

# VANITY FAIR

W. M. THACKERAY



EDITED BY PETER L. SHILLINGSBURG

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

---

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

---

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY  
VANITY FAIR

---

AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT  
BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS  
CRITICISM

*Edited by*  
PETER SHILLINGSBURG  
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY



---

W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • *New York • London*

Copyright © by Garland Publishing, 1994, 1989  
Copyright © 1994 by W. W. Norton & Company

---

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition

The text of this book is composed in Baskerville  
with the display set in Bernhard Modern.  
Composition by Peter Shillingsburg (the novel) and PennSet, Inc.  
Manufacturing by Courier, Westford.

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Thackeray, William Makepeace, 1811–1863.

Vanity Fair : authoritative text, backgrounds, criticism / edited  
by Peter Shillingsburg.

p. cm.—(A Norton critical edition)

Includes bibliographical references.

1. England—Social life and customs—19th century—Fiction.
2. Thackeray, William Makepeace, 1811–1863. Vanity fair. 3. Women—  
England—Fiction. I. Shillingsburg, Peter L.

PR5618.A1 1994

823'.8—dc20

93-48019

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110  
<http://www.wwnorton.com>

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

7 8 9 0



---

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY • New York • London

### *The Editor*

PETER SHILLINGSBURG is professor of English at Mississippi State University. He is the author of *Pegasus in Harness: Victorian Publishing and William Makepeace Thackeray* and *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*. He is the editor of the Garland Press editions of Thackeray's *Flore et Zéphyr*, *Yellowplush*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Pendennis* as well as *Poems of Howell Gwin*. Shillingsburg has been visiting professor at the Australian Defence Force Academy, and was also a Guggenheim Fellow. He is a member and former chairman of the Modern Language Association's Committee on Scholarly Editions.

# VANITY FAIR

AUTHORITATIVE TEXT

BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS

CRITICISM

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, INC.  
*Also Publishes*

ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA: A NORTON ANTHOLOGY  
*edited by David Bevington et al.*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE  
*edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay et al.*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE  
*edited by Nina Baym et al.*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE  
*edited by Jack Zipes et al.*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE  
*edited by M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt et al.*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF LITERATURE BY WOMEN  
*edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY POETRY  
*edited by Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY  
*edited by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT FICTION  
*edited by R. V. Cassill and Richard Bausch*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF THEORY AND CRITICISM  
*edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al.*

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF WORLD LITERATURE  
*edited by Sarah Lawall et al.*

THE NORTON FACSIMILE OF THE FIRST FOLIO OF SHAKESPEARE  
*prepared by Charlton Hinman*

THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE  
*edited by Alison Booth, J. Paul Hunter, and Kelly J. Mays*

THE NORTON INTRODUCTION TO THE SHORT NOVEL  
*edited by Jerome Beaty*

THE NORTON READER  
*edited by Linda H. Peterson and John C. Brereton*

THE NORTON SAMPLER  
*edited by Thomas Cooley*

THE NORTON SHAKESPEARE, BASED ON THE OXFORD EDITION  
*edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al.*

For a complete list of Norton Critical Editions, visit  
[www.norton.com/college/english/nce\\_home.htm](http://www.norton.com/college/english/nce_home.htm)

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

The text and textual notes are from the Garland (1989) edition, preparation of which was made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency.

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, ELEET STREET.

J. MENZIES, EDINBURGH; J. McLEOD, GLASGOW; J. McGLASHAN, DUBLIN.

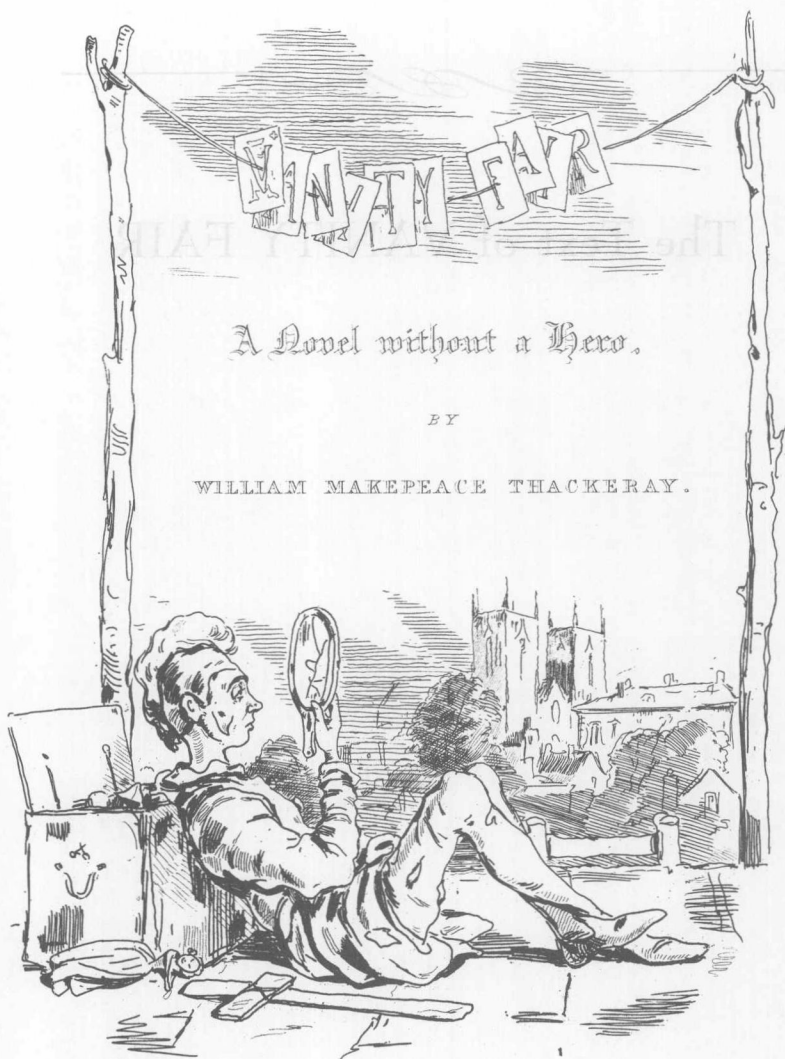
1847.

Cover of original installment

---

## The Text of VANITY FAIR





Engraved vignette title page

## *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.<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

---

Preface	ix
The Text of <i>Vanity Fair</i>	xiii
Engraved vignette title page	xiv
Appendix: Composition and Revision of Chapter VI	691
Backgrounds and Contexts	697
COMPOSITION AND PRODUCTION	699
William Makepeace Thackeray • Selected Letters	
To Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, July 2, 1847	699
To the Duke of Devonshire, May 1, 1848	699
To Miss Smith, June 6, 1848	701
Anne Thackeray Ritchie • [Introduction to <i>Vanity Vair</i> ]	702
Gordon Ray • [Originals]	703
Edgar F. Harden • The Discipline and Significance of Form in <i>Vanity Fair</i>	710
Geoffrey Tillotson • [Philosophy and Narrative Technique]	731
Peter L. Shillingsburg • The “Trade” of Literature	739
RECEPTION	745
Robert A. Colby • [Reception Summary]	745
[Abraham Hayward] • Thackeray’s Writings	749
Charlotte Brontë • Selected Letters	
To W. S. Williams, March 29, 1848	751
To W. S. Williams, August 14, 1848	751
William Makepeace Thackeray • Letter to George Henry Lews, March 6, 1848	752
[George Henry Lewes] • Review	753
[Robert Bell] • Review	758
William Makepeace Thackeray • Letter to Robert Bell, September 3, 1848	761

Charlotte Brontë • Preface to the Second Edition of <i>Jane Eyre</i>	763
[Elizabeth Rigby] • Review	763
CONTEXTS	770
A Pretty Fellow • Wanted a Governess, on Handsome Terms	770
Maria Edgeworth • Female Accomplishments, Etc.	771
Kathleen Tillotson • [Propriety and the Novel]	772
Joan Stevens • <i>Vanity Fair</i> and the London Skyline	777
Robert A. Colby • [Victor Cousin and the Foundation for an "Edifice of Humanity"]	798
Criticism	805
William C. Brownell • William Makepeace Thackeray	807
David Cecil • [A Criticism of Life]	811
G. Armour Craig • On the Style of <i>Vanity Fair</i>	822
John Loofbourov • Neo-Classical Conventions	830
Peter K. Garrett • [Dialogic Form]	835
Richard Barickman, Susan MacDonald, and Myra Stark • [Politics of Sexuality]	841
Ina Ferris • The Narrator of <i>Vanity Fair</i>	856
Catherine Peters • [Didacticism]	857
James Phelan • <i>Vanity Fair</i> : Listening as a Rhetorician —and a Feminist	859
CHRONOLOGY	869
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	873



# VANITY FAIR.

## A NOVEL WITHOUT A HERO.

### Chapter I.

CHISWICK MALL.



HILE<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup> 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*<sup>5</sup> of Hammersmith, the friend of Doctor Johnson, the correspondent of Mrs. Chapone<sup>6</sup> 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