To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Judith Fisher Noyes entitled "The Aesthetics of William Makepeace Thackeray as Developed in His Art Criticism." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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THE AESTHETICS OF WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY AS DEVELOPED IN HIS ART CRITICISM

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee

Judith Fisher Noyes

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the art criticism of William Makepeace Thackeray. Thackeray's personal life is first discussed to discover the roots of his aesthetic values. The origins of these values appear to center on a sharp dichotomy between the warmth of a domestic setting dominated by Thackeray's mother and the comparative coldness of the "public" world experienced by Thackeray at school. Thackeray's emphasis on domesticity and conformity underlie his art criticism, which is discussed in the second section. Two elements of the art criticism are found to be the organizing principles: the sublime and the mediocre. Thackeray toned down the sublime and in his ethic of art for the masses, recommended mediocre art as the "best" art for public consumption. Thackeray sees art and the artist as having a serious didactic purpose to educate the public's taste. Thackeray's own writings reflect his aesthetic and didactic demands for art in both style and content.

The conclusion explores Thackeray's critical relationship with Joseph Mallord Turner as it exemplifies the former's withdrawal from artistic extremism and from any exploration of the inner man. His

withdrawal originates in his youth and symptoms of it pervade his fiction creating a total unification of the artist, the man, and the work.

The preparatory work for this thesis lies in reading and studying Thackeray's art criticism, his life, and, to a lesser degree, his fiction. Also contributory to the thesis was an understanding of Victorian art and art criticism in general.

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I. A CHRONOLOGY OF THACKERAY'S LIFE 1830-1850

1829	Feb.	Matriculates at Trinity College, Cambridge
	July-Sept.	Vacations in Paris
1830	April	Surreptitious visit to Edward Fitz-Gerald in Paris
	June	Leaves Cambridge after losing £1,500 at play
	July to	
1831	March	In Germany, chiefly at Weimar
	June 3	Admitted to the Middle Temple
1832	June-July	In Devon and Cornwall electioneering for Charles Buller, "The Annuals," Fraser's Magazine
	July 31-	
	Nov. 5	In France, chiefly in Paris
1833	May	Becomes part owner of The National Standard
	June-Aug.	Paris correspondent of The National Standard
	Oct.-Nov.	Studies art in Paris
		Loses the bulk of his fortune in the failure of an Indian bank
1834	Feb. 1	Issues the last number of The National Standard
	Sept.	Settles in Paris to study art
1835		Meets Isabella Shawe
1836	April	Publication of Flore et Zephyr
	Aug. 20	Marries Isabella Shawe at the British Embassy in Paris
	Sept. 19	First article as Paris correspondent of The Constitutional published
1837	March	Settles in London with Carmichael-Smyths
	June 9	Birth of Anne Isabella Thackeray (later Lady Ritchie)
	July 1	Last number of The Constitutional
	Nov.	First installment of The Yellowplush Correspondence in Fraser's Magazine
1838		Moves to own house in Great Coram Street
	May	First installment of Catherine appears in Fraser's Magazine
	June	"Strictures on Pictures," Fraser's Magazine

	July 9	Birth of Jane Thackeray
	Dec.	"Painter's Bargain," Fraser's Magazine
1839	June	"Second Lecture on the Fine Arts," Fraser's Magazine
	March 14	Death of Jane Thackeray
1840	Jan.	"Ramble in the Picture Galleries," The Corsair
	May 27	Birth of Harriet Marian Thackeray (later Mrs. Leslie Stephen)
	June	First installment of A Shabby Genteel Story in Fraser's Magazine
		"Essay on the Genius of George Cruikshank," Westminster Review
		"Pictorial Rhapsody; Parts I and II," June/July, Fraser's Magazine
	July	Publication of the Paris Sketchbook
	Sept.	His wife's insanity is revealed when she attempts to drown herself en route from London to Cork
	Oct.-Nov.	Takes his family to Paris by way of Clifton and London
	Nov.	Places Isabella in Esquirol's Maison de Santé
1841	Jan.	Publication of The Second Funeral of Napoleon
	April-May	Removes his wife from Maison and entrusts her to a nurse
	June-July	In England
	July	"On Men and Pictures," Fraser's Magazine
	Sept.	First installment of The Great Hoggarty Diamond in Fraser's Magazine
1842	Jan.?	Meets Mrs. Brookfield
	Feb. 9	Places Isabella with Dr. Puzin at Chaillot
	May	At Great Coram Street with Colonel and Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth
	June 18	First identified contribution to Punch
	Sept. & Oct.	"Some of the Picture Galleries in England; Parts I and II," Fraser's Magazine
1843	March	"Letters on the Fine Arts. No. 1," Pictorial Times
	April	"Letters on the Fine Arts. No. 2," Pictorial Times
		Gives up house in Great Coram Street
	May	Publication of The Irish Sketchbook
		"Letters on the Fine Arts. No. 3," Pictorial Times

		"Letters on the Fine Arts. No. 4," Pictorial Times
1844	Jan.	First installment of Barry Lyndon appears in Fraser's Magazine
	May	"Academy Exhibition," Punch
	June	"May Gambols or Titmarsh in the Picture Galleries," Fraser's Magazine
	July	"Punch's Fine Art Exhibit," Punch
	April	"Exhibition of the Society of Painters of Water-Colours," Morning Chronicle
	Aug.	Leaves England for the Mediterranean
	Dec.	Final installment of Barry Lyndon
1845	Feb.	Returns to London from Rome
	April	"Mr. Smith's Reasons for not sending his Pictures to the Exhibition," Punch
		"A Painter's Wish," Punch
		"Royal Patronage of Art," Punch
		"Commission of Fine Arts," Punch
		Moves from rooms in Jermyn Street to St. James Street
	May	"Mr. Punch on the Fine Arts," Punch
		Early chapters of Vanity Fair in Colburn's hands
		Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth and his children visit him in London
	Oct.	Isabella is brought to England and placed in the care of Mrs. Bakewell in Camberwell
1846	Jan.	Publication of Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo
	March 7	First installment of The Book of Snobs appears in Punch
	April	"Exhibition of the Society of Painters of Water-Colours," Morning Chronicle
	May	"Exhibition of the Royal Academy (three notices)," Morning Chronicle
	June	Moves to Young Street, Kensington
	Sept.	His children move to live with him in London
	Dec.	Publication of Mrs. Perkin's Ball
1847	Jan.	First number of Vanity Fair appears
	Feb.	Brookfield protests Thackeray's warmth of affection for Mrs. Brookfield

		Final installment of *The Book of Snobs* appears in *Punch*
1848	June 29	*Vanity Fair* finished
	Aug.	Begins *Pendennis*
	Nov.	First number of *Pendennis* appears
	March	"The Louvre," *The Times*
	May	"Royal Academy," *The Times*
1849	Jan.-July	Growing concern of Mr. Brookfield and Henry Hallam, Sr., over Thackeray's intimacy with Mrs. Brookfield
	Sept.-Nov.	Serious illness followed by slow convalescence (*Pendennis* not published between October and December)
	Dec.	Publication of *Rebecca and Rowena*
1850	Nov.	*Pendennis* finished
	Dec.	Reading for *The English Humourists*

II. INTRODUCTION

One important facet of William Makepeace Thackeray--his art criticism--has never been studied, much less integrated with the artist as a whole. The art criticism is important for three reasons. First, it is the only body of Thackeray's writing which contains a coherent aesthetic system. Second, the art criticism is part of Thackeray's early career, and the aesthetic values developed in the ten years, 1838 to 1848, of the art criticism shape all of Thackeray's fiction as much by what Thackeray omits as by what he includes in his standards for art. The third reason that a study of the art criticism is important is less localized than specific influences on the career and the man. Thackeray's art reviews eloquently represent the growth of the middle-class culture in Victoria's England. Thackeray took it upon himself, as did many of his contemporary critics, to educate the growing audience of the middle class. To do this he combined eighteenth-century aesthetic theories with his own personal experiences as an artist and the result was a complete guide for the common man to choose and appreciate art. Thackeray's novels reflect his system, but it is his

art criticism which actively develops the aesthetic concepts.

Although the art criticism was designed to teach, Thackeray still could not eliminate himself from the reviews. His teaching was very personal and this element, too, gives importance to the criticisms. Because his aesthetic standards grew naturally out of his own experiences of the possibilities and limitations of man, Thackeray did not reach for an ideal art, but defined a possible, attainable art, totally separate from the lofty concept of "art" housed in most people's minds. Within the art criticism there is a complete union of the man, the artist, and the work which, when elucidated, gives more depth and reason to all Thackeray's writing and systematizes many incongruities within Thackeray's novels. Thackeray, the art critic, is a representative of his times as well as a very personal man devising a comfortable philosophy of life.

III. THACKERAY'S PERSONAL LIFE: ITS INFLUENCE ON HIS ART CRITICISM

Thackeray's youth left an indelible impression upon him not only as memories for his novels, but also as an important influence on his mature philosophy of life upon which he based his aesthetic system. He came from an upper-middle-class family that was part of the isolated Anglo-Indian society. This group consisted of the English officials in India who upon their return to England found a strange and unfriendly culture awaiting them. Out of self-defense the Anglo-Indian families shut out the country which had rejected them and created a very self-sufficient, close-knit society. Thus Thackeray's background was one of exclusion and, in his earliest youth, one of loneliness for when five or six he was sent to England, as were all children of his class, in order to be properly educated. The small boy was shunted between school and relatives, always aware of his apartness, and of his own position as a stranger to the English culture. Thackeray necessarily became acquainted with the snobbery of others as a result of his sensitivity to his own position. So from his early youth Thackeray

was acutely self-conscious and sensitive as well as terribly conscious of the class distinctions around him.

Thackeray's self-exclusion from society's hierarchy was not long-lived, because as the boy developed into a youth his class-consciousness turned from an awareness of other's attitudes to a recognition of his own class and his own position. His upper-middle-class position enabled Thackeray to regard himself as a gentleman, and class acted as a refuge during this period of isolation from his family--it was one surety in a world of uncertainty. His sense of class was especially comforting when, at ten years old, Thackeray went to Charterhouse. Charterhouse was a good public school according to the standards of nineteenth-century England, but a "good school" licensed or ignored an incredible amount of physical and psychological brutality. The rod was not spared in the classroom and the schoolboys themselves had strict standards of discipline and "place." One boy "fagged" for another according to his age and form or class in school; if one's parents were in trade, as business and commerce were called, he was subjected to merciless torment by the boys of "gentle" birth. There was little place for a sensitive young Anglo-Indian whose roots were in a far-off country. Although he came in for his share of

teasing because of his Indian origin, Thackeray was not unduly persecuted by either the students or the teachers, but the insensitivity generated by the system of education hardened the young William and forced him to look at and judge by externals. He assumed that class differences were the nature of society and developed a preference for conformity in dress, conduct, and manners.[1] Moreover, character came to matter more to Thackeray than intellect simply because one's intellect was given no room to develop at Charterhouse where memorization passed for learning and recitation supplanted understanding.

Thackeray's predilection for conformity had great effect on his later years. In his art criticism, which is our particular interest, the conformity of Charterhouse signified the beginning of the growth of Thackeray's aesthetic of mediocrity. To be mediocre was to be "safe" in art, as to conform was to be "safe" in society. Thackeray's art criticism of 1838-48 was characterized by a repudiation of daring or extravagance either in technique (for which offense Thackeray castigated Joseph Mallord Turner) or in content (for

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[1]Gordon Ray, The Uses of Adversity (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955), p. 99.

which he condemned William Etty). Thackeray's own insecurity at school, his personal "failings," i.e., his exorbitant height (for the nineteenth century), over six feet, his poor eyesight, his lack of physical coordination, combined with a serious doubt of his own intellectual abilities to create in Thackeray a need to "melt-in." There is an element of fear in Thackeray's conformity, fear of the unknown, of what would exist if Thackeray stepped out of the ordered hierarchy of society as he saw it. Thackeray came to believe or to try to believe that society was built on common ideals and beliefs which were reflected in common external characteristics such as physical appearance or social mannerisms. Thus anything "uncommon" was frightening for it was tantamount to revolution. Thackeray's persuasion of the common externality of society was strengthened by his intellectual insecurity, which weakened his capacity for abstract thought. Thackeray's concept of art does not rely on an intellectual perception of the artist's intent and "philosophy," but rather on an emotional identification achieved with the painting by means of external similarities between the observer's reality and that reality portrayed by the artist. In art, the mediocre or average was much more easily identifiable

and inspired much more controllable emotions than did the unique or experimental. In the same way as classes were easily identifiable by dress and conduct, character was more easily evaluated by external actions than intellect could be judged by its internal cogitations.

Thackeray's conviction of the importance of character at this early age resulted in an aesthetic emphasis in both the literary and the visual arts placed on "heart" and sentimentality. His Charterhouse experiences combine with his homelife to create this influence, for when Thackeray was ten, just beginning Charterhouse, his mother and step-father, Mr. and Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, returned from India and established themselves at Larkbeare in Devon. Here Thackeray spent his vacations and as an only child was enveloped by a warm maternal love. Larkbeare was ruled by Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth. She was strikingly attractive, strong-willed, and passionate in her loves and beliefs in which young William and religion, respectively, took precedence. Through his sojourns at Larkbeare, Thackeray acquired a veneration for domestic life and the order it engendered as well as an antipathy for the outside world inspired by the contrast of his joyous vacations at Larkbeare and the uncongenial society of Charterhouse. "Thackeray came to see life permanently in

terms of a dichotomy between the warmth and trust of a happy home circle and the brutality or indifference of the outside world."[2]

Larkbeare had three primary influences on Thackeray's development. As has been said, the estate acted as a refuge from Charterhouse. He could put aside his self-doubts at Larkbeare for there he was "King Billy,"[3] and his uncertainty about himself and his position among his fellows at school vanished when confronted with his sure place at Larkbeare. Thackeray's feeling of security was particularly pronounced at this time by the fact that previously--before his mother had returned from India--the six-year-old Thackeray had had no place to go except from school to relatives where, although he was treated with every kindness, he was uncomfortable. Suddenly there was Larkbeare and most importantly, Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth. She was a lasting influence on Thackeray and became the standard whereby he judged womanhood. Even her excessive emotions were included in Thackeray's vision of woman as was his adoration of her and his view of Larkbeare as a "safe haven." Thackeray's ideal of woman

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[2]Gordon Ray, The Buried Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 14

[3]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 103.

was tinged by an "affectionate and admiring love of sentimental stupidity for its own sake."[4] He evolved into a man of the home and hearth, rather than a man of the world. Thackeray's later judgment in his art criticism is colored by his feeling for his mother and the retreat and love symbolized by Larkbeare's domestic tranquility. Not only did the Larkbeare period solidify Thackeray's insistence on the importance of sentiment in art, but also it increased his distaste for unpleasant subjects as they represented intrusions upon a peaceful life.

Larkbeare gave Thackeray another personal outlet which significantly affected his critical and literary career. His own artistic inclinations ran rampant during his vacations. At Charterhouse Thackeray developed a talent for caricature which he pursued in Devon, evidenced by the recollections in the 1820's by Mary Graham, a ward of the Carmichael-Smyths: "The drawers of this [Thackeray's] dressing table were so crammed with scraps of paper that they wouldn't quite shut, and those scraps were covered with pen and ink caricatures. . . . Downstairs, in the drawing room, the drawers of the old-fashioned piano were stuffed in

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[4]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 111.

the same way."[5] Aside from caricatures, Thackeray's more serious artistic endeavors significantly had as their subject matter either the quiet landscape surrounding Larkbeare or his family and domestic life, both of which held so much meaning for him. His art reflected his psychological environment and because it was a place of happiness and security, Larkbeare and the emotions it generated became associated with "rightness" in Thackeray's mind, the more so because his feelings of class were upheld by the isolation of the Anglo-Indian society and its concentration around his home life.

Cambridge, the next step after Charterhouse, found Thackeray a class-conscious young gentleman with inner doubts which were disguised in his external assertiveness. He was a young man whose sensitivity and capacity for love flourished in a domestic atmosphere but were concealed in public--in short, there was a separation of his inner and outer character. Excited by the traditions abounding in Cambridge, Thackeray developed a deep attachment for the English past. The University also served to broaden his range of culture,[6] for he came into contact

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[5]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 111.

[6]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 138.

with a wider variety of life, men, and art, and his self-assurance increased with the increase of his knowledge. The limitations of Charterhouse and the Anglo-Indian society were erased but his sense of class was solidified. Cambridge fixed Thackeray's social status; he could never be anything but a middle-class gentleman. Thackeray himself discovered the dangers encountered when one imitated one's betters. Not only did Thackeray run up debts by entertaining "high society," but also he compounded his financial problems by his perilous attraction to the aristocratic pleasure of gambling. In addition, Thackeray saw the ridicule heaped on the "snobs"--townsmen who aped the clothes and manners of the high born "gownsmen." The consequence of these experiences in Thackeray's mind was a firm conviction that pretensions to class could only have disastrous results. In his novels this belief emerges in the histories of Becky Sharp, Arthur Pendennis, and Clive Newcome, while in his art criticism this creed colors his ethic of art for the public--but only a certain kind of art.

Another side of life opened to Thackeray in 1833 when he, in October of that year, acted on a desire to become an artist and established himself in Paris. With him went all his Charterhouse and Cambridge

prejudices. The aspiring artist was aware that art was not a socially-acceptable career for one of the upper-middle-class, but he defended his choice with the example of artists in England who were gentlemen--Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Thomas Lawrence--as well as citing the respected position which artists occupied in Italy and France. Thackeray gained reluctant permission to pursue his desired course and moved in with his grandmother in Paris. His art lessons consisted of copying the old masters at the Louvre in Paris and studying at the Life Academy. Although he preferred a Delacroix over the neoclassic David, he had little sympathy for the Romantic movement. Between bursts of industry he experimented with the "vie bohème," an experience which he later recorded graphically in the Paris Sketchbook of 1840. Thackeray found the life of a Parisian artist to be less glamorous than he had envisioned and also morally uncomfortable for himself. The life of irresponsibility, ease, and individuality was also a life of lax morals in which "men from sixty to sixteen seemed to be in habits of perfect familiarity with the model. . . ." His companions were raffish, hard drinkers with hard hearts, such as those described in "A Gambler's Death" (a segment of the serialized Paris Sketchbook in 1835). These were

the men who were producing the lush art of the French Romantic period and Thackeray consequently determined that a work of art would be moral or immoral in direct proportion to the moral calibre of the artist.

Thackeray returned to London in 1834 after the failure of the National Standard, the newspaper bought by Colonel Carmichael-Smyth to support the young artist. Thackeray presevered in his quest for a career as an artist and placed himself under the tutelage of Henry Sass. Sass was a frustrated devotee of "high" art, that is, painting after the grand manner of Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael. He set his students to copying classical statues instead of life models in order to gain an ideal concept of perfection. Unusual as this practice may sound today, it was common training in the academies of "high" art in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Joshua Reynolds advocated in his Discourses (1780-1800) the pursuit of the idea of "perfect beauty" by conceiving a perfect ideal in the mind and not studying nature too closely. Benjamin Haydon, a late practitioner of the "grand style" during Thackeray's youth and young adulthood, took his models from the Elgin Marbles and not from life. The brunt of this discipline descended on Thackeray's shoulders with the result that he developed a contempt for what he

termed the "classical humbug." Thackeray the critic was to later remark in 1840 (in Fraser's Magazine) that he found Greek art to be devoid of humanity. It did not satisfy his own sensitivity and need for warmth and feeling.

In spite of these personal disappointments and the lack of commercial success, Thackeray's year in Sass's studio was not a wasted period. He formed close friendships with artists later to be popular. The watercolorist George Cattermole, John Frederick Lewis, the illustrator George Cruikshank, who also served as Thackeray's teacher, were numbered among his friends. Frank Stone and Daniel Maclise became intimate associates. Not content with vicarious success, Thackeray returned to Paris in September of 1834 to resume his bohemian existence. He gradually realized that he had not enough talent to make his way as an artist and ended his art career and depression over its failure with his courtship of and marriage to Isabella Shawe. These years were never forgotten, however, for "throughout his life painting remained the employment from which he derived most pleasure."[7]

The lessons learned from this abortive attempt at

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[7]Ray, The Buried Life, p. 17.

an art career came to be of considerable value in Thackeray's career as a critic, which began almost immediately after he discarded the idea of being an artist. Thackeray learned first hand the difficulty of visual artistic creation and gained knowledge of technique as well as a knowledge of art history. He could base his critical opinions upon first-hand experience of painters and painting as well as upon his personal taste--influenced as that was by his school and family experiences. Thackeray's demand for morality in both the artist and his art and his direct relation of the two were strengthened by the dissolute life he had seen (and participated in) in Paris. Yet Thackeray rejected the other extreme of false heroic virtues and a grand morality perpetrated by sham genius and fake classicism. He considered these values too foreign to the public and to the reality of daily life to be correctly understood by either the masses or the artists who could not know their subjects well enough to be sincere. It is from this period that one can start to understand the importance Thackeray placed on the axiom "Know thyself," i.e., the artist, whether novelist or painter, should be aware of his own limitations. What Thackeray had learned earlier in a social sense he now applied artistically.

After his marriage to Isabella Shawe in 1836 Thackeray was under greater pressure than ever before to earn a living wage. He had been writing sporadically for journals and now his essays and reviews had increased so as to preclude the possibility of any but a literary career. Art reviews comprised a large number of his articles; he wrote nearly forty between the years 1835-1848, concentrated during the years 1838-1844. Every May the Royal Academy had its Exhibition as did the Old and New Watercolour Societies. Thackeray used his reviews of the May Exhibitions as vehicles by which to communicate his personal aesthetics. Not only were his youth and art career instrumental in the creation of these values, but also his tragic personal life and the resulting emotional stress during the years of his reviewing had a direct effect on Thackeray's outlook.

The tragedy centered around Thackeray's wife, Isabella Shawe, a child-like girl-woman who captured Thackeray's heart by her innocence. As their marriage moved from honeymoon to every-day life, Isabella's childishness was an inability to cope with household duties and her innocence was ignorance and weakness. She was unable to stand the stress when in March 1839 their second daughter died and Isabella responded to

the tragedy by retreating inward. Oddly enough, the usually sensitive Thackeray was unaware of Isabella's dangerous instability; finding only that his home was sadly altered and cold, Thackeray began to spend more and more time at his clubs which served only to increase Isabella's depression and her conviction that she was not good enough to meet Thackeray's standards. Their growing separation came to a tragic climax in August of 1839 when, on a ship to Ireland, Isabella attempted to commit suicide by throwing herself off the boat. Her illness subsided enough to allow the birth of their third daughter in 1840 in Paris where Thackeray and Isabella went to join the Carmichael-Smyths, but Isabella finally had to be placed in a sanitarium where throughout 1840-41 she grew gradually worse, first violent, then regressing to a child-like state.

After 1841 Thackeray was essentially a bachelor, suddenly and tragically stripped of the warm domestic environment so important to him. He had to leave his wife and children in Paris to be cared for by the Carmichael-Smyths while he returned to London to make a living. The three years from 1838 to 1841 brought Thackeray much self-knowledge and suffering and taught him that "where your heart is, there is your treasure"

(The Great Hoggarty Diamond, 1841). Until 1843 Thackeray kept his house in Coram Street, but in that year Isabella was declared hopeless and from 1843-1846 Thackeray had no permanent residence; in 1846 he set up housekeeping again with his children.

Thackeray's writing at this time was colored by melancholic overtones which reflected his saddened view of life. He was more firmly ensconced in his middle-class role than previously. Never an equalitarian, Thackeray wished no identification with the poor and did not subscribe to the social welfare ethic which was creating a generation of social criticism most eloquently to be expressed fictiously by Dickens in characters such as Little Nell and Stephen Blackpool. Thackeray bore no malice toward the laboring class, but his goodwill was casual and withdrawn as if given to a foreign people--as indeed it was. At the same time Thackeray was intensely resented toward aristocratic privilege.[8] Inherited rights were not earned by superior merit in Thackeray's eyes; the immorality of the regency nobility tended to overshadow the worth of the present generation of English nobility. His fiction shows in characters like the Marquis of Steyne and the

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[8]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 214.

older Sir Pitt Crawley the small worth of people of such high stations. As late as 1855 Thackeray was still striking out at those aristocrats who had no personal advantages, but only an inherited rank. He saw George IV in The Four Georges as only "silk stockings, padding, stays, a coat with frogs and a fur collar, a star and blue ribbon, a pocket-handkerchief prodigiously scented, one of Truefitt's best nutty-brown wigs reeking with oil, a set of teeth, and a huge black stock, under-waistcoats, more underwaistcoats, and then nothing."[9] An aristocrat was not automatically a gentleman, something which Thackeray considered himself to be. A gentleman had, besides education (for lack of which Thackeray is continually satirizing the upper classes), strong inner leanings toward a pure mind and lofty aims.[10]

In 1840 such an optimistic view of a "natural" gentleman was buried under Thackeray's general disillusionment. Events in his personal life had destroyed the possibility of a warm domestic life for no reason and left only the ideal dangling before his

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[9]William Makepeace Thackeray, The English Humorists and the Four Georges (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 388.

[10]Thackeray, The English Humorists and the Four Georges, p. 423.

eyes. One could hardly say Isabella deserved her insanity, and in addition to that unreasonable tragedy, Mrs. Shawe, Isabella's mother, pursued Thackeray with accusations and incriminations about her daughter's condition. Thackeray grew increasingly bitter and his youthful uncertainty was bolstered by cynicism rather than eliminated by personal achievement. His own extenuating circumstances coincided with:

> . . . the common lot of men approaching thirty; he was experiencing the flight of youth, the advent of middle age. By 1840 his hair was grey, and the long leisurely days of young manhood, given over to friendship, to the arts, to pleasure, were irrevocably gone. "The horrible glazed eyes of Necessity are always fixed upon you," he reflected; "fly away as you will, black Care sits behind you, and with his ceaseless gloomy croaking drowns the voice of all more cheerful companions." One by one, Thackeray's illusions dropped from him, leaving a world that seemed to him to be drab and depressing enough. . . .[11]

The world was not merely depressing to Thackeray, but society appeared to be organized without any rational basis. Instead of the orderly cheerfulness of Larkbeare, Thackeray witnessed evil and weakness practiced indiscriminately in the society he saw around him. The moral judgments of a society in such moral chaos could but be hollow:

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[11]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 213.

> Look at the unequal lots in the fortunes of men and see how completely circumstance (of personal disposition or outward fortune) masters all--and one begins to think of Vice and Virtue as here practised with profound scorn or else with bitter humiliation and debasement (Letters, vol. I).

The remedy to such an irrational environment was to withdraw oneself from the active struggle. It was best to put oneself in the hands of fate rather than to assert one's free-will because human nature was so weak when confronted with the dark abyss of a falsely-ordered society whose real basis was chaos. Thackeray's recognition and withdrawal were personal developments which characterized all of Thackeray's writing. "From life so conceived, the best that man could hope was the sort of golden mediocrity possible in an obscure and domestic life."[12] Thackeray created his aesthetic standards in his art criticism in the light of his withdrawal from the realities of his world. Mediocrity became for Thackeray not necessarily the most that a man could achieve, but the desirable end for the bulk of men--and for himself.

There were necessary consequences in Thackeray's writing because of his retreat. His misfortunes narrowed his conception of truth and nature to center

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[12]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 218.

more particularly on the specific and the concrete. Society and its moral pretensions became, for a long time, totally fraudulent. The effect on his art criticism was to direct him away from abstract qualities of painting to the utilitarian possibilities therein. In painting utility lay in the educational possibilities and the didacticism. In "Caricatures and Lithography in Paris," included in the Paris Sketchbook, Thackeray calls lithography "the best friend of the artist," because it is a way of making inexpensive and rapid copies of one's own work, thus enabling the artist easily to disseminate his work--with its attendant moral sentiments--to the public and to a public who would not ordinarily be able to afford works of art. Caricature is valuable because, in the hands of a skillful artist, cartoons can directly criticize corrupt institutions or men without being vulgar. Thackeray's own illustrations and decorative initials in his books follow this view of caricature. Many a passage in the book is twisted or underwritten by the accompanying illustration. The most famous instance occurs in Vanity Fair near the end of the book where Becky Sharp has captured Jos Sedley at last and is depicted hiding behind a curtain with up-raised dagger while a terrified Jos begs Major Dobbin to help him get away. Thackeray

completes the union of picture and word in his caption, "Becky's second appearance in the role of Clytemnestra."

The union of words and pictures is not just a rhetorical device in Thackeray's fiction; he saw art with a literary eye and his aesthetics and criticism reflected his verbal interpretation. He held the same standards for painting as for literature; in both Thackeray knew exactly what he wanted, that is, the method which was appropriate to achieve the desired effect, and he evinced a great determination to show truth from falsity in the subject matter, the moral lesson, and the sentiment. His art criticism is the collection of writing which most nearly represents a complete aesthetic statement applicable to all of Thackeray's work. An examination of the art criticism reveals not a "Theory of literature," but consistent standards and expectations of art, the artist, and the public. In the process of developing these values, Thackeray is also self-revelatory in that he demonstrates in his choices and omissions the process of withdrawal from the harsh realities of life.

IV. THE ART CRITICISM

I. The Environment and Background of Early Victorian Art Criticism

In 1838 Thackeray was "writing for his life" as Carlyle stated it. Necessity was indeed breathing down his neck and the pressure to provide for his family continued through the 1830's into the early 1840's. Journals, especially Fraser's Magazine, furnished a ready supply of paying work so Thackeray immersed himself in reviews and articles. Early in 1838 he had created Michelangelo Titmarsh, who, by the mid 1840's, was Thackeray's spokesman and alter-ego for many of the art reviews. During the years 1841-1845 Thackeray was struggling--and failing--to strike the public's taste anywhere except in his journalism. Catherine (1838-1839), The Great Hoggarty Diamond (1841), and Barry Lyndon (1844)--his attempts at extended works of fiction--met with only a lukewarm public reception. Thackeray sat, frustrated, while he saw his companion writers and painters achieve greater and greater successes until he was in danger of being left behind with the hacks.

The economic and social pressures which united

with Thackeray's personal trials in this period gave his work a negative tone. He concealed his kinder, more sensitive nature which had been nurtured at Larkbeare, and struck out in his coldest, most calculating "public" tone at the absurdities of the world around him. His negative attitude applied to both his life and art, especially his active search for snobbery, meanness, and humbug. The "Yellowplush Papers" (1838) were an early example of Thackeray's crusade against sham. Not only did Charles James Yellowplush, the valet, evince a scathing view of Mr. Altamont and Mr. Deucace the "gentlemen" blackguards, but in his own pretensions to gentility, Yellowplush is a "criticism of life--criticism of life and letters below stairs, in motley of speech as well as in many-coloured coat and breeches."[13] Catherine and Barry Lyndon are novels in which Thackeray exposed the "sham" of the popular anti-heroic and Newgate novels of the day. He vindicated accusations of immorality levelled at these two books by laying the guilt on the public's taste. In a letter to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth (Ray, Letters, vol. I) he said, "To insist on the 'sham moral' of

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[13]George Saintsbury, A Consideration of Thackeray (New York: Russell & Russell, 1952), p. 31.

poetic justice is to make 'sham' characters inevitable. The fault lies in the vulgarity of the commonly held ethical standard which recognizes no higher felicity in life than 'bodily prosperity.'" The depth to which such a "felicity" could sink when moral standards were ignored was explored in the rise and fall of Becky Sharp in Vanity Fair (1846). The art criticism provided an immediate vehicle through which to direct and teach a higher "felicity" of the heart and mind to the public.

Thackeray's art criticism had a decidedly didactic cast common to the popular art critics of his period. I use the term "popular" to distinguish critics such as Thackeray, who reviewed the Royal Academy Exhibitions and wrote in the popular magazines, from serious critics and theoriticians such as John Ruskin. Ruskin wrote for an intellectual upper echelon of Victorian society and followed in the footsteps of the Earl of Shaftsbury, Joseph Addison, Jonathon Richardson, Joshua Reynolds and other eighteenth-century theorists. Ruskin adopted their intellectual process of appreciation and study whereas the popular critics relied upon their own personal taste and gleanings from authors such as William Gilpin in his Essays on the Picturesque (1782).

The world of popular criticism Thackeray entered was not the professionally developed one it is today. Far removed from twentieth century ideas of "conceptual" or "experiential" art, nineteenth-century art was based on realism, emotionalism, and didacticism. The Balance of Painters, a seventeenth-century treatise by Roger de Piles, published in the Artist's Repository in the early nineteenth century, gives the basic elements which critics such as Thackeray sought in a painting. De Piles graded twenty old masters on the basis of four criteria of Composition, Design, Expression, and Colouring.[14] The Victorian critic generally had no idea as to the technical meaning and correct application of these terms and used them arbitrarily in stock phrases.

Given the calibre of the reviewers, it was natural that the criteria for the evaluation of a painting were based on subject matter rather than on form and style. This was characteristic of the "literary" way in which the English viewed art. Ernest Chesneau, a French art critic writing in 1891, claimed that the English soul felt "no ardent craving over the most perfect expression of beauty whether in pictorial or plastic form. . . . Greatness, elevation--these words in no wise apply to

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[14]Helene Roberts, "Art Reviewing in the Early 19th Century" (unpublished paper).

the British artists of the past century. They possess a studied simplicity which quickly degenerates into monotony; they are profuse in narrative subjects, producing thereby literary rather than artistic impressions. . . ."[15] The reviews and paintings produced by the popular artists and critics would appear to support Chesneau's assertion. The reviewer looked for all paintings to conform to nature. In portraiture "correspondence to nature" meant that a general likeness should be maintained while the artist sought the utmost idealization of the sitter. The goal in landscape painting was to achieve an exact representation of nature with an overlay of the picturesque or the sublime. "Nature" in history and literary paintings was defined as fidelity to the source; matching the mood, situation, and detail of the historical event or literary scene. This view was not limited to the critics; it was shared by many artists. David Wilkie, a giant among the popular artists said that "Art . . . only requires to reproduce nature and seek out truth," meaning literal truth.[16]

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[15]Ernest Chesneau, The English School of Painting (London: Cassell & Co., Ltd., 1891), p. 162-163.

[16]Chesneau, The English School of Painting, p. 73.

The last, perhaps the most important, quality sought after in a painting was the moral statement. This was the justification for art itself and was achieved through a combination of realism and sentiment. The realism of the subject would inspire emotion and the didactic impact of the painting was determined by the quantity and quality of not merely the emotions, but also the associative powers of the emotions. The critic and the casual observer looked to have their sentiments aroused and their minds flooded with associations. The associations had to be, if not overtly edifying, then at least calming and peaceful. In modern eyes this is a superficial demand to make of art and Thackeray was aware of the limitations of the English form of art appreciation. He himself was, from his own experience as an artist and his friendship with artists, knowledgeable in technical faults and merits. He was also the first English critic to point out the greater practice and refinement of art appreciation in France than in England. On any given Sunday, he wrote in the Paris Sketchbook, one would see a French family of the middle class traipsing through the Louvre, whereas in England the husband spent his holidays at the pub, guzzling porter. Thackeray was also cognizant of the radical difference between the quality

of English and French art appreciation. "For abstract art we have no appreciation," he noted in the Paris Sketchbook and proceeded to work within these limitations to educate the public's taste and to establish his own standards for art.

II. Thackeray's Concept of the Sublime

In art criticism as in literary criticism there is a tendency to categorize and compartmentalize. In the nineteenth century there were three basic categories of art: the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque. These were eighteenth-century concepts developed by rational theorists such as Edmund Burke in his Origin of the Sublime and the Beautiful, Reynolds' Discourses, and Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty. Thackeray was acquainted with these abstract concepts, especially that of Burke, and adapted their ideas to a pragmatic and easily comprehensible level. The highest form of art was sublime art, best exemplified by the masters of the Italian Renaissance. Burke defined the sublime as a violent aesthetic experience, the most powerful emotion possible in man. He linked it to man's instinct for self-preservation; to feel oneself overpowered and in terror at an unknown danger wielding uncontrollable power. The pain and pleasure experienced from the

sublime was allowed by the distance between the spectator and the actual danger and also from the intensity of the sense stimulation. To Thackeray the Burkian sublime was morally unsafe for the common man, and he adopted the idea of sublimity without accepting either terror as the causal factor or Burke's emphasis upon sensuality. Thackeray stressed sentiment in place of terror as the "secret of the sublime"[17] and his concept of sublimity could be called the "True Sentimental." He was very particular about the sincerity of the painter, the subject, and the emotions and associations aroused in the viewer. Thackeray de-emphasized the sensual impact of the sublime, making it less awesome and more human.

Thackeray called sentiment the first quality of painting but he could not specify what this "sentiment" was, for its presence in a certain painting was left up to the individual since the quality itself is "indefinable." The "best" pictures, according to Thackeray, touched the heart and achieved greatness through a combination of sentiment and great ideas.[18] Thackeray's sublimity was more similar to Uvedale

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[17]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's Magazine (hereafter to be cited as Fraser's), July 1840.

[18]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, July 1840.

Price's "picturesque" than to Burke's "sublime." The picturesque was a popular genre in the late eighteenth century, developed in 1794 by Price, who used the term primarily in conjunction with landscapes. The picturesque was "nearer the sublime than the beautiful but it does not rely entirely upon the instinct of fear for its effects--rather upon fear and awe softened into pity and sentimental regard."[19] Thackeray did not use "picturesque" in his reviews due to the fact that its popularity had dimmed by 1830, but the concept is encased in the word "poetical," which Thackeray uses in reference to the amount and the effect of sentiment in a painting.

The subject matter for the poetical sublime were religious scenes, not, however, the German "Nazarene" style prevalent in the 1830's and 1840's, called by Thackeray "middle-aged affectation." Dramatic representations as in scenes from Shakespeare's plays, literature such as Gil Blas and the Vicar of Wakefield, and an occasional historical painting also fulfilled Thackeray's standards. More often than not, however, history paintings were simply "caricatures in

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[19]Henry Ladd, The Victorian Morality of Art (New York: Ray Long & Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1932), p. 86.

form" of the great masters, Massacio, Raphael, and others and were condemned as paintings with "swagger and no sincerity" or "sincerity with no swagger."[20] In The Pictorial Times, for which Thackeray wrote in the years 1844-1848, he cited an improvement in painting as "painters paint more from the heart and less from the old heroic values." He criticized those modern painters who strove for the traditional sublime because he felt it was unattainable. The "True Sentimental" did not include Greek or classical art. Thackeray's experience in Sass's studio had taught him that Greek Art "carries corporeal beauty to perfection . . . but takes away all humanity."[21] Modern painters had been raised as Christians and the Christian school taught that "love is the first element of beauty in art" and chose the religious painter Charles Eastlake as an example of an artist who "gets a divinity through nature" not through sterile perfection.

Thackeray selected nature over the classical tradition as the more appropriate subject for the nineteenth-century artist, claiming that "It is the study of nature, surely, that profits us, and not of

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[20]Thackeray, "On Men and Pictures," Fraser's, July 1841.

[21]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, July 1840.

these imitations of her."[22] "Nature" has three meanings for Thackeray; firstly, it is doing that which is natural for the subject and the artist--visual consistency within the painting and painting only what one can express sincerely. One of Thackeray's primary complaints about neoclassicism was that it was "a classicism inspired by rouge, gas-lamps, and a few lines in Lempriere, and copied, half from ancient statues, and half from a naked guardsman at one shilling and sixpence the hour!"[23] Secondly, "nature" is where "the objects are capitally presented,"[24] that is, when visual fidelity to the subject is maintained, and finally, nature is that which is, if the subject is imagined, that which is at least probable and could exist.

In addition to classical perfection, Thackeray discarded most of the modern attempts at "catastrophe pictures." Catastrophe pictures were flamboyant depictions of shipwrecks, hurricanes, the Seven Plagues of

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[22]Thackeray, "On the French School of Painting," Paris Sketchbook, Vol. 22 of The Centenary Biographical Edition of the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1911), p. 50.

[23]Thackeray, "On the French School of Painting," Paris Sketchbook, p. 54.

[24]Thackeray, "On the French School of Painting," Paris Sketchbook, p. 56.

Egypt, and other mythological and historical disasters. The major English practitioners of this genre were Joseph Mallord Turner, John Martin, and Francis Danby. Thackeray called Turner's "Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying," exhibited in the 1840 Royal Academy Exhibition, "either sublime or ridiculous."[25] Thackeray questioned the violent coloring, unpleasant subjects, and sometimes dearth of detail in the same way as he questioned all extremism; "Why, in painting, are we to have monstous, flaring Drury Lane tricks and claptraps put into practice, when a quieter style is, as I fancy, so infinitely more charming?"[26] Traditional heroic painters, such as the die-hard Benjamin Haydon, fell into Thackeray's list of the "absurd" or "inappropriate."

> . . . it was the absurd maxim of our forefathers that because these subjects [classical and heroic-historical] had been the fashion twenty centuries ago, they must remain so in saecula saeculorum--because to these lofty heights giants had scaled, behold the race of pigmies must get on stilts and jump at them likewise! (Paris Sketchbook, 1840).

Thackeray actively advocated in the Sketchbook that

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[25]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, July 1840.

[26]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, July 1840.

contemporary painters should not strive for the sublime in the eighteenth-century sense of the word. He also quarrelled with the eighteenth-century neoclassical standard which aped past achievements asking, "Why is yonder simpering Venus de Medicis to be our standard of beauty, or the Greek tragedies to bound our notions of the sublime?"

Although Thackeray substituted sentiment for grandeur in the modern sublime, he still had a genuine appreciation of the traditional sublime and the old masters. Michelangelo represented the Burkian sublime to Thackeray. He showed his awareness of the pain-pleasure sensation in the viewer's reaction when he noted that "the spectator's sense amounts almost to pain" when observing Michelangelo's work. "The Last Judgment" "is the sublime, if you please--a new sublime--an original sublime--quite as sublime as the Greek sublime. . . ."[27] Thackeray called the painting "frightfully majestic" and then went on to advise the general viewer not to see it more than once and he voiced his own reservations because of the intensity of the paintings of Michelangelo.

> I would not like to be left in a room alone with the "Moses." How did the artist live amongst

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[27]Thackeray, "On the French School of Painting," Paris Sketchbook, p. 51.

> them, and create them? How did he suffer the painful labor of invention? One fancies that he would have been scorched up, like Semele, by sights too tremendous for his vision to bear. One cannot imagine him, with our small physical endowments and weakness, a man like ourselves (Paris Sketchbook).

Thackeray considered Michelangelo's passion too overpowering for the masses and too intense even for himself. "The Last Judgment" was too much of an irrational and violent aesthetic experience. Using one reason or another Thackeray shied away from the more powerful of the Renaissance and Baroque Masters. He preferred Claude Lorraine's landscapes which to experience were to "hold our faces to the sun and feel the golden light playing over our cheek" above Poussin.[28] Although Thackeray acknowledged Poussin to be sublime, he could not honestly enjoy the painter's work. Poussin was not always true to nature and his dark, melancholic tone "arouses a feeling similar to that of drinking rich wine . . . the luscious odor almost sickens you . . . you feel as if you were drinking hot blood."[29] The coloring and lush nudes of Titian and Rubens, while magnificent, are extreme and

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[28]Thackeray, "Some of the Picture Galleries in England, Pt. I," Fraser's, September 1842.

[29]Thackeray, "Some of the Picture Galleries in England, Pt. I," Fraser's, September 1842.

their fleshiness evoked a shudder of disgust from Thackeray who reacted identically to William Etty, a Victorian colorist, whom Thackeray called as "rich as Rubens,"[30] "not surpassed by Titian,"[31] and immoral. Etty, Rubens, and Titian were "not for the profanum vulgus, who could not comprehend."[32] Raphael had a fault of the opposite extreme--his cold intellectualization. He "excells in delineating a passion"[33] but could not inspire the gentle associations desirable from painting.

These artists from a by-gone era were separated from Thackeray's world. Even if one were capable of appreciating their work, constant exposure to Michelangelo and Rubens would cause an emotional surfeit and result in indigestion in one's moral being. The sublime

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[30]Thackeray, "Exhibition of the Royal Academy, Second Notice," Morning Chronicle, May 1846, in Contributions to the Morning Chronicle, ed. Gordon Ray (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955), p. 147.

[31]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, July 1840.

[32]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, July 1840.

[33]Thackeray, "Some of the Picture Galleries in England, Pt. II," Fraser's, October 1842.

was a reminder to the common man of the heights to which he could not reach and roused extremes of feeling which were unhealthy and disturbed one's mundane life. There was a distinct line of demarcation between past and present art. Thackeray admitted the Roman school of drawing was "unsurpassable" because its exact knowledge of anatomy freed the artist to be "daring without being absurd," while at the same time he accused contemporary artists' daring to be only "caricatures." This division was indicative of one major reason why Thackeray felt the pursuit of the sublime to be an impossible, nay, a ridiculous, endeavor for modern man. One could only catch at the form without ever reproducing the larger-than-life sensation because Victorian man was, as Thackeray said in his letters, small and weak, and prone to temptation. Man was born and bred to "appreciate the pleasures of mediocrity," living a life in which "glimpses of the sublime [were] but rare."[34]

III. The Mediocre

"Why do men make light of the mediocre and struggle for the sublime?"[35] questioned Thackeray in 1841.

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[34]Thackeray, "On the French School of Painting," Paris Sketchbook, p. 64.

[35]Thackeray, "On Men and Pictures," Fraser's, July 1841.

Thackeray advocated the pleasures of mediocrity as the desirable standard for art. There were specific reasons as to why the mediocre would be the preferred yardstick for art. The classical virtues of honor, fortitude, self-sacrifice, etc., inherent in "high" art were not applicable to the Victorian businessmen who had not been nurtured with pride in an ancient lineage, a chivalric sense of honor, or the Roman virtues. Even to Thackeray the fervent "gentleman," the heroic ideals in sublime art were distant from the practices of life. Thackeray evaluated art in terms of what would reflect or further the "practices" rather than the "ideals" of living. The pragmatic emphasis in Victorian England on truth and fidelity to nature resulted in a general devaluation of neoclassical and historical painting. The new interest in the historical antique brought forth such discoveries from archaeological excavations and acquisitions such as the Elgin marbles which proved the neoclassical imitations very disparate from the classical reality.

To attempt to recreate a reality which one is unable to imitate sincerely spawned a false imitation that is almost an immoral act, in the eyes of Thackeray; immoral on the part of the artist and on the part of the observer because the one creates a lie and the other

believes the deceit. The pursuit of such an impossibility distracted the artist from his "right" task--creating the best art he can within his limitations. The strength of the antique lay in the fact that the ancients worked within their limitations of patience and concentrated thought; they did not "ape a less instructed century" as did those who strove for a purity or genius they did not possess.[36] Any continuous contact with sublime art also disturbed the viewer, making him dissatisfied with his mediocrity--his ordained lot and ordinary capabilities. Thackeray concluded in the Paris Sketchbook that third-rate artists are better than Michelangelo, for the masters "drown the common man."

Thackeray was a realist in his belief that anything less than a probability was a delusion. His concept of nature was twofold in addition to his overall demand for consistency in the presentation of the subject; the physical outdoors of gardens, trees, meadows, etc., and that which was "natural," i.e., something which if it did not exist, could exist. For example, Turner's "Rain--Steam--Speed" impressed

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[36]Thackeray, "Exhibition of the Royal Academy," Athenaeum, June 1845.

Thackeray with its palpable realism, but he condemned the same artist for being "incomprehensible" when Turner did not adhere to nature. Thackeray censured artists for extremism in both their subject matter and their technical effects. Daniel Maclise's choice of subject in "Macbeth" was "too dreadful and lively" for comfortable viewing. William Etty was too colorful and Rubenesque; Thackeray called his "Pluto and Prosperpina" "overdrawn" and its "too much flesh" in bad taste.[37] As early as 1830 in the Athenaeum Thackeray decided Etty would never be a historical painter for he was too rooted to the earth and lacked the "epic idea." Etty's great sin was his lack of "loftiness of thought, no poetry, grandeur of spirit, dignity, grace." His was the "vigour and boldness of a rude animal, not a cultivated spirit." Delacroix was also too effective in his coloration and violent action. Thackeray's critical reaction against extremism reflected his personal experiences during this period. It was "safer" to be in the middle of the road. Fate was arbitrary enough without tempting her by experimentation, if one opened the valves of the emotions and

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[37]Thackeray, "A Second Lecture on the Fine Arts," Fraser's, June 1839.

explored the limits of reality, where would one find a boundary?

Thackeray answered the question by establishing the boundary of the mediocre in both fiction and the visual arts. As the Burkian sublime founded on terror became in Thackeray's aesthetic a quasi-sublime based on sentimental associations, the "beautiful" became a moral pleasantry. There was a constant demand for "pleasantness" in Thackeray's criticism. It was a pleasantness to be enjoyed "in spite" of all things; Thackeray knew that the difficulties of the human condition would remain the same under any social order[38] and "he can only recommend you to enjoy honestly, to suffer bravely, and to wear a patient face . . ." man must "accept men and things the way they are."[39] In 1845 Thackeray made his preference clear when he dismissed one of Benjamin Haydon's heroic efforts as too strenuous and demanding, saying, "I begin to find the world growing more pathetic and laugh less every year."[40] In this frame of mind,

[38]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 15.

[39]W. C. Roscoe, "Thackeray's Art and Morality," National Review ii (January 1856) in Thackeray: The Critical Heritage, eds. Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), p. 278.

[40]Thackeray, "Picture Gossip," Fraser's, June 1845.

Thackeray determined that the basic effect of the mediocre was to "leave a happy mood" and "suggest peaceful thoughts" as he said in reference to a Creswick landscape.[41] "Little pictures copied directly from nature" left the same impression and one should gaze at paintings suitable for wall decorations. A moral genre picture by W. P. Frith, the "Good Pastor," exhibited in 1845, typified Thackeray's concept of ideal mediocrity. The sentiment in the painting was not oppressive; it was "indicated rather than expressed." The overall aura of the painting was one of kindliness and beauty; "inspiring delicate sympathies" and "awakening [a] tender good humor." Such is "the kind of picture that is good to paint nowadays." "Nowadays" it will be remembered are the days of Thackeray's personal disillusionments and tragedy, the days when Thackeray had no home and his domestic ideal was a bitter irony in the reality of an insane wife and the English Channel looming between himself and his daughters.

Foreseeably, Thackeray chose subjects of domestic scenes, moral genre pictures, rural scenes, and quiet landscapes for the mediocre. These small subjects he

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[41]Thackeray, "Exhibition of Royal Academy, Third Notice," Morning Chronicle, May 1846, in Ray, Contributions to the Morning Chronicle, p. 152.

called "bread and butter for the common man."[42] Art improved as artists moved from large, grandiose paintings to the cultivation of the "pathetic and familiar." Accordingly, the subject took precedence over technical virtuosity. Thackeray looked for "poetic credence" which would ignite associations."[43] He wrote of George Cattermole's "Contest For the Bridge" (1844) that one should examine the "sentiment and poetry of it rather than the fine parts."[44]

There was, however, a limit to the amount of sentiment allowable in a painting before it became "namby-pamby." If the painting condescended too much to the general taste, which had been nurtured on the execrable "Annuals" and "Books of Beauty," Thackeray did not hesitate to discard it as too sentimental, "belonging to the milk of human kindness breed."[45] An excess of sentiment or hypocritical sentiment were

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[42]Thackeray, "Letters on the Fine Arts. No. 3: The Royal Academy," Pictorial Times, May 1843, in Stray Papers, ed. Lewis Melville (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1901), p. 214.

[43]Thackeray, "Exhibition of the Society of Painters of Water-Colour," Morning Chronicle, April 1846, in Ray, Contributions to the Morning Chronicle, p. 135.

[44]Thackeray, "Exhibition of the Society of Painters of Water-Colour," Morning Chronicle, April 1844, in Ray, Contributions to the Morning Chronicle, p. 28.

[45]Thackeray, "Picture Gossip," Fraser's, June 1845.

false in Thackeray's opinion and unsuitable guides for the viewing public. Depending upon the depth of the painting, true sentiment inspired a feeling of awe or tenderness; at its most serious, painting evoked an intense feeling close to a religious experience. Such a painting had a "high poetical quality." At a lower level, a simple portrait such as that of "Mr. and Mrs. Webster" contained "true and good sentiment." This level of sentiment, while not awe-inspiring, reinforced one's virtuous inclinations and beliefs--love of home, love of family, and love of country. Landscapes were the major source for the poetical sentiment because they were not limited by narrative content. Thackeray conceived of both levels of sentiment as means to educate the public's taste, which concern was paramount in his mind when he wrote his art criticism. In the same interest Thackeray sought out and condemned any hint of vulgarity in English painting. He considered the public to be sufficiently vulgar without their artists reinforcing their ignorance. "Caricatures and Lithography in Paris," a chapter in the Paris Sketchbook, stated his view of the cultural condition of the English viewing public. As has been stated, Thackeray made a great distinction between the French and the English appreciation for art. The French may

not have had a refined taste for art, but, as is evidenced in their love of ornamentation and their flocking to the museums, at least "they have a taste." The English demand of art was "for neatness, prettiness, and what is called effect in pictures. . . ." Thackeray characterized the nature of English taste:

> Nothing merely intellectual will be popular among us: we do not love beauty for beauty's sake, as the Germans; or wit, for wit's sake, as the French; for abstract art we have no appreciation . . . the art is a very minor consideration.[46]

True to himself, Thackeray connected the lack of artistic appreciation with the falsity of the idea of "superior English morality." The lower classes might buy cheap prints and spend their Sundays with beer or tea instead of at the National Gallery, while the aristocracy frittered away their Sundays behind a Sunday newspaper and a whiskey and soda. This "immorality" existed because "the people must be amused and have not been taught how."

IV. The Purpose of Art and the Artist

To raise the public morals was the specific office of art and the artist. Constant exposure to the right

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[46]Thackeray, "Caricatures and Lithography in Paris," Paris Sketchbook, p. 178.

kind and number of moral lessons would necessarily raise one's level of moral consciousness and certainly would enable one to enjoy more delicately the world around one. "Mediocre" painting was easily understood by the common man. It aroused no strange and violent emotions. Thackeray was willing to sacrifice technique or virtuosity for the associative powers of painting. Said Thackeray of one of Charles Eastlake's religious paintings, "the artist has attained his great end, which is to strike far deeper than the sight; and we have no business to quarrel about defects in form and colour which are but little parts of the great painter's skill."[47] Technical defects only became obvious in a painting based on a petty idea. Thackeray denounced David Wilkie's "Grace Before Meat" as "half-drawn," but even if the picture lacked skill, it was commendable because the "expression is exquisite."

Associations, "the great end," educated the mind by "purifying the taste and heart."[48] They were created through love and nature; love as it was taught in the "Christian school" to be a pure, unselfish emotion, and

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[47]Thackeray, "Second Lecture on the Fine Arts," Fraser's, June 1839.

[48]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, June 1840.

nature as an unsullied element, particularly considered so in the nineteenth century when "religion and nature became very nearly inseparable."[49] Of course an appreciation of art which would lead to the development of one's associative powers was gained only through education. General cultivation of the mind was necessary as well as the frequent study of landscape paintings or of nature itself, according to Thackeray. Genre pictures took second place to landscape paintings because of the former's limited associative properties due to the constrictions of a narrative content. Genre imparted a specific moral lesson or a specific beneficial feeling, but that was the extent of their powers. Landscape paintings were not as limited in their scope. In fact, Thackeray called it the "privilege" of the landscapist that he was never confined to just one subject or expression but there were "a thousand which rise out of (each) painting."[50] In a dramatic landscape, which embodied the poetic sentiment, the "chain of thought is touched by the fire of association,

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[49]Ladd, Victorian Morality of Art, p. 52.

[50]Thackeray, "On the French School of Painting," Paris Sketchbook, p. 63.

and every link vibrates with the mysterious sympathy of emotion."[51]

The associative principle is an eighteenth-century aesthetic concept derived from John Locke and discussed by Addison (Pleasures of the Imagination), Hume (A Treatise of Human Nature), and Burke (Inquiry into the Origin of . . . the Sublime and the Beautiful), among others. The process by which the painting affected the viewer was as follows; the painting by its content would inspire associations in the mind of the viewer; these associations came from the viewer's own deepest memories and experiences. The associations were so powerful as to arouse the viewer's emotions and inspire him. Upon reflection, the emotions acted upon the intellect and then the intellect combined with the remembered emotions to act upon the soul to raise and improve its quality. Sublime painting brought about the most elevated experience of contemplation of God (Addison, Pleasures) and, while not having the immediate effect of producing a good action, all painting caused a delayed reaction that was permanently enriching to the whole person, in addition to the immediate pleasure of viewing the painting. Thackeray did not

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[51]Thackeray, "Some of the Picture Galleries in England, Pt. I," Fraser's, September 1842.

aim his associations as high as contemplation of God, but he considered that pleasantly sentimental art would inspire contemplation of those values and virtues which were attainable to man. Thus art would keep forever in man's mind what he could do and be, and make him happily content with his lot. Thackeray also believed that the associative process worked negatively as well as positively. A voluptuous painting would give rise to voluptuous thoughts and would eventually undermine female chastity and male temperance. This is not to say that one glimpse of an Etty nude would turn a man into a libertine, but continued exposure to such art would at least cast a shadow between the man and his proper virtue.

Thackeray's adaptation of the theory of association to fit a middle-class public was part of his larger attempt to bring the whole theory of art appreciation to the great mass of men. "As patrons change, tastes change," he wrote in a Punch article,[52] and he felt obligated to ensure that the public's taste was of a "gentlemanly" calibre. Thackeray attained his position among his contemporaries "chiefly by redefining the gentlemanly ideal to fit a middle class rather than an

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[52]Thackeray, "Mr. Punch on the Fine Arts," Punch, May 1845.

aristocratic content."[53] He continually advocated public participation in the arts and stressed the responsibility of artists and their institutions to the public. "Mr. Punch on the Fine Arts" lashed out at the museums for closing to the public on Sunday. An incredible thing to do, according to Thackeray, for Sunday was the only day of leisure for the middle- and working-class when they might get some enjoyment and instruction at a museum.

Another issue which aroused controversy in the art world was the Art Unions. This was an attempt to make art available for possession by the general public through a lottery. Art Unions offered to buy exhibition pictures with an aggregate of their members' money and then raffled off the paintings among the members. Many people, particularly the artists, felt that this practice degraded art, made it too commercial. Thackeray in the Pictorial Times came out strongly in favor of the Art Unions.[54] He claimed that in the long run Art Unions would improve the general taste. His defense of the Unions lay in the belief that people joined them because they had a love of art and a love of art "will

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[53]Ray, The Uses of Adversity, p. 13.

[54]Thackeray, "Letters on the Fine Arts. No. 1: The Art Unions," Pictorial Times, March 1843, in Melville, Stray Papers, pp. 192-202 passim.

generate a Knowledge of Art." Thackeray saw advances which had been made in art in the past twenty years, primarily the advancement of "truth" in painting--from the false heroic to the simplicity of moral genre paintings and landscapes. In addition to the aesthetic reasons for exposing the public to art there was the practical consideration that the middle class was rapidly replacing the aristocracy as patrons of art. That in itself was desirable since the English aristocracy had never been particularly generous patrons; but if the public had no taste or bad taste, the change would have a disastrous effect upon the state of English art.

If art were the means of education, then artists bore the responsibility to create art which would properly instruct the public's taste. Thackeray had strong feelings about the position and duty of the painter. He did not agree with the bulk of English opinion which imprisoned the artist in a lower social class and a morally suspect environment. If the artist were to teach he could not be excluded from the ranks of respectability. The artist, on his side, must be worthy of his office. Artists should not paint down to the public for money, but should raise their

tastes.[55] Any painter who did not conform to this didactic purpose fell under Thackeray's biting sarcasm. In "May Gambols" of 1844 Charles Landseer was condemned for "vulgarizing" a religious theme in his Victorian-domestic version of the story of Noah. Thackeray specifically criticized the artist for attempting to please everyone. Landseer "familiarized" history, thus taking from it its dignity and moral greatness.

One of Thackeray's earliest reviews dealt with the problem of the condescending or mercenary artist. In 1832 Thackeray wrote a vitriolic condemnation of the "Annuals," yearly albums issued under titles such as "The Book of Beauty," or "The Keepsake Book."[56] The structure remained the same regardless of the title; saccharine single figure compositions or narrative tableaux all designed to display feminine beauty. The pictures were accompanied by verse equally as trite--Thackeray may possibly have had first-hand knowledge of the "Annuals" for he set Arthur Pendennis in Pendennis to scribbling verses to be used in an "Annual."

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[55]Thackeray, "May Gambols or Titmarsh in the Picture Galleries," Fraser's, June 1844.

[56]Thackeray, "The Annuals," Fraser's, December 1832, rpt. The Times, 1838.

> That eminent publisher, Mr. Bacon . . . used to present to the world every year a beautiful gilt volume called the "Spring Annual," edited by the lady Violet Lebas, and numbering amongst its contributors not only the most eminent, but the most fashionable, poets of our time. Young Lord Dodo's poems first appeared in this miscellany--the Honorable Percey Popjoy . . .--Bedwin Sand's Eastern Ghazuls, and many more of the works of our young nobles, were first given to the world in the "Spring Annual. . . ." The book was daintily illustrated with pictures of reigning beauties, or other prints of a tender and voluptuous character. . . .[57]

Thackeray saw the "Annuals" substituting "beauty," a "modern English improvement on a woman," for nature. He scorned the custom of major and emerging artists drawing for these books for the extra money. The artists could not progress for they simply plagiarized other artists. The subjects demanded would spoil and pervert any artist, but the young ones particularly would be irrevocably corrupted because the continual repetition of one (and that one false) idea of beauty would distract their eyes from the study of nature "of which art is just the mirror."[58] Moreover the "Annuals" encouraged the public's bad taste; if well-known artists did not draw for these

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[57]Thackeray, Pendennis, Vol. I, Vol. 3 of The Centenary Edition of the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), pp. 405-406.

[58]Thackeray, "The Annuals," Fraser's, December 1832.

albums, the public would not purchase them so readily and thus not develop a false idea of the beautiful. In short, Thackeray saw the artist betraying a public trust in proliferating the "Annuals."

The "Annuals" were only an example of what Thackeray felt the artist should not do. The artist should never forget that he was painting for the general public, not for himself. This consideration automatically outlawed immoral subjects and undue experimentation. Painters should recognize their own mediocrity (if that be the case) as well as that of their public. In a discussion of large paintings, Thackeray asserted that each painter should know his limitations[59]; if he cannot achieve what he sets out to do, perhaps he is attempting too much. Education was also necessary for the educators, primarily in order to refine the natural inclinations of the artist, "The understanding may inherit from nature its flexibility and strength; but the grace of its movements must in some measure, be taught by art."[60]

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[59]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, July 1840.

[60]Thackeray, "Some of the Picture Galleries in England," Fraser's, October 1842.

V. Thackeray's Development as an Art Critic

The artist and the public were not alone in their need for education. Critics underwent a certain amount of development also. Thackeray himself learned as he wrote and his art criticism shows a distinct growth between 1838 and 1848. It is the same progress which occurred in his fiction from the "Yellowplush Correspondence" of 1838 to the inception of Pendennis in 1848--a steady process of mellowing, of deepening insight, and of an increasingly literary point of view. As the "Yellowplush Correspondence" was the "stronger Thackeray," called by himself "too savage,"[61] so was the early art criticism extremely snide in tone and ruthless in its exposure of sham. Thackeray had little charity for anything outside his narrow standards and was capable of establishing absolute conditions of "right" and "wrong." "Strictures on Pictures" (Fraser's, 1838) dismisses Titian as "antichrist," Rubens as "Martin Luther," and facetiously sets up a court of the reigning popular painters of the day: King Mulready, Baron Briggs, Daniel, Prince Maclise; Edwin, Earl of Landseer; The Lord Charles Landseer; Duke of

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[61]Saintsbury, A Consideration of Thackeray, p. 29.

Etty; and Archbishop Eastlake, parodying Eastlake's religious paintings. This was Thackeray's unsubtle method of criticizing the overabundance of titled painters in the Royal Academy and their exclusivity. Thackeray's very distaste for neoclassicism and his interpretation of it as "humbug" was couched in no uncertain terms in the Paris Sketchbook, first serialized in 1835 for Fraser's. At this time Thackeray's self-assertiveness amounts almost to bigotry as when he speaks about Raphael's last works:

> I hate those simpering Madonnas. I declare that the "Jardinière" is a puking, smirking miss, with nothing heavenly about her. I vow that the "Saint Elizabeth" is a bad picture,--a bad composition, badly drawn, badly coloured, in a bad imitation of Titian,--a piece of vile affectation. I say that when Raphael painted this picture two years before his death, the spirit of painting had gone from out of him; he was no longer inspired; it was time that he should die!![62]

At this early period everything which Thackeray disliked received a withering verbal attack with never a hint of charity; neoclassicism, the German Nazarene movement, the French (both painters and paintings), pseudo-heroic painters (Benjamin Haydon), the trite "Annuals," and romanticism all were irrevocably wrong to Thackeray. Thackeray's disillusions on life

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[62]Thackeray, "On the French School of Painting," Paris Sketchbook, p. 65.

sharpened his pen and put blinders upon his eyes to the extent that he saw sham in almost everything. He used words such as "silly" and "absurd" which were not critical terms but indicated only a personal preference without a reason. His attitude toward English art had a tendency to be marked by a personal bias; those artists who were personal friends (Maclise, Cattermole, Stone) came in for a good deal of praise.

Thackeray's excessively personal attitude and opinions diminished in his criticism but never disappeared. Gradually, in the early and mid 1840's Thackeray lost his flippancy and showed a deeper sympathy for the artist's intent even if he did not grasp the end result. His demand for sentiment and pleasantness emerged in 1840 in "Pictorial Rhapsody" and increased thereafter as did his similar demand for mediocrity instead of sublimity.[63] These two aesthetic concerns combined with an increased overall tone of resignation and fatalism. The Morning Chronicle articles, reviews of the Water-colour Exhibitions of 1844 and 1846 and a review of the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1846 were dotted with pleas for fidelity to nature and "poetic credence."

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[63]Thackeray, "On Men and Pictures," Fraser's, July 1841.

The importance of painting as a refuge from the unpleasantness of life and as an educational tool overpowered the sarcastic voice of the young disillusioned artist and man reviling the humbugs of the world. Thackeray was much more positive and inclined to excuse imperfections; the "uncertainty" of Maclise's "Ordeal By Touch" only "adds to the drama and mystery," Cattermole's lack of technical skill is "careless mastery" and is unimportant beside his sentiment and poetry.

Thackeray was writing more and more during the 1840's on lengthy works of fiction and was pulling his thoughts together. The resultant deeper perception appears in his art criticism. He was still moved to question what he considered to be dubious values, but he was less inclined to preach and to insist upon his own guidelines. Thackeray's choice of subject matter was now (1844-1848) centered upon domestic scenes and landscapes--paintings which were suited for room decoration and which inspired pleasant associations and thoughts, for Thackeray was less predisposed to judge on the surface. Heretofore, Thackeray had merely declaimed about art and judged it without sympathy, but he was learning that the author must be sympathetically involved with his work. In the Morning Chronicle (1846) Thackeray called for the artist to include himself

in his work. He was becoming increasingly aware through his own experience that art is a self-revelatory endeavor and that it is necessary that it be so in order to succeed. This realization made Thackeray more tolerant without lessening his principles.

The gradual change from journalist to novelist in the 1840's separated Thackeray from his early view of art as a former artist and made him forever a literary connoisseur of art. He identified the two forms of art and developed his aesthetic ideas accordingly. Art became to Thackeray a thing through which emotion is transmitted. Things were important to Thackeray's fiction and both mediums became a vehicle to communicate for a purpose. Thackeray's early fiction tended to expose sham, Vanity Fair being the great example; Barry Lyndon and Catherine were earlier, more virulent attempts at the same overall social criticism. Thackeray the art critic grows to reinforce the simple values which he found important: the values learned at Larkbeare and during his brief married life. The two mediums worked toward the same end which was to establish a sensible code of mediocrity. The early literature worked in a negative sense by ridiculing what was, while the art criticism worked positively to show what could be. The later novels,

starting with Pendennis, lost the vituperative bitterness of Vanity Fair and a resigned melancholic tone permeated the books. The tone is resigned because the happy mediocre existence of the characters at the end of the books comes about only after the protagonists have tried for or dreamed of something better. Pendennis ended at Fairoaks living in quiet obscurity with Laura, while Colonel Esmond retired to the colonies where he lived so saddened and disillusioned from his youthful hopes that he "submitted to life rather than enjoyed it, and never was in better spirits than in his last hours when he was going to lay it down."[64] Clive Newcome finally married Ethel in The Newcomes, but what an unsatisfactory match--they come to each other as the leavings of someone else. The domestic ideal in Vanity Fair is tinged with melancholy and disillusion; Major Dobbin won his Amelia but only after his eighteen-year-old image of her as his "great love" was shattered. Thackeray's mediocre art fitted just such lives in which one had to "suffer bravely and wear a patient face."[65] His aesthetic taught people

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[64]Thackeray, The Virginians (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1884), p. 23.

[65]Roscoe, "Thackeray's Art and Morality," in Tillotson, Critical Heritage, p. 278.

not to strive for what he knew, and what his characters learned, one could not achieve--a life where one's illusions were fulfilled or even remained intact; a life in which sublimity was possible.

Not only was the purpose of the novels and the art criticism the same but also the aesthetic standards for both were the same. Thackeray's style is a verbal manifestation of his visual demands for painting, and he found the same faults in literature as he found in painting. Writing in Punch in 1844 on the "Royal Academy," Thackeray complained of the political maneuvering of the Academy members. There was so much "kow-towing to prize winners" and position-jockeying for a good hanging spot that the appreciation of the art was almost forgotten.[66] In 1839 Thackeray criticized the same kind of misdirection in literature in a letter to his mother: "Criticism has been party matter with us til now, and literature a poor political lackey--please God we shall begin ere long to love art for art's sake."[67] Thackeray found the same sham and

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[66]Thackeray, "Royal Academy," Punch, May 1844.

[67]Thackeray, Letters, Vol. I, 1817-1840, ed. Gordon Ray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1946), to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, December 1839, p. 396.

pretensions in both painting and literature. In "Pictorial Rhapsody" Thackeray stated his disgust with the grandiose historical style: "Why, in painting, are we to have monstrous, flaring, Drury Lane tricks and claptraps put in practice, when a quieter style is, as I fancy, so infinitely more charming?" Thackeray similarly criticized Byron's Werner in a letter to Edward Fitzgerald (1838): "What a grand collection of clap-trap that play is!--but there is no soul in all those fine words, and grand sentences; like old-fashioned damask gowns all flowers and finery, and so stiff that they stand up by themselves, you fancy at a little distance there is someone inside the gown. . . ."[68] This was a play which reflected the phrase, "swagger with no sincerity," a criticism of the French Romantics in "On Men and Pictures."[69]

VI. Thackeray's Writing as Example of His Aesthetic Demands

Thackeray's own writing followed the aesthetic set forth in his criticism. Contemporary reviews of

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[68]Thackeray, Letters, Vol. I, to Edward Fitzgerald, 1838, p. 349.

[69]Thackeray, "On Men and Pictures," Fraser's, July 1841.

Thackeray voiced the same criticisms and commendations about his writings as Thackeray voiced about English painting, evidence that Thackeray practiced what he preached and that he did reach the audience with his desired impression. Abraham Hayward wrote in 1848 a review of "Thackeray's Writings" for the Edinburgh Review. Hayward's main topic of interest was Thackeray's magnum opus up to that time, Vanity Fair. He praised the novel for its "thoroughbred carelessness" in its flow of "natural" sentiments which statement echoes Thackeray's own picture of George Cattermole's truthful sentiment and "careless mastery." Thackeray's concern for gentlemanliness and truth to oneself, so important in the visual arts, was satisfied in Vanity Fair as Hayward saw it; "In a word, the book is the work of a gentleman, which is one great merit; and not the work of a fine (or would-be fine) gentleman which is another [merit]. . . ."[70] Thus, the refinement which Thackeray sought to disseminate through his art criticism was manifest in his own work as was his lack of fashionable pretensions.

Thackeray's fidelity to nature was marked by George Henry Lewes in the Morning Chronicle (May 6, 1848).

[70]Abraham Hayward, "Thackeray's Writings," Edinburgh Review, 88 (January 1848), pp. 46-47, in Tillotson, Thackeray: The Critical Heritage, p. 37.

"While reading Thackeray you feel that he is painting 'after nature'; not that he is inventing figments. . . ." Significantly, Lewes also saw Thackeray as a kind of apogee of the Golden Mean (or the mediocre in Thackeray's words).

> He has no asperities; he presents no rough points against which the reader's mind is thrust with pain; his manner is unobtrusive, his mannerism is not obvious. He offends no one by the vehemence of his opinions, nor by dogmatism of manner. His wit is delicate, his pathos simple, and rather indicated than dwelt upon. He indulges in no false sentiment, disturbs you by no ambitious bursts of rhetoric. There is no fustian in him, no glare from the footlights is thrown upon exaggerated distortions of human nature.[71]

No pain, unobtrusiveness, delicacy, simplicity of pathos, suggesting rather than expressing sentiment, no false sentiment, no histrionic displays; all these qualities are exactly those which Thackeray demanded in painting.

David Masson writing for the North British Review (May 1851) made a comparison of Thackeray and Dickens as "low art" and "high art," respectively. According to Masson "low art" is the "real style" of art in which the "aim is to produce pictures that shall impress by their close and truthful resemblance to

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[71]George Henry Lewes, "Review of Thackeray," Morning Chronicle, May 1848, p. 3, in Tillotson, Thackeray: The Critical Heritage, pp. 44-45.

something or other in real nature or life." "High" or "ideal" art is built more upon flights of fancy which elevate the mind "out of itself into a region of higher possibilities" rather than striking by "recalling real scenes and occurrences." "High art" is more panoramic and more inclined to be ethically black or white. "Low art," at least Thackeray's "low art," is localized and specific, and less precise in its moral judgments. Thackeray's study "seems to be to give the good and bad together." Masson characterizes the literary Thackeray as a visual artist: ". . . he seems to unite the strong and fierce characteristics of Hogarth, with a touch both of Wilkie and Maclise, and not a little of that regular grace and fine sense of colour which charm us in the groups of Watteau. . . ."[72] Translated into literary terms, this means that Thackeray had the unrelenting sarcastic insight of Hogarth, the domestic ideals and moral pleasantry of Wilkie's or Maclise's genre pieces, and the grace and "gentlemanliness" of Watteau. All four artists were admired by Thackeray for just those characteristics; Thackeray called Maclise "Prince" and commends his poetry and

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[72]David Masson, "Pendennis and Copperfield: Thackeray and Dickens," North British Review, 15 (May 1851), pp. 57-58, in Tillotson, Thackeray: The Critical Heritage, pp. 114-116.

humor ("May Gambols," 1844 and "Strictures on Pictures," 1838); Thackeray praised Wilkie for his genre scenes of "exquisite expression" ("A Second Lecture," 1839); he admired Watteau for his "brightness and gaiety" ("On the French School of Painting," 1840); and Hogarth was lauded for his sarcastic insight.

W. C. Roscoe found Thackeray's content to reflect his aesthetic interests. Roscoe's article, "Thackeray's Art and Morality," appeared in the National Review for January of 1858. He called Thackeray a "painter" repeatedly and typified him as a "painter of manners." Roscoe's view of Thackeray's approach to his fiction echoes Thackeray's determination to avoid unpleasantness, to stay within his limitations, and to emphasize sentiment and the importance of feeling. Man the social animal occupied Thackeray in fiction and in art--the mediocre was for man as part of a society; it was to educate man the social animal that Thackeray advocated "public" art and didacticism. He did not penetrate, nor did he wish to enter, into the "secret real life that every man leads in isolation from his fellows. . . ."[73] Because Isabella Shawe Thackeray's

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[73]W. C. Roscoe, "Thackeray's Art and Morality," National Review, 2 (January 1858), pp. 177-213, in Tillotson, Thackeray: The Critical Heritage, pp. 266-276.

"real" life drove her insane, it followed naturally that Thackeray, who had to live with his own feelings of guilt about his behavior in his marriage (cf. George Osborne's relationship with Amelia in Vanity Fair), would be adverse to exploring an inner area which had such painful memories. Roscoe again struck a chord of similarity when he said that the force of Thackeray's writings "derived from his feelings" not "from the intellect" and there was "an absence of ideas, principles, and reflections" in Thackeray's novels. Thackeray's form of didacticism was based upon the associative principle whereby one learned and improved through an emotional osmosis, not through an overt philosophy. The emphasis on sentiment in both the art reviews and the novels spoke for this; his rapturous account of Frith's "Good Pastor" and his rhapsodies about Helen Pendennis, Pen's mother, come from the same root and lead toward the same end--to work upon man's finer emotions, not to excite intellectual cogitations.

Thackeray as a moralist in his fiction had, in Roscoe's eyes, a "sense of the powerlessness of the human will." In his art criticism this resignation caused the whole ethic of mediocrity to emerge. If Thackeray's fictional themes were the "disappointment which waits on human desires, in both their fulfillment

and destruction; the emptiness of worldly things; the frailty of affections; the sternness of fate; and the hopelessness of [human] endeavor"; then his preferences in art determined the solution and the solace for that defeatist attitude. "Get as much pleasure as you can from those things which are in your grasp and where you have the choice, surround yourself with goodness and pleasantness."

The general ethical similarity between the art criticism and the fiction can be narrowed to more specific likenesses. One element which has been discussed in relation to the art criticism and Thackeray's life which also held a prominent place in his fiction, was Thackeray's class-consciousness. He felt social classes were static conditions. He divided painting according to one's social class. Public art, or the mediocre, fitted the middle and lower classes. In fiction, characters meet with great opprobrium if they tried to move up the social scale.[74] Becky Sharp and George Osborne in Vanity Fair attempted to improve their social positions, and the pictures of their characters is anything but pleasant; Becky from a shrewd and witty

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[74]Barbara Hardy, Exposure of Luxury: Radical Themes in Thackeray (London: Peter Owen, 1972), Introduction, passim.

governess becomes a heartless mercenary whore who would rather her child go unfed and her husband be stranded in jail than give up her struggle toward acceptance by the aristocratic class. George Osborne hobnobbed only with those officers who were his social betters. He was incredibly vain and false in his affections for both wife and friends. A great part of Vanity Fair dealt with social maneuverings depicted always in the darkest light. The gentler books following Vanity Fair were not more sympathetic to social climbing, but emphasized more the failure of the protagonists to be other or greater than they were instead of concentrating on the despicableness of the climb. Arthur Pendennis very nearly got himself into an inextricable pattern of social pushing in his engagement to Blanche Amory. He was to put up with a loveless marriage to a "sham" girl in return for a seat in Parliament. Pen saved himself from such a disaster but not before he had played the "grand gentleman" with an innocent girl of the lower class, Fanny, and the blasé "man of the world" with Laura, both roles to his own ridicule and to others' pain. Clive Newcome was an aspiring artist who let himself be pushed by his doting father into a grandiose setting and the upper classes. Again, Clive saved himself but not without the aid of his father's financial ruin. And the

father who wanted so much for his son, Colonel Newcome, ended up as a pensioner in Grayfriars--a charity case. All these fictional failures reinforce the advisability of Thackeray's aesthetic of the mediocre.

A necessary adjunct to Thackeray's class-consciousness, based as it was on a certain amount of personal failure, was a lack of moral optimism. There are no really "happy endings" in the novels, for the lives are more of a second choice than a goal attained. The mediocre is never a completely happy mediocrity, and the characters settle down not without some misgivings as to their choice of life or an odd twist to their union. Laura marries Pen knowing she is superior to him and that she is a mother-figure to him; "seeing and owning that there are better men than he. . . ."[75] Pen knows he is second choice, that Laura would have married Warrington if the latter were unmarried. Dobbin finally married Amelia after he had discovered that she was unworthy of his great devotion. There is no escape in the fiction, no way of recapturing ideals or perfect happiness. The height of the happiness attained by the couples in the novels are like to the "pleasant" effect of a mediocre painting; no grand

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[75]Thackeray, Pendennis, Vol. II, p. 495.

flashes or profound statements but no acute pain or sorrow, either.

Thackeray's use of "things" is also applicable to both his fiction and his theory of art. Painting is itself a "thing" and it consists of "things." In the novels people are expressed by their use of objects and the kind of objects surrounding them. Becky Sharp uses objects in order to use people--she keeps Jos Sedley's picture for years and finally captures him by the use of it. Ethel Newcome becomes an object: "You belong to your belongings," Lady Kew tells her. Beatrix Esmond and Blanche Amory derive their being from the gilt and finery which envelope them. "Things" are also expressive of society, particularly in Vanity Fair. The idea that "man's envelope is a part of him, defines the degree of his freedom, the extent of his conditioning, his taste and loves, his susceptibility to the outsides of others, or to the objects of trade, religion, and beauty" so pervades Thackeray's fiction that his work is "not only a history, but a sociology and a moral psychology of the world of objects."[76]

"Things" have a two-fold importance in Thackeray's philosophy of art. A painting as an object acts to define one's existence by establishing a moral climate.

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[76]Hardy, Exposure of Luxury, p. 111.

Thackeray felt nothing would be more beneficial to study and mediation than to line the library walls with landscapes which would open doors to another world. One's mental characteristics were also expressed through art. Poussin would suit a melancholic person, Claude Lorraine a more cheerful temperament. A domestically-inclined person would be attracted to genre pictures or "small subjects." An example of the latter are the animal paintings by Edwin Landseer, who was a great favorite of Queen Victoria. The kind of painting one chose expressed one's taste, education, and financial situation. The objects within the painting were of great significance because they were the sources of the associations. The kind of objects in a painting would determine the kind of associations and reactions which took place in the viewer. The subject of a painting influenced and expressed the sensibilities of the people who saw it. Each painting was a "thing" which communicated, and each painting was a medium through which other "things" could communicate, just as each novel was an object (although without the great significance of the painting) and also contained objects animate and inanimate which communicated parts of the whole meaning.

Thackeray's use of objects related directly to

his style of didacticism. He did not make overt statements to express his moral values in his fiction, nor did he desire such in painting. Morality, like sentiment, should be "indicated rather than expressed." Objects were the vehicles in both artistic mediums for expression. Placed in certain patterns, in certain relationships with each other, they gave off different vibrations. The author's moral evaluation was implicit in the arrangement and coloration of the objects. It was to be sought in the basic overall values which emerged from the whole, rather than in technical questions of right or wrong (in fiction) or finish and detail (in painting). Becky Sharp is an example of the deliberate lack of specificity in Thackeray's moral judgments. Her affair with Lord Steyne is never concretely established, but she is morally guilty even if she is technically innocent. In the same way the finish and detail of a painting cannot hide its immorality if its basic values are unsuitable. Thackeray stated in two reviews that he preferred suggestive art rather than the finished product. "Pictorial Rhapsody" asserted that "sketches are invariably more vigorous" and seeing the sketch beside the finished painting would "kill" the painting because the original inspiration and emotion would be softened

by technical finish. Likewise, in "On Men and Pictures" Thackeray "prefers painters whose power of execution is incomplete rather than those who have been fully formed." The moral quality of art does not lie in the technical elements and may even be lessened by them--it would destroy part of the power of Vanity Fair if we knew without a doubt of Becky's guilt or innocence for it would paint her too black or white and eliminate any effort on the part of the viewer to question his own values through Becky's situation.

One can pin down Thackeray's approval or disapproval of a character overall, but specific moral lessons are difficult to find, as in painting one's moral feelings were worked on by associations, not by specific axioms. The medium for both systems is the same: sentiment. Sentiment was the cornerstone of art and the point of differentiation between real art and sham art. Neoclassical paintings were sham art because the artists could not possibly have experienced those values which they put on canvas and therefore could not paint true sentiment. Becky Sharp was like a false heroic painting, always aping feelings and manners which were foreign to her and which belonged to her betters. Blanche Amory was an admirable depiction of a false sentimental painting or an "Annual" figurine.

Her gilt edition of "Mes Larmes" and her nonexistent miseries and loves pretended a depth of sentiment and sincerity of sensibility. "For this young lady was not able to carry out any emotion to the full; but had a sham enthusiasm, a sham hatred, a sham love, a sham taste, a sham grief, each of which flared and shone very vehemently for an instant, but subsided and gave place to the next sham emotion.[77] Becky and Blanche, like neoclassicism and the Nazarenes, were not art or did not use art in Thackeray's eyes because they had no true feelings with which to touch others.

To touch others, but not to touch too deeply was the axiom behind Thackeray's concept of art. His stubborn insistence on the superficiality of the communication is indicative of a personal withdrawal on his part from the struggle to achieve something in spite of great opposition and from the harsher realities of the world around him. Thackeray also rejects the possibility of modern man having genius; his reactions to Turner vacillate between a shock of recognition at sublimity and a harsh repudiation of the new terms on which Turner achieves sublimity--the paradox of making reality from nothingness. Turner's

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[77]Thackeray, Pendennis, Vol. II, p. 460.

endeavors coincide with Thackeray's question of the line between art and reality; a question which he did not probe. Thackeray's most personal characteristics emerge in an investigation of this issue and of the history of his reaction to Turner. They explain the reasons behind the whole aesthetic of the mediocre and tie that aesthetic together.

V. CONCLUSION: THACKERAY AND TURNER

Thackeray had a very unified concept of art and one observes the formulation of his ideals in his art criticism and their practice in his fiction. One is always stumbling across or against limitations and instances of withdrawal from extremism on Thackeray's part. The bitter exposé of moral insincerity which exists in Vanity Fair never occurs to that extreme again in the fiction. Pendennis, Esmond, The Newcomes, and The Virginians have their sarcasms mollified by the omnipresent sentimentalizing. Thackeray plumbed the depths of artifice in Vanity Fair and never struck bottom, never finding a solution for the arbitrariness of the world's moral order. So he recoiled from the sublime, which entailed too much self-revelation, to the mediocre, the safety of conformity and sentiment. The moral beautiful art of which Thackeray approved could also be called "public art." It is easily understandable and fits in with day-to-day living. Public art does not demand the intense emotional involvement on the part of either the artist or the viewer as does its counterpart, sublime or "private" art. Thackeray retreated from involvement as spectator as he retreated

from the self-revelation necessary to probe the secret "real life" of man in fiction. There is a point where truth and artifice are almost indistinguishable and the deeper one probes, the more difficult truth becomes to find. Thackeray questioned in his writing the extent to which an artist should reveal himself and the extent to which those revelations are truth. Art is "a perilous trade" because the artist "has to bring his tears and laughter, his recollections, his personal griefs and joys, his private thoughts and feelings to market . . ."[78] where they are cast before a world with sham standards. If the world is arbitrary and artificial, how much is truth of what the artist himself says? Does the artist know where the boundary between real and unreal lies?

Thackeray attempted to establish certainties so that he would know the boundaries. He withdrew from questioning reality as he withdrew from the "active struggle" in the world to take refuge in mediocrity. A history of Thackeray's retreat from and conflicts with reality appeared in his ambivalent reactions to the painter Joseph Mallord Turner. Understanding Turner's sublimity in spite of himself, Thackeray veered between

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[78]Thackeray, The English Humorists and the Four Georges, p. 232.

admiration and indignation, evincing more than a little wariness. The conflict exists partly between Turner's sensually-based paintings and Thackeray's insistence on concrete reality and sentiment, sensuality causing an uncontrollable reaction and sentiment being more easily restrained by the viewer.

Thackeray recognizes and admires Turner's realistic paintings. In his 1839 reviews of the Royal Academy Exhibitions Thackeray praises "The Fighting Temaire" for its depth and power, even though Turner's color scheme is unorthodox, but that is the extent to which Thackeray lets himself depart from nature. It was not unusual for one who was imbued with Joshua Reynolds' dictum of "nature" being "the source of all artistic truth" to find Turner "incomprehensible" when he has "forsaken nature or attempted to embellish it."[79] Ridicule was Thackeray's earliest means for coping with Turner's "unreal" reality. The "nebulous" "Pluto and Proserpina," exhibited the same year, he belittled by a quasi-poetical caption:

> Methought I saw a heroglyphic bat
> Skim o'er the surface of a slipshod hat;
> While to increase the tumolt of the skies,
> A damned potato o'er the whirlwind flies.

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[79]Thackeray, "A Second Lecture," Fraser's, June 1839.

Thackeray will not accept artistic truth without representation of nature. Turner in this, his last, phase of painting was moving into what H. W. Janson terms "formless light and colour." This discrepancy between what Thackeray knows as reality and what Turner makes into reality comes to disturb Thackeray more and more as he himself begins to question the truth of appearances in his writing. Vanity Fair, Pendennis, Henry Esmond are all books about façades, the characters' self-delusions. The deeper one probes, the greater the façade grows and the more the reality diminishes. The use of façades is similar to Turner moving away from concrete subject matter to "formless light and colour" because the surface representations of Turner's paintings have a false reality, upon close inspection his works are abstract masses of color. Turner does not need to imitate nature exactly in order to produce his desired realistic effect. The painter's façade of reality deprived Thackeray by an irrefutable visual statement of one of his basic tenets; the reality of nature, this reality being one means to truth.

"Slavers Throwing Over the Dead and Dying: Typhoon Coming On," shown in 1841, was not dismissed by a belittling rhyme, but was "either sublime or

ridiculous." The total effect of the color was impressive, but Thackeray was amazed at the color's unnatural distribution and the brushwork; "the fishes . . . never . . . seen since the 'saeculum pyrrhae'" and the "flakes of white" were "laid on with a trowel."[80] Thackeray contrasted this painting with another work by Biard, a Frenchman, dealing with the same subject, the slave trade. The sublime Turner, overpowering to one's senses, arousing a "pain-pleasure" sensation stemming from terror, is compared to the beautiful and moral Biard picture. Thackeray complained of Turner's "Slavers" that "If Wilberforce's statue downstairs were to be confronted with this picture, the stoney old gentleman would spring off his chair and fly away in terror!"[81]

Biard's picture, on the other hand, is systematically approved for its close adherence to nature and its moral content: "It is the best, most striking, most pathetic lecture against the trade that ever was delivered." Through the realistic detail, the painter has conveyed a message which "must convert

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[80]Thackeray, "Pictorial Rhapsody," Fraser's, June 1840.

[81]Thackeray, "On Men and Pictures," Fraser's, July 1841.

every man who has seen it." The difference between the two was that Turner was experimenting with technique, attempting to transcend nature to produce a certain sensation and paid no attention to the moral evil of slavery, while Biard was using nature to depict a subject and moral clearly. Turner's lack of moral concern and his neglect of narrative clarity controverted a second important standard of Thackeray's art. Turner was interested in the relation of shapes to light and distance, a far cry from proselytizing a social wrong or depicting a pathetic subject. This element of daring and experimentation which raises Turner in twentieth-century estimation above a Biard, who painted in the mold of his contemporaries, alienated Thackeray although he sensed the greatness in it. "Slavers" is unreadable except through the senses, which approach Turner increasingly relied upon in his mounting dissolution of shapes. Thackeray insisting upon sentiment to moderate passion, understands the effect reluctantly, but will not commend it.

In 1842, writing for Ainsworth Magazine, Thackeray recommended that Turner's "Peace: Burial at Sea" be rehung turned "upside down" and yearned for the days before "Mr. Turner lighted on 'The Fallacies'

and could see like other people!"[82] The problem emerged at this period of the discrepancy between the reality of the objects depicted from a distance in Turner's paintings and the near-abstraction of shape upon close observation. Turner's rendition of the Campo Santo in Venice is incomprehensible up close but "seen at a little distance, however, it is a most brilliant, airy, and beautiful picture."[83] "Moses" seen closely is likened by Thackeray to the color flashes caused by the reception of the "reader's last black eye at school."[84]

This discrepancy between a near-view and far-view of Turner predominated in Thackeray's later reviews. His overall reaction was one of amazement tinged with fear at Turner's ability, in effect, to make something from nothing. That the "something" was sublime, Thackeray increasingly admitted. The painter of "Rain-Steam-Speed" had "outprodigied almost all other prodigies."[85] The rain was "real rain, behind

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[82]Thackeray, "Royal Academy," Ainsworth Magazine, June 1842.

[83]Thackeray, "Royal Academy," Ainsworth Magazine, June 1842.

[84]Thackeray, "Letters to the Fine Arts. No. 4," in Melville, Stray Papers, May 1843.

[85]Thackeray, "May Gambols," Fraser's, June 1844.

which is real sunshine, and you expect a rainbow every minute." The train was "really moving at the rate of fifty miles an hour; and which the reader had best make haste to see, lest it should dash out of the picture, and be away up Charing Cross through the wall opposite. . . ." All was not what it seemed, however, for the rain was actually "dabs of dirty putty slapped on to the canvass with a trowl. . . ." The sunshine was "thick, smeary lumps of chrome yellow." Accidental discrepancies with nature due to a lack of virtuosity Thackeray excused, but a deliberate massacre of what the eyes see, moreover a successful massacre, opposes everything Thackeray had trained himself to expect. Thackeray demanded that appearances will not be deceiving, that he see for himself and not have a colorist manipulate his senses.

Thackeray succumbs to Turner's sensory manipulation even as he denounced the "absurd" coloration and substance of the painter's work. Of course Turner is wild, and "extravaganza" but "Look at [one of his paintings] for a little time, and it begins to affect you, too--to mezmerize you."[86] It was not a voluntary

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[86]Thackeray, "Picture Gossip," Fraser's, June 1845.

reaction produced from the combination of the moral and the sentiment as in a Daniel Maclise or a David Wilkie, but it was forced, "Joseph Mallord makes you see what he likes. . . ." The means by which he accomplishes this are a "great and aweful mystery" to Thackeray, but he no longer denies Turner's effectiveness of his genius. Admitting Turner's genius, however, did not remove the potential danger. "Venice, Noon" was a "dream . . . which sets us a dreaming more than is good for the quiet performance of our operative duties." Thackeray stated bluntly as he compared Turner's poetry, "The Fallacies of Hope" with his paintings, "I don't like to contemplate him too much, lest I should actually begin to believe in his poetry as well as his paintings, and fancy the 'Fallacies of Hope' to be one of the finest poems in the world." An artist who broke all Thackeray's rules of art and succeeded in producing sublimity was, in a sense, a rejection of an age. Thackeray knew no other standards aside from those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century criteria, and, as he contemplated Turner, looking for a vestige of the broken rules, a feeling of frustration and deception overcame him:

> As a traveler in the desert beholds at a distance pools of the most delightful water and shady palm trees for his camels to rest under,

> and urging on his footsore dromedary, finds at the desiderated spot, that it is all bosh--no water, no date trees, no shade--only sand, rubbish, vanity, and vexation of spirit; so as you look from far off at Mr. Turner's picture, you behold all sorts of wonderful and agreeable sights--Venice and the Adriatic flash out in the sunshine, ships loom through the haze at sea, or whales frisk and gambol there, etc., but on coming up to the picture, behold, it was all an illusion--a few washes of gamboge, putty, and vermillion are flicked over a canvass at hazard seemingly; it is only at a distance that they condescend to take shape, but near at hand they are as intangible as Eurydice (Morning Chronicle, 1846).

This sounds suspiciously like the Manager of the Performance in Vanity Fair who "sits before the curtain on the boards and looks into the Fair" as a "feeling of profound melancholy comes over him in his survey of the bustling place." Melancholic because as an "experienced and disillusioned observer" Thackeray knows that what goes on behind the curtains is "all bosh."[87] Turner was visual evidence of the self-delusion and artifice which Thackeray exposed in Vanity Fair and from which he tried to retreat in his later works. Turner takes the world Thackeray already sees as an artifice, rejects the recognizable, comfortable delusions, and with materials completely meaningless, can still achieve the one true emotion of the sublime. The poetic landscape and beautiful genre

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[87]Thackeray, Vanity Fair (New York: Random House, 1950), p. xxix.

piece are much easier to live with than the terrifying sublime and Turner's meaningful void.

"Meaningful void" is not a phrase which Thackeray would have used, but it describes the prospect presented to Thackeray by an abrogation of his Victorian standards. Moreover, Turner was endowed with a genius which gave meaning to abstraction; a man or culture without genius would find it much more difficult to perceive meaning in the chaotic paintings of Turner. The "meaning" which gave most shape to Thackeray's art and world was the moral and social purpose contained in his aesthetics. In fact his aesthetics did not exist without their moral and social basis. When Thackeray said he hoped criticism would approach "art for art's sake," and then he was confronted by Turner's work of genuine art for art's sake, the difference in the two conceptions of art becomes immediately apparent; essentially the distinctions are those between modern art and traditional art. Since the writings of Aristotle the purpose of art was both to delight and instruct and instruction for Thackeray became the means to delight, not vice versa. Turner experimented for himself while Thackeray's guidelines pertained to himself and others. Turner's lack of

feeling of responsibility toward the public violated Thackeray's ideals.

Thackeray was a literary "public servant" and social critic in that he determined how a man was to recognize and live with his own limitations and avoid involvement in an artificial world where one's true self was lost in false suppositions. The only truth which could be easily ascertained was external truth, thus the uncertainty of self-revelation and abstract qualities. To achieve such a "safe" life entailed recognizing one's own defeat. If one consciously chose this mode of life a "bankruptcy of spirit" could result which would cast a shadow over one's "happy endings." The point of Thackeray's aesthetics was to ingrain his audience with the concept of mediocrity painlessly and, to them, unconsciously so that they would not know what they were missing. Thackeray was aware of the abyss which exists between dream and potential, but instead of exploring that gap, he turned his writing and his aesthetic demands to leading others from his own realization. The result was a remarkable unification of the man, the artist, and the work. He positively reinforced the Victorian "ideals" in his own life and in his books, and these ideals find voice in Thackeray's art

criticism. The identity he saw between the work of art and the way of the world is evidenced in his fiction by his authorial interruptions and in his art criticism by his integration of painting with one's working life, not as a separate pleasure to be enjoyed, but as a constant affirmation of the way one chose to live.

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