian fiction, does not concentrate on the life and fortunes of a character or two, thus, it provides a wide panorama of a whole society. So, the

study concludes that, although the traditional hero is completely absent, in *Vanity Fair*, but heroism is fairly and successfully divided among the major characters in the novel.

#### Notes:

- (1) Encyclopedia Britannica C D Edition, 2012: Thackeray, William Makepeace.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists* (London: Penguin Books, 2004, first published 1963.), p.66.
- (4) Robert Colby, *Thackeray's Canvass of Humanity: An Author and His Public* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.111.
- (5) John Cary, *Thackeray: Prodigal Genius* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), p.78.
- (6) Britannica: Thackeray.
- (7) William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (London: Penguin Books, 1989, first published in a serial form 1847-1848), p.295. Subsequent quotations will be from this edition, therefore they will be referred to only by page numbers parenthetically cited in the text.
- (8) John Cary, p.80.
- (9) Raghukul Tilak, *Vanity Fair* (New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 2007), p.66.
- (10) Ibid, p. 59.
- (11) Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Fiction* (London : Penguin Books, 2005), p.93.
- (12) Goldfarb Sheldon, *Thackeray and His Twentieth-Century Critics* (London: Penguin Books, 1999.), p. 77.
- (13) Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*. (London: Penguin Books, 2000, first published 1966.) p.166.
- (14) Cecil, p. 71.
- (15) Raghukul Tilak, p. 134.
- (16) Arnold Kettle, p.198.
- (17) John Grieg, *Thackeray, A Reconsideration* (New York : Great Neck, 1999), p.111.
- (18) David Cecil, p. 69.

- (19) Ibid, p. 67.
- (20) Geoffrey Tilloston, *Thackeray the Novelist* (London: Penguin Books, 2001, first Published 1954) p. 44.
- (21) Flamm Dudley, *Thackeray's Critics* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 2000), p.57.
- (22) Alexander Welsh, *Thackeray: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), P.78.
- (23) Goldfarb Sheldon, *Thackeray and His Twentieth-Century Critics* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.44.
- (24) Ray N. Gordon, *Thackeray* (London : Evans Brothers, 2000, first published 1955–58), p.107.
- (25) Ann Monsarrat, *An Uneasy Victorian: Thackeray the Man* (London: British Council, 1990), p.155.
- (26) David Cecil, p.69.
- (27) Oden Elton, *Dickens and Thackeray* (London: Edward Arnold, 1998), p.33.
- (28) Cecil, p.70.
- (29) John Cary, *Thackeray: Prodigal Genius* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p.98.
- (30) Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (London: Penguin Books, 2008, first published 1954), p.174.
- (31) Ibid, p.175
- (32) Geoffrey Tilliston, *Thackeray the Novelist* (London: Penguin Books, 2001, first published in 1954), p.222.
- (33) Walter Allen, p.176.

