VANITY FAIR

W. M. THACKERAY

EDITED BY PETER L. SHILLINGSBURG

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

VANITY FAIR

AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT

BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS

CRITICISM

Edited by

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MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

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Preface

From John Forster and Elizabeth Rigby, among early reviewers, to Percy Lubbock, Jack Rawlins, and Jerome Meckier more recently, readers have objected to *Vanity Fair* because it does not say clearly what is real and what is not, what is good and what is not, because it does not make the moral dilemmas clear, because its author seems to waffle in his stand, because the novel's view of humankind is simultaneously too cynical and too sentimental—in short because the reader cannot be sure what the author or the narrator *really* thinks and, therefore, cannot know whether to agree or disagree. Fiction should not come so close to real life, said Miss Rigby, that the moral imperatives become too complex or obscure.

From Robert Bell and Dr. John Brown, among early reviewers and admirers of the novel, to John Loofbourow, Ina Ferris, and James Phelan in more recent times, readers have delighted in the sleight of hand, the slippery viewpoint, the detached ironic suggestiveness of the novel. These find in the book a challenge to enjoy the impressionist mimicry of the narrative voice as it pretends to give and then withdraws "proper" views of money, sex, and politics as they are manipulated in military, social, and domestic arenas where persons of varying intellectual and moral integrity maneuver and jockey for position and acclaim.

Oddly enough, both groups quote the same passages in support of these opposed interpretations. Both groups are represented, the latter a bit more generously, in the critical materials at the end of this Norton Critical Edition. No one can agree simultaneously with both groups, and each group is filled with internal disagreements about the narrator, the central issues of the novel, its admirable achievements, its flaws. The novel emerged in a century infamous for the easy patriarchal subjugation of women and discrimination against Jews and dark-skinned people; and critical opinion divides on the extent to which Thackeray participated in these insensitivities or questioned the status quo.

A common frustration is the novel's casual but dense references to history, literature, local places, and current events. In every age Thackeray has been praised for the easy lucidity of his prose style, but his frame of reference has with time become steadily less familiar. Critics acknowledge the timelessness of the issues raised, the human relations explored, the politics and morality; but the references to ladies of the opera, generals, harness shops, clubs, country seats, and myriads of other no longer extant concrete items by a narrator who always assumes the reader will recognize what is fact and what is fic-

tion and be able to catch the sly ironic twists—all tend to obscure the text for modern readers. It is to mitigate these difficulties that annotations are provided.

The novel was published in monthly installments from January 1847 to July 1848. With the installments completed, the publisher gathered the unsold parts, printed additional copies, and bound them in single volumes, introducing about 350 changes in the text. In February 1853, while Thackeray was lecturing in America, the publisher brought out a revised edition, called the Cheap Edition, omitting all the illustrations and any text referring to them. Though the revisions are primarily Thackeray's, he was not present to read proofs.

The text of this Norton Critical Edition is closest to that of the one-volume first edition, except that the punctuation of chapters I–VI and VII–XII (those for which the manuscript survives) is in Thackeray's style, not that of the publishers. Thackeray's style was rhetorical—a system not much used today—indicating pauses for reading aloud. A comma is a short pause, a semicolon is about twice as long, a colon three times as long, and a period four times as long. Dashes are significant pauses that usually do not end a sentence; they are frequently used in combination with other points, especially commas. This system is subtle and flexible but takes some getting used to; for by comparison with modern syntactical punctuation, it appears illogical and erratic. Rhetorical punctuation more readily speeds and slows, separating and merging phrases and ideas according to the emotion. These early chapters best reflect the rhetorical cadences of Thackeray's prose.

An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Edgar F. Harden, Oscar Mendel, John Sutherland, and Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson by generations of readers of *Vanity Fair* for their useful annotations.[1] It is impossible to write annotations for *Vanity Fair* as if they had never been done before. Some new notes and additions are offered. In a few instances where I was unable to verify information first provided by others, I have named my source in parentheses in the notes. Even where I have verified and extended explanations, my debt to previous annotators remains significant: the suggestion that a note was required and the suggestion of what the explanation should be.

I am grateful to Professors Robert Colby, Ina Ferris, Judith Fisher, and Edgar Harden for advice about the historical and critical essays at the end of this volume.

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1. Edgar F. Harden, ed., *Annotations for the Selected Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*. 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1990); John Sutherland and Oscar Mandel, *Annotations to Vanity Fair*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, N.Y., and London: University Press of America, 1988); and Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson, eds., *Vanity Fair* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Editions, 1963).

Symbols

<word>	= canceled, deleted
↑word↓	= interlined, added
«word»	= canceled within a deletion
↑↑word↓↓	= interlined within an addition
MS	= manuscript

VANITY FAIR.

PEN AND PENCIL SKETCHES OF ENGLISH SOCIETY.

BY W. M. THACKERAY,

Author of "The Irish Sketch Book:" "Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo:" of "Jeames's Diary" and the "Snob Papers" in "Punch;" &c. &c.

LONDON:
PUBLISHED AT THE PUNCH OFFICE, 85, FLEET STREET.
J. MENZIES, EDINBURGH; J. M'LEOD, GLASGOW; J. M'GLASHAN, DUBLIN.
1847.

Cover of original installment

Before the Curtain.

As the Manager of the Performance sits before the curtain on the boards, and looks into the Fair, a feeling of profound melancholy comes over him in his survey of the bustling place.[1] There is a great quantity of eating and drinking, making love and jilting, laughing and the contrary, smoking, cheating, fighting, dancing, and fiddling: there are bullies pushing about, bucks ogling the women, knaves picking pockets, policemen on the look-out, quacks (*other* quacks, plague take them!) bawling in front of their booths, and yokels looking up at the tinselled dancers and poor old rouged tumblers, while the light-fingered folk are operating upon their pockets behind. Yes, this is VANITY FAIR; not a moral place certainly; nor a merry one, though very noisy. Look at the faces of the actors and buffoons when they come off from their business; and Tom Fool washing the paint off his cheeks before he sits down to dinner with his wife and the little Jack Puddings behind the canvass. The curtain will be up presently, and he will be turning over head and heels, and crying, "How are you?"

A man with a reflective turn of mind, walking through an exhibition of this sort, will not be oppressed, I take it, by his own or other people's hilarity. An episode of humour or kindness touches and amuses him here and there;—a pretty child looking at a gingerbread stall; a pretty girl blushing whilst her lover talks to her and chooses her fairing; poor Tom Fool, yonder behind the waggon, mumbling his bone with the honest family which lives by his tumbling;—but the general impression is one more melancholy than mirthful. When you come home, you sit down, in a sober, contemplative, not uncharitable frame of mind, and apply yourself to your books or your business.

I have no other moral than this to tag to the present story of "Vanity Fair." Some people consider Fairs immoral altogether, and eschew such, with their servants and families: perhaps[2] they are right. But persons who think otherwise and are of a lazy, or a benevolent, or a sarcastic mood, may perhaps like to step in for half an hour and look at the performances. There are scenes of all sorts; some dreadful combats, some grand and lofty horse-riding, some scenes of high life, and some of very middling indeed; some love making for the sentimental, and some light comic business: the whole accompanied by appropriate scenery, and brilliantly illuminated with the Author's own candles.[3]

What more has the Manager of the Performance to say?—To acknowledge the kindness with which it has been received in all the principal towns of England through which the Show has passed, and

1. The first edition was dedicated to Bryan Waller Procter (1787–1874), an attorney and poet, whose wife, Anne, befriended and comforted Thackeray in the tragic illness of his own wife.
2. MS reads: very likely
3. Illustrations. The revised edition (1853) omitted the illustrations and inserted a footnote by way of explanation.

where it has been most favourably noticed by the respected conductors of the Public Press, and by the Nobility and Gentry. He is proud to think that his Puppets have given satisfaction to the very best company in this empire. The famous little Becky Puppet has been pronounced to be uncommonly flexible in the joints and lively on the wire: the Amelia Doll, though it has had a smaller circle of admirers, has yet been carved and dressed with the greatest care by the artist: the Dobbin Figure, though apparently clumsy, yet dances in a very amusing and natural manner: the Little Boys' Dance has been liked by some; and please to remark the richly dressed figure of the Wicked Nobleman, on which no expense has been spared, and which Old Nick will fetch away at the end of this singular performance.

And with this, and a profound bow to his patrons, the Manager retires, and the curtain rises.

LONDON,

June 28, 1848.

Contents

VANITY FAIR.

A NOVEL WITHOUT A HERO.

Chapter I.

CHISWICK MALL.

WHILE[1] the present century was in its teens, and on one sun-shiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gates of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies on Chiswick Mall,[2] a large family coach with two fat horses in blazing harness, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig, at the rate of four[3] miles an hour. A black servant who reposed on the box beside the fat coachman, uncurled his bandy legs as soon as the equipage drew up opposite Miss[4] Pinkerton's shining brass plate, and as he pulled the bell, at least a score of young heads were seen peering out of the narrow windows of the stately old brick house,—nay the acute observer might have recognised the little red nose of good-natured Miss Jemima Pinkerton herself, rising over some geranium-pots in the windows of that lady's own drawing room.

"It is Mrs. Sedley's coach, sister," said Miss Jemima. "Sambo, the black servant, has just rung the bell; and the coachman has a new red waistcoat."

"Have you completed all the necessary preparations incident to Miss Sedley's departure, Miss Jemima?" asked Miss Pinkerton herself, that majestic lady: the Semiramis[5] of Hammersmith, the friend of Doctor Johnson, the correspondent of Mrs. Chapone[6] herself.

1. Later events show Thackeray changed the setting to the early teens. MS. reads: Before
2. Chiswick: a country town west of London, now a suburb.
3. MS reads: three
4. MS reads: Mrs.
5. Mythic queen of Babylon, famous for beauty and wisdom. Hammersmith: another small town between London and Chiswick.
6. Samuel Johnson, "The Great Lexicographer," referred to later, compiled a frequently

"The girls were up at four this morning packing her trunks, sister," replied Miss Jemima; "we have made her a bowpot."[7]

"Say a bouquet, sister Jemima, 'tis more genteel."

"Well, a booky as big almost as a hay stack; I have put up two bottles of the gilly flower water[8] for Mrs. Sedley, and the receipt for making it, in Amelia's box."

"And I trust, Miss Jemima, you have made a copy of Miss Sedley's

account—this is it, is it? Very good—ninety three pounds four shillings. Be kind enough to address it to John Sedley, Esquire, and to seal this billet[9] which I have written to his lady."

In Miss Jemima's eyes an autograph letter of her sister, Miss Pinkerton, was an object of as deep veneration as would have been a letter from a sovereign. Only when her pupils quitted the establishment, or when they were about to be married, and once when poor Miss Birch died of the scarlet-fever, was Miss Pinkerton known to write personally to the parents of her pupils; and it was Jemima's opinion that if any thing *could* console Mrs. Birch for her daughter's loss it would be that pious and eloquent composition in which Miss Pinkerton announced the event.

In the present instance Miss Pinkerton's "billet" was to the following effect:—

reprinted *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). The 1809 edition features an oval portrait of Johnson on the title page, as in the plate illustration. Hester Chapone (1727–1801), a friend of Johnson, authored *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1774).

7. Bough-pot, pot or vase used for flowers; a "vulgar" English word in contrast to "bouquet," of French origin.
8. Clove-scented water.
9. Of French origin, but listed in Johnson's *Dictionary*. Contrasts with "letter" in Jemima's vocabulary.

"The Mall, Chiswick, June 15, 18—.

"MADAM,—After her six years' residence at the Mall, I have the honour and happiness of presenting Miss Amelia Sedley to her parents, as a young lady not unworthy to occupy a fitting position in their polished and refined circle. Those virtues which characterise the young English gentlewoman, those accomplishments which become her birth and station,[1] will not be found wanting in the amiable Miss Sedley, whose *industry* and *obedience* have endeared her to her instructors, and whose delightful sweetness of temper has charmed her *aged* and her *youthful* companions.

"In music, in dancing, in orthography, in every variety of embroidery and needle-work she will be found to have realised her friends' *fondest wishes.* In geography there is still much to be desired: and a careful and undeviating use of the backboard for four hours daily during the next three years is recommended as necessary to the acquirement of that dignified *deportment and carriage* so requisite for every young lady of *fashion.*

"In the principles of religion and morality Miss Sedley will be found worthy of an establishment which has been honoured by the presence of *The Great Lexicographer* and the patronage of the admirable Mrs. Chapone. In leaving the Mall Miss Amelia carries with her the hearts of her companions and the affectionate regards of her mistress, who has the honour to subscribe herself,

"Madam,

"Your most obliged humble servant,

"BARBARA PINKERTON."

"P.S. Miss Sharp accompanies Miss Sedley. It is particularly requested that Miss Sharp's stay in Russell Square[2] may not exceed ten days. The family of distinction with whom she is engaged desire to avail themselves of her services as soon as possible."

This letter completed Miss Pinkerton proceeded to write her own name and Miss Sedley's in the fly leaf of a Johnson's Dixonary—the interesting work which she invariably presented to her scholars on their departure from the Mall. On the cover was inserted a copy of "Lines addressed to a young lady on quitting Miss Pinkerton's school at the Mall, by the late revered Doctor Samuel Johnson." In fact, the lexicographer's name was always on the lips of this majestic woman, and a visit he had paid to her was the cause of her reputation and her fortune.

Being commanded by her elder sister to get "the Dictionary" from the cupboard, Miss Jemima had extracted two copies of the book from the receptacle in question. When Miss Pinkerton had finished the inscription in the first, Jemima, with rather a dubious and timid air, handed her the second.

"For whom is this, Miss Jemima?" said Miss Pinkerton with awful coldness.

1. MS reads: become <the person of fashion> ↑her birth and station↓,
2. Newly built in 1804 just west of the City and surrounded primarily by the homes of rich merchants.

"For Becky Sharp," answered Jemima trembling very much and blushing over her withered face[3] and neck, as she turned her back on her sister—"for Becky Sharp: she's going too."

"MISS JEMIMA!" exclaimed Miss Pinkerton in the largest capitals, "are you in your senses? Replace the Dixonary in the closet, and never venture to take such a liberty in future."

"Well, sister, it's only two and ninepence and poor Becky will be miserable if she don't get one."

"Send Miss Sedley instantly to me:" said Miss Pinkerton—and so venturing not to say another word poor Jemima trotted off exceedingly flurried and nervous.

Miss Sedley's papa was a merchant in London and a man of some wealth; whereas Miss Sharp was an articled pupil:[4] for whom Miss Pinkerton had done as she thought quite enough without conferring upon her at parting the high honour of the Dixonary.

Although schoolmistresses' letters are to be trusted no more nor less than churchyard epitaphs; yet as it sometimes happens that a person departs this life, who is really deserving of all the praises the stone-cutter carves over his bones, who *is* a good Christian, a good parent, child, wife or[5] husband, who actually *does* leave a disconsolate family to mourn his loss—so in academies of the male and female sex it occurs every now and then,[6] that the pupil is fully worthy of the praises bestowed by the disinterested instructor. Now Miss Amelia Sedley was a young lady of this singular species: and deserved not only all that Miss Pinkerton said in her praise, but had many charming qualities which that pompous old Minerva[7] of a woman could not see, from the differences of rank and age between her pupil and herself.

For she could not only sing like a lark or a Mrs. Billington and dance like Hillisberg or Parisot:[8] and embroider beautifully, and spell as well as the Dixonary itself, but she had such a kindly, smiling, tender, gentle, generous heart of her own, as won the love of everybody who came near her, from Minerva herself down to the poor girl in the scullery, and the one-eyed tartwoman's daughter who was permitted to vend her wares once a week to the young ladies in the Mall. She had twelve intimate and bosom friends out of the twenty four young ladies: even envious Miss Briggs never spoke ill of her: high and mighty Miss Saltire (Lord Dexter's grand-daughter) allowed that her figure was genteel, and as for Miss Swartz, the rich woolly-haired mulatto from St. Kitts,[9] on the day Amelia went away she was in such a passion of tears, that they were obliged to send for Doctor Floss, and

3. MS reads: withered old face
4. A pupil whose work offset fees. A parlor boarder, by contrast, like Amelia, paid all fees.
5. MS reads: Christian, <mother or daughter or> ↑a good parent, child, wife or↓ husband,
6. MS reads: occurs ↑every now & then,↓ that
7. Roman goddess of wisdom.
8. Elizabeth Billington (1768–1818), a noted singer, performed opera at Covent Garden and Drury Lane Theatres till her retirement in 1811. Hillisberg and Parisot were French dancers frequently performing at the King's Theatre, Haymarket.
9. West Indies island; "Swartz" suggests German "schwarz," for "dark" and is perhaps anti-Semitic.

half tipsify her with salvolatile.[1] Miss Pinkerton's attachment was, as may be supposed from the high position and eminent virtues of that lady, calm and dignified: but Miss Jemima had already blubbered[2] several times at the idea of Amelia's departure, and but for fear of her sister would have gone off in downright hysterics like the heiress (who paid double) of St. Kitts. Such luxury of grief however is only allowed to parlour-boarders. Honest Jemima had all the bills and the washing and the mending and the puddings and the plate and crockery and the servants to superintend—but why speak about her? It is probable that we shall not hear of her again from this moment to the end of time, and that when the great filligree iron gates are once closed on her, she and her awful sister will never issue therefrom into this little[3] world of history.

But as we are to see a great deal of Amelia, there is no harm in saying at the outset of our acquaintance that she was one of the best and dearest creatures that ever lived;[4] and a great mercy it is, both in life and in novels which (and the latter especially) abound in villains of the most sombre sort, that we are to have for a constant companion so guileless and good-natured a person.[5] As she is not a heroine,[6] there is no need to describe her person: indeed I am afraid that her nose was rather short than otherwise, and her cheeks a great deal too round and red for a heroine: but her face blushed with rosy health, and her lips with the freshest of smiles, and she had a pair of eyes which sparkled with the brightest and honestest good humour except indeed when they filled with tears and that was a great deal too often—for the silly thing would cry over a dead canary-bird or over a mouse that the cat haply had seized upon, or over the end of a novel were it ever so stupid—and as for saying an unkind word to her—were any one[7] hard-hearted enough to do so,—why, so much the worse for them. Even Miss Pinkerton, that austere and godlike woman, ceased scolding her after the first time, and though she no more comprehended sensibility[8] than she did Algebra, gave all masters and teachers particular orders to treat Miss Sedley with the utmost gentleness, as harsh treatment was injurious to her.

So that when the day of departure came, between her two customs of laughing and crying Miss Sedley was greatly puzzled how to act. She was glad to go home, and yet most wofully sad at leaving school. For three days before, little Laura Martin the orphan followed her about like a little dog. She had to make and receive at least fourteen presents, to make fourteen solemn promises of writing every week,—"Send my letters under cover to my grandpapa the Earl of Dexter," said Miss Saltire (who by the way was rather shabby): "Never mind the postage but write every day you

1. Smelling salts for fainting fits.
2. Revised edition reads: whimpered
3. MS reads: this <three volume> ↑little↓ world
4. For "one of the ... ever lived" the revised edition reads: a dear little creature
5. MS reads: creature
6. The novel's subtitle, "A Novel without a Hero," was chosen after this passage was written.
7. MS reads: any persons
8. In its eighteenth-century meaning: sensitivity, emotion. Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* contrasts opposing character traits, using the word in a similar meaning.

dear darling," said the impetuous and woolly-headed, but generous and affectionate Miss Swartz: and little[9] Laura Martin (who was just in round hand)[1] took her friend's[2] hand and said looking up in her face wistfully, "Amelia, when I write to you I shall call

you Mamma."—All which details, I have no doubt JONES[3] who reads this book at his club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish trivial twaddling and ultra-sentimental. Yes, I can see Jones at this minute (rather flushed with his joint of mutton and half-pint of wine,) taking out his pencil and scoring under the words "foolish twaddling" &c., and adding to them his own remark of *"quite true."* Well he is a lofty man of genius, and admires the great and heroic in life and novels, and so had better take warning and go elsewhere.

Well then—the flowers and the presents, and the trunks and bonnet boxes of Miss Sedley having been arranged by Mr. Sambo in the carriage together with a very small and weatherbeaten old cow's-skin trunk with Miss Sharp's card neatly nailed upon it; the which was delivered by Sambo with a grin and packed by the coachman with a corresponding sneer—the hour for parting came—and the grief of that moment was considerably lessened by the admirable discourse which Miss Pinkerton addressed to her pupil. Not that the parting speech caused Amelia to philosophise, or that it armed her in any way with a calmness the result of argument, but it was intolerably dull pompous and tedious, and having the fear of her schoolmistress greatly before her eyes, Miss Sedley did not venture in her presence to give way to any ebullitions of private grief. A seed-cake and a bottle of wine were produced in the drawing room, as on the solemn occasions of the visit of parents, and these refreshments being partaken of, Miss Sedley was at liberty to depart.

9. Revised edition reads: the orphan, little
1. Style of handwriting with round, full letters, taught in penmanship classes with copybooks.
2. MS reads: patron's
3. Generic name for social club snob, also used thus by Thackeray in *Punch* articles, where an actual George Jones was ridiculed similarly.