ROGERS, III, Henry Nelson, 1944--
THREE NOVELS OF WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS.

Rice University, Ph.D., 1971
Language and Literature, general

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED
RICE UNIVERSITY

THREE NOVELS OF WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

by

Henry Nelson Rogers, III

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Director's signature:

[Signature]

Houston, Texas

May, 1971
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ....................................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY .................................... 5

CHAPTER TWO: VANITY FAIR ...................................... 49

CHAPTER THREE: HENRY ESMOND .............................. 95

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NEWCOMES .............................. 134

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................... 182
INTRODUCTION

The primary concern of this thesis is a critical analysis of three major novels of William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair*, *Henry Esmond*, and *The Newcomes*. The methodology employed is strongly modeled on the critical theories formulated by Northrop Frye. The reasons for a critical and interpretive approach and for the methodology chosen are various.

The state of Thackerayyan criticism was an important factor dictating a strongly critical investigation. Early evaluation of Thackeray's work was hampered by a lack of biographical knowledge. When such information became available, it took precedence over his literary efforts. This was true to such an extent that much written about him was purely biographical, and most criticism was firmly biocritical in method. This approach is at times a valid and valuable one, as in John Dodds's book, but such work tends to concentrate first on Thackeray's personal history and move from it to his fiction. Biocriticism is often so imbalanced that Thackeray's work is lauded or condemned on the basis of his personality rather than on its artistic merit.

Much Thackerayyan criticism also belongs to what may be loosely termed the "wonder" school. This frequently consists of the critic praising or faulting various aspects of Thackeray's novels and, rather than presenting a soundly reasoned argument, letting extensive passages from the novels serve as evidence. This is of course an oversimplification, at least in most instances, and much
that is valid concerning Thackeray’s work has been revealed in this manner. Yet, while the fiction rather than the author is being considered, a sound methodological basis for analysis is still lacking. And finally, there are instances in which critics allow their personal feelings or opinions to mar their literary judgment. John Greig's **Thackeray: A Reconsideration** contains this intrusion of feeling and also carries the biocritical method to the extreme previously mentioned. Greig strongly condemns Thackeray not merely for such things as authorial intrusions, but for the nature of his personality.

There is, of course, some excellent work dealing with Thackeray's literary achievement. The general condition of Thackerayan criticism, however, indicated a need for additional emphasis on the writing itself rather than on its creator. And as noted above, the utilization of a sophisticated methodology seems desirable for investigation of the fiction. It may also be mentioned that while **Vanity Fair** and **Henry Esmond** have received substantial critical attention, the other major novel, **The Newcomes**, has been largely neglected. Such factors as these influenced the direction of this thesis: its employment of a valid and sophisticated critical method in an analysis of Thackeray's three most significant novels.

The critical approach adopted in this thesis is delineated and demonstrated in the initial chapter. Northrop Frye attempts to classify and describe literature on the basis of myths, or generic plots, structurally organizing principles of literary form. His method, and mine, are therefore essentially descriptive, as
the novels are investigated and discussed in terms of those classifications which he formulates. It is thus possible to determine and enumerate which mythic elements, especially those relating to plot, are operative in a novel; in short, to find out what, in structural terms, is going on. This is not merely a mechanistic operation, in which various literary features are fitted into rigid categories. Understanding these fictional conventions, their traditional implications, and their treatment in a particular novel can reveal why certain responses and/or meanings are conveyed—how structural form and novelistic content are related. Displacement of myth is usually critical in this respect, providing crucial insight into the meanings of the novel and perhaps into the attitudes of the author. And when the various plots and other mythic elements are isolated and examined, it must then be determined where the emphasis lies, what is most important. Always to be considered are Thackeray's adaptations of mythic elements within a work to his entelechy—his controlling purpose in that work. Thus, given the current state of Thackerayan criticism, the basic descriptive purposes of this approach proves valuable in revealing just what type of work each novel is. At the same time it may be seen how the knowledge and insight it furnishes lead to additional implications relative to the novels and their author.

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first establishes the methodology to be employed and briefly illustrates it in two examples. Each of the subsequent chapters is a critical discussion of one of Thackeray's three major novels. The novels are considered in chronological order, so that some relationships and
points of comparison between them are self-evident. These aspects are not of primary concern here, however, for the consideration and comprehension of the individual novels as artistic entities remains paramount.
CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY

The critical concepts which Northrop Frye presents in The Anatomy of Criticism are strongly influenced by those of Aristotle. In his essay on historical criticism, Frye accepts Aristotle's assertion that differences in fictional works may be related to the different elevations of the characters in those fictions. This principle forms the basis for Frye's theory of modes. Plot consists of somebody—the hero if somebody is an individual—doing something. Literary fictions may thus be classified by the hero's power of action in relation to ours—according to whether it is greater, less, or approximately the same as our own. With this power of action as criterion, Frye discovers five fundamental modes of fiction.

In the mythic mode, the hero is superior in kind to other men and to his environment. He is in fact a divine being, a god, and the story about him is a myth. The hero of the romantic mode is superior in degree to other men and his environment. He is himself a human being, although his actions are often marvelous. He inhabits a world where natural laws are not absolute, and where magic and the supernatural are commonplace. There has been a movement from pure myth into legend, folk tales, and their derivatives. When the hero is a leader, when he is superior in degree to other men but not to his environment, the mode is high mimetic. The high mimetic hero is the hero of most
epic and tragedy. His passions, powers of expression, and authority are greater than those of other men, yet he is subject to the order of nature and to social criticism. Most comedy and realistic fiction, however, possess a low mimetic hero. In this mode the hero appeals to the reader's sense of common humanity, for he is not superior to other men or to his environment. He is "one of us." When the hero is inferior to us in intelligence or power, the mode is ironic. Here there is a sense of the reader looking down on conditions of frustration, bondage, or absurdity. The mode is also ironic if the reader feels himself to be in the same predicament, when the situation is evaluated by the standards of a greater freedom. Thus the hero's relative power of action serves as the principal characteristic of each mode. Each mode of course possesses other attributes which aid in the description and classification of literary fictions. These may be more profitably dealt with as they arise in subsequent consideration of Frye's critical tenets, and as they are pertinent to various literary works.

Examination of these fictional modes reveals two contrasting poles of literature, the mythic and the mimetic. At the mythic pole the stories are about characters who can do anything in a supernatural or divine world. Credibility and realism are unimportant. As the mimetic tendency becomes stronger, the need to make the story plausible and true to experience grows, and emphasis on verisimilitude and accuracy of description increases correspondingly. The change in focus brings literary fictions progressively down the modal list from the mythic mode, through the romantic, high mimetic, and low mimetic, to
the ironic mode. Viewed historically, fiction has followed this course of development from myth towards irony. The low mimetic mode had encompassed most literature from Defoe until approximately 1900, and irony has become increasingly dominant since then.

In historical criticism, a myth is a literary fiction whose hero is a god and commands a god's power of action. In terms of narrative, however, a myth is an imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire. It is not affected by a need for plausible adaptation to human experience. As previously indicated, the mythos, or plot formulas, of various fictions tend to move through the other modes towards the mimetic pole—the other extreme of literary design, which is naturalism. In pure myth the structural principles of literature are isolated. During the movement towards the other extreme, these principles are worked into plausible contexts. The various means by which realistic fiction is made to accommodate mythic structures are termed displacement. Thus these plot formulas, as they appear in the romantic, high mimetic, and low mimetic modes, may be seen as a series of displaced myths moving towards the opposite pole of verisimilitude. The process is a cyclic one, as will be seen later, and with irony myth begins to reappear. Frye terms the area between myth and realism, romance. This is not the earlier historical mode or the romance plot formula to be discussed later. In terms of literary design, it is the tendency to displace myth in a human direction and yet—in contrast to realism—to conventionalize content in an idealized direction.
Frye discovers four mythoi, or generic plots, in his essay on archetypal criticism. These are "narrative categories of literature broader than, or logically prior to, the ordinary literary genres."5 They are the myths of tragedy, comedy, romance, and irony and satire. As will become evident, they form two opposed pairs—comedy and tragedy contrast, as do romance and irony, respective representatives of the ideal and the actual. The boundaries of these classifications are not rigidly fixed, however, nor are the myths mutually incompatible. Comedy and satire blend at one extreme, and comedy and romance at the other. Romance may be comic or tragic, and tragedy extends from high romance to bitter and ironic realism. Consideration of the structural principles, character types, and additional features of the individual myths should reveal more fully their distinctive characteristics, their similarities, and their interrelationships.

The basic action of the comic centers upon a young man's efforts to gain the young woman he loves. To win her he must overcome various kinds of opposition, usually paternal. Eventually a twist in the plot enables the hero to triumph and attain his goal. The pattern is simple, but it contains other and more complicated elements. The movement of comedy is in most instances a movement from one society to another. The society is at first controlled by those characters who oppose the hero's wishes. When hero and heroine are finally united, a new and better society forms around them. This is the point of resolution in the action, the moment of cognito, or comic discovery. Some type of party or ritual of celebration then occurs or is assumed
to occur, indicating that a new society has been born. It usually takes the form of a wedding or weddings, although dances and banquets are also common.

Thus the action of comedy is comprised of the obstacles to the hero, and the surmounting of these difficulties forms the comic resolution. Frequently the hero's father is the primary barrier, and their conflict furnishes the plot's action. If his opponent is not paternal, an older and richer rival often confronts the hero. Such a rival is a father surrogate and an impostor who has no legitimate claim on the girl. The fact that he possesses any real power is an unfavorable commentary on the society which allow it to him. Finally the rival and his society are overcome and sometimes cast out by the hero's new order. Because pathos or even tragedy may result from their disgrace and exposure, such persons and less threatening blocking characters are converted or reconciled more frequently than they are totally repudiated. It is a comic tendency, then, to bring as many people as possible into the triumphant and final society.

The form of comedy may be developed in one of two principal ways. Shakespearean and other romantic comedy tends to throw primary emphasis forward towards discovery and reconciliation. However, comic satire, irony, realism, and comedies of manners emphasize the blocking characters and their roles. Hero and heroine are often dull and uninteresting in themselves. The hero's character is generally somewhat neutral, letting him move easily with turns of the plot and enabling him and the heroine to serve as focal points around which more remarkable characters may be grouped. Technically they are still the main personages of the comedy, but real interest lies elsewhere.
A comic ending is usually a happy one, but it is happy in a social sense, not from a restricted moral point of view. Within a comic context, virtues may be as absurd and irrational as vices. The opposition which is defeated may or may not be evil, but it is absurd. Moral comedy is possible, of course, but a social judgment against the absurd seems closer to the comic norm than a moral judgment against evil.6

A blocking character's absurdity is therefore not fully explicable in moral terms. It can be best explained by Ben Jonson's theory of the "humor." The basis of the humor is the principle that repetition, when it is exaggerated or aimless, is funny. Completely obsessed by what Pope termed a "ruling passion," the humor simply repeats his obsession—a miser is always a miser, a hypochondriac a hypochondriac, and they must always act in accordance with their roles. A humor generally possesses enough social power and prestige to impose his obsession upon much of society. The blocking character is therefore closely related to the absurd and irrational forces which the comic action moves against.

Unlike the old order it has replaced, the new society formed at the end of comedy is a pragmatically free society whose standards are seldom formulated, for definitive laws and actions are undesirable characteristics of the ousted society. The hero and his bride will certainly live happily ever after, but the exact conditions of their happiness are not made clear. This is another factor contributing to the hero's lack of character. His real life starts only at the
comedy's end, and his neutrality makes it possible to believe he is potentially 
more interesting than he has previously been.

Only a portion of the complete comic mythos is usually presented in a 
single work. In its totality, comedy consistently possesses a ternary form. The 
hero's society, which battles and defeats an absurd but dominant order, suggests 
by its standards and ideals a golden past. Although not actually present in the 
action, this recalled age makes the full comic movement a progression from an 
established and desirable society to an arbitrary and irrational one that is in 
turn superseded by a third order reminiscent of the first.

Within the comic mythos there are fundamental characters who must 
function in certain ways to fulfill the requirements of comic convention. There 
are four primary types: the alazons or impostors, the eirons or self-deprecators, 
the buffoons, and the churls or rustics. They form two opposed pairs. The 
comic action is based on the conflict between eiron and alazon, and the comic 
mood is polarized by buffoon and churl.

The humorous blocking characters are almost always alazons. Sometimes 
hypocrisy alone is their distinguishing feature, but more often they are character-
ized by a lack of self-knowledge. Perhaps most important in the alazon group 
is the senex iratus or heavy father. His obsessions and rages usually furnish the 
hero's chief opposition. There are several heavy-father surrogates, including the 
older, more powerful rival previously mentioned.
The comic hero is the chief eiron figure, one whose character is largely neutral and undeveloped. The heroine, whose qualities are similar, is also an eiron. The tricky slave, who frames the plans and schemes which enable the hero to emerge victorious, is another important eiron. The trickly slave character is generally the architectus of the action, functioning to bring about the desired comic ending. The vice is a different kind of trickster, one acting simply from love of mischief and starting the comic action with little motivation. Whether he is carefree or full of malice, his actions are almost always benevolent. Vice and hero are combined when the hero does his own scheming and cheating to gain girl and fortune. A related but somewhat different eiron is a kind of Prospero figure, who may be the true "architectus" under whose direction the vice acts.

The buffoon characters operate primarily to contribute to the festive mood of comedy rather than to its actual plot. A large variety exists within this type, of which the cook is one of the most notable. Humorous in himself, he may gradually become a kind of master of revels, a jovial host figure providing a focal point for the comic mood. In contrast, rustic or churl figures are often solemn or inarticulate characters who may serve as types of straight men, letting humor and festivity rebound from them and refusing to enter the comic festivity. Usually they are alazons. In very ironic comedy, however, the refuser of festivity may be a kind of character termed the plain dealer. Representing a moral norm, he has the audience’s sympathy and is qualified to
condemn the folly of society through his outspoken refusal to participate in it. The true plain dealer is an eiron with a basically objective viewpoint. When envy, bitterness, or some other personal factor enters the picture he becomes a malcontent or railer, an alazon whose judgment is no longer reliable.

The basic structural patterns and characterization of comedy remain consistent through a variety of attitudes. The comic myth ranges from savage irony to wish-fulfillment romance. As noted earlier, each mythos is closely related to two other mythoi. Frye finds six phases of each mythos, and in the comic the first three phases are parallel to the first three phases of irony and satire and the second three to the second three of romance. The third phase of comedy is the normal one which has been discussed, in which the ruling society and heavy father give way to the hero's desires.

Adventure is the plot element essential to the mythos of romance. The major adventure which gives romance its literary form is the quest. It follows that it naturally possesses a processional and sequential structure. The central form of quest romance is the dragon-killing theme, which has many elements and variations. Its complete form is the successful quest, which has three major stages. The first of these is the perilous journey of the hero and his minor adventures along the way. This precedes the critical struggle between the hero and his foe, a battle in which either hero or enemy or both must die. The final stage is the exaltation of the hero which takes place whether or not he has survived his quest. Thus the progression from struggle through a point of
ritual death to recognition found in comedy is here presented with greater clarity and force.

Quest and conflict have two principal characters; protagonist-hero and antagonist-enemy. All emphasis is directed towards their confrontation, and all the audience's values lie with the hero. The characterization of the romance myth is generally determined by its dialectic structure. Characters are seldom subtle or complex; they are either for or against the quest. There is also a tendency for each standard type to find himself faced by his moral opposite. Those characters working for the quest correspond to the eiron's of comedy. The benevolent eiron has a close romantic counterpart in the Prospero figure, often a wise old man who observes and sometimes influences the action. His opposite is the traitor, and the heroine is opposed by the siren. Often the hero's potential bride waits for him at home but at the same time furnishes his motivation for the quest. The father and son conflict so prominent in comedy may be present in romance as well. There are other characters who are types of nature spirits. Neither heroic nor evil, they embody nature's moral neutrality and also a mysterious world never comprehended. These figures may aid the hero, but they do not lose their air of mystery. Finally there is a Sancho Panza type who emphasizes realistic aspects of life in the romantic dream world. He can provide an outlet for realism without causing disruption of romance conventions. The more realistic the story, the more significant he becomes. Thus, like comedy, romance has four basic poles of characterization. The crucial struggle between
the hero and his foe corresponds to the comic contest of eiron and alazon. Intensifying the romantic mood, nature spirits are parallel to the comic buffoon or master of revels. And the refuser of festivity of comedy is matched by the Sancho Panza figure of romance. The six phases of romance move from the tragic to the comic, with the first three paralleling the first three of tragedy and the second three paralleling the second three of comedy. The normal quest theme already discussed makes up the third phase.

Perhaps the nature of tragedy cannot finally be adequately formulated or accounted for. It sometimes appears to result from the working out of an inevitable fate, while in other instances tragedy occurs because of a character's hamartia, or tragic flaw. It is clear, however, that the tragic process is begun by the creation of some sort of imbalance in nature. Equilibrium must be restored, and this righting of balance, or nemesis, is the chain of events leading up to and including the final catastrophe. The agent of nemesis may take various forms. It may be a villain who is the hero's deadly enemy, or an accident or a particular set of circumstances could bring the action to its inevitable end. Whatever is the case, nemesis is unaffected by the moral quality of the human motivation involved.

The characterization of tragedy is much like that of comedy in reverse. The source of nemesis is an eiron and may appear in various forms. A god who decrees the tragic action is the counterpart of the withdrawn eiron of comedy, and the comic vice is here the soothsayer or prophet who sees the future unavoidable.
able end. The most common nemesis is the Machiavellian villain of Elizabethan drama, who is a self-starting principle of malevolence. The fact that his conduct requires little or no real motivation makes him a convenient architectus of the tragic action.

Self-deceived or blinded by hubris, the tragic hero, whatever his strength and virtue, is an impostor, an alazon. A protagonist must be of an heroic size in order for his fall to assume tragic proportions. At the same time, this fall asserts ironically his relationship to the rest of society and emphasizes the supremacy of natural law. The suppliant figure, often female, presents a pathetic picture of unmitigated helplessness, destitution, and suffering. And the plain dealer is the equivalent to comedy's refuser of festivity. He may be a friend of the hero, but he also discerns and speaks out against the tragic action.

In the mythos of tragedy, the first three phases correspond to the first three of romance and the second three to the second three of irony. The central tragic phase is the fourth one. Its mode is most often high mimetic, for the hero stands above other men yet must fall because of his relationship to society and inability to overcome natural law. The heroic and the ironic are thus mingled in the basic fiction of high mimetic tragedy, that of the fall of a leader. Tragedy in the low mimetic mode presents its hero as an increasingly pathetic figure. The root idea of pathos is the exclusion of an individual from a society or social group to which he wishes to belong. The character shares
the same level of experience as the audience and is therefore isolated by a human weakness that arouses sympathy for him. Pathos is usually concentrated in one individual, frequently a woman or child. Some failure of expression seems to characterize pathos, and it is intensified by the victim's inarticulate-ness. Low mimetic tragedy may center around a conflict between inner and outer life, a mania about rising in the world, or be concerned with the impact of rigid morality on experience. In any case the leading character is an alazon, for he either pretends or attempts to be more than he is.

The ironic mode gains dominance as emphasis falls on tragic isolation for its own sake. The central principle of tragic irony is that whatever disaster befalls the hero is causally inappropriate to his character. He may not possess any kind of obsession or flaw, but he gets isolated from his society nevertheless. Because its catastrophe relates plausibly to its situation, tragedy is intelligible. In irony, however, the sense of arbitrariness, that the victim is just unlucky, is isolated from the tragic situation. If a reason does exist for the misfortune which befalls him, it is an inadequate one. So as the ironic tone intensifies, the figure of the random victim, the pharmakos or scapegoat, emerges. Such a character is innocent in that he does nothing warranting personal disaster, but he is guilty because he belongs to a guilty society or because he lives in an unjust world. When his undeserved humiliation and agony become so ex-cessive that he no longer retains any heroic aspects, the hero is no longer a tragic figure.
Irony and satire may be viewed as efforts to impart order to the complexities and ambiguities of existence. The central principle of ironic myth as structure can be dealt with most effectively as parody of romance: "the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content which fits them in unexpected ways." Irony and satire are so closely related as to be regarded as a single mythos, but some distinguishing aspects should be noted. Satire is militant irony. It assumes certain standards, makes its moral norms clear, and measures the absurd and the grotesque against them. Satire requires a recognizably grotesque content and at least an implied moral standard. It is structurally close to comedy with its struggle of comic and normal societies. Satire's two essential elements are wit or broad humor founded on a sense of the absurd, and an object of attack. Irony with little satire, on the other hand, does not make its author's moral standards definite, nor does it indicate what the reader's attitude should be. Structurally such irony is the "non-heroic residue of tragedy," emphasizing the theme of confused defeat. The first three phases of this mythos are termed phases of satire, paralleling the first three, ironic, phases of comedy. The second three are phases of irony, which correspond to the second three, also ironic, tragic phases.

Thus Frye classifies literary fictions according to their hero's power of action in his theory of modes, and by their mythos or plot formulas in his theory of myths. Consideration of these categories has indicated that they form a basis for the description of all literature, enabling one to determine in a given work
what fictions are operative there, how they are handled, and how they function to produce certain responses. The displacement of pure myth is crucial to critical analysis. Understanding the manner in which various myths are mingled in a novel and the effects of the resultant displacement can provide insight into the novel's meanings and into the attitudes of its author. While this is fundamentally a descriptive rather than an evaluative approach, it can lead to evaluation. It is possible to go beyond description to discover the entelechy of a novel; its animating force, the aim towards which it is directed. In some instances, a specific purpose may be stated, and an author may use a particular literary form or forms to achieve that purpose. Often it is not declared, and the entelechy must be found through comprehension of the novel, through acquiring insight into what kind of work it is. In any case, concern lies with what functions in the novel, and whether or not form and content are suited to each other—in short, if the entelechy informs and unifies all aspects of the fiction. And this of course involves evaluation; of the author's ideas and aims, his technical strengths and weaknesses as a writer, and finally how well he integrates these various elements to create a literary work of artistic merit.

The basis for a Fryean critical approach has been established, then, and what it can be expected to achieve. It should prove profitable at this point to examine briefly two major Victorian novels: Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Discussion of these works
in a Fryean context should reveal their fundamental modal and mythic characteristics and the way form operates under the entelechies of their authors. The essential purpose underlying these limited analyses is to demonstrate the Fryean methodology which will later be employed in the critical consideration of three of Thackeray's major novels.

In Little Dorrit Charles Dickens employs the comic myth to create a powerful, well-realized novelistic perspective. The principal plot of the novel is comic, as Arthur Clennam and Amy Dorrit overcome or escape various blocking elements and are eventually married. It is an ironic comedy, however, for they are immersed in an absurd and unnatural society, one too powerful for hero and heroine to alter. There is no new order established with their marriage. And for Amy there is a social demotion rather than promotion involved in the comic resolution. Throughout the novel such comic conventions and their positive implications function in a primarily ironic fashion. Skillfully interwoven with the main plot are subplots centering around Mrs. Clennam and William Dorrit. As their stories unfold, their relationship to the novel's predominantly comic action becomes clear.

As the hero of a low mimetic comedy, Arthur is a self-deprecator, an eiron. Unable to change an absurd system, he becomes a critic of that order, the plain dealer of ironic comedy. Having been absent from England for twenty years, Arthur is not conditioned to accept its institutions and social dictates without question. He returns to London on a Sunday, and his remembrances of
past Sundays there are harsh comments on institutionalized religion: "There was a legion of Sundays, all days of unserviceable bitterness and mortification, slowly passing before him." Concerned that his mother may have been responsible for Dorrit's long imprisonment, Arthur tries to obtain information about the matter at the Circumlocution Office. Its operation, as Dickens makes explicit, demonstrates "the whole Science of Government." It is a madhouse of waste and confusion: "Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving--HOW NOT TO DO IT" (p. 145). Because he attempts to find in it some kind of meaning, although only a small piece of knowledge, Arthur creates a furor: "'Look here! Upon my SOUL you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know!'" (p. 155). Later in the novel Arthur sponsors Doyce's cause with the Office, and, while he never prevails, he consistently serves as the eiron needed to satirize the system. Doyce himself functions as an eiron in this respect. The completely pragmatic man, his characteristics are antithetical to those of the system.

Arthur plays a similar role in the plot involving Mrs. Clennam. Strong-willed and domineering, she subordinates religion as well as people to her purposes, thus blinding herself to her inhumanity towards Arthur's real mother, Arthur himself, and Amy. Jeremiah and Blandois are both villainous, but it is Blandois, the embodiment of unmotivated evil, who provides the impetus for Mrs. Clennam's fall. The tragedy is basically low minetic, because there is
choice involved in the course she pursues. Arthur functions as critic of the tragic action, articulating the inscription "D. N. F." ("Do Not Forget") on the watch sent to Mrs. Clennam by her dying husband. Unaware that he has been the greatest sufferer at her hands, he asks her to remember her obligation if she and Mr. Clennam had once "unhappily wronged any one, and made no reparation?" (p. 87) When he discovers that she has dealings with Blandois, Arthur tries to warn her of her danger and to help her if she will permit him:

"'Mother, shall I do nothing to assist you?'
'Nothing.'
'Will you entrust me with no confidence, no charge, no explanation? Will you take no counsel with me? Will you not let me come near you?'" (p. 747)

Despite his efforts, Arthur can never come near her. Isolated by her obsession, she remains a self-deceived alazon until her fall. Mrs. Clennam ends as a pathetic, inarticulate ruin, completely cut off from the humanity she had so long denied.

Thus Arthur operates within both comic and tragic structure without inconsistency, criticizing a society he cannot change and a tragic action he cannot halt. But he is also a different type of eiron in the comic plot, a benevolent Prospero figure. Feeling that through his family he is responsible for the imprisonment of the Dorrits, he first enables Tip to leave the prison and then, along with Pancks, helps to free the whole family. Interested chiefly in Amy, he works to make her happy, as well as to right any wrong his family may have
done. Arthur is therefore two distinct eirons in the same comic plot—hero and Prospero figure. The Prospero role is not sustained throughout, but understanding how and why he operates both as a hero and as an older, paternal character is essential to a full comprehension of the novel. It has been noted previously that Arthur has few misconceptions concerning various institutions like the Church and the Circumlocution Office. After his shocking encounter with Flora and the subsequent marriage of Pet Meagles to Charles Gowan, his romantic aspirations are put to rest, so he thinks, forever. His belief that love has passed him by becomes so strong that he creates an illusion of himself as an old man. Thus Arthur becomes an alazon, an impostor. The gradually assumed character does not prevent him from remaining a clear-sighted eiron concerning everything except his relationship to Amy. Because of her physical appearance and his growing conviction that he is too old for romantic love, Arthur regards Amy as a child, almost as a daughter. Blinded in this manner, he is unaware of her love, and can easily take the attitude of a generous father towards her and function accordingly.

Arthur thus serves as eiron and alazon, the alazon role itself being that of another eiron, the Prospero figure. The contest between eiron and alazon which forms the basis of comic action is therefore found in Arthur himself. There are other blocking elements standing at least momentarily between him and Amy: Flora, Pet, Mrs. Chivery, and Amy's father. Yet Arthur in his self-deception becomes the father figure who conventionally rivals the comic hero for the heroine.
His delusion is in fact the primary blocking force in the comic action:

'Being wiser, I counted up my years and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked forward, and found that I should soon be gray. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly.'

If he had known the sharpness of the pain he caused the patient heart, in speaking thus! While doing it, too, with the purpose of easing and serving her (p. 432).

It is not until John Chivery tells him of Amy's love for him that Arthur realizes his folly: "he stood amazed; his eyes looking at John; his lips parted, and seeming now and then to form the word 'Me!' without uttering it; his hands dropped at his sides; his whole appearance that of a man who has been awakened from sleep, and stupefied by intelligence beyond his full comprehension" (p. 797).

The social order within which Arthur functions as eiron is one of sham and delusion. It is bitterly condemned through the story by means of William Dorrit and his family. Dorrit is freed from prison and made rich largely through Arthur's efforts. He and his family then travel about Europe and England, always moving among high society. More and more obsessed by a desire to rise in the world, he attempts to do so by sacrificing his parental duties and affections to social forms and conventions. He thus utilizes the same means by which he became Father of the Marshalsea, and his success strongly implies one of the
novel's main themes—that society is in fact a prison for those who accept and conform to its perverted values. The action of Dorrit's fall is that of extremely ironic tragedy. He is not a completely arbitrary victim, for he does experience a few brief moments of remorse. Yet he has no heroic qualities and his purchased place in society is as meaningless as was his esteemed position in the Marshalsea. Mrs. General, who tutors the sisters in the social graces, is the vice of the plot. For a fleeting instant, Frederick Dorrit becomes a critic and prophet of the tragic action, but his spirit endures only a moment. Amy herself is the eiron who resists the course which her father pursues. Dorrit had lived the part of Father of the Marshalsea, and now he adopts a still more destructive identity, one which threatens to cut him off from all meaningful human relationships even as it integrates him with "Society." Amy wishes to please her father, but she can never exchange her natural humanity for conformity. She grows alarmed as she watches him dedicate himself to becoming a completely social creature: "I struggle with the feeling that I have come to be at a distance from him; and that even in the midst of all the servants and attendants, he is deserted, and in want of me" (p. 523). Neither the memories of her past kindness nor her continuing devotion to him have any significant effect, however, and Frederick's prophecy is fulfilled—Dorrit dies a shattered, empty shell. More tragic than her father is Amy's sister Fanny. A girl possessing both strong will and feelings, she deliberately chooses to relinquish her personal values and natural affections to enter the world of society. In spite of Amy's efforts, she wilfully marries the bumbling Mr. Sparkler.
As she stands in opposition to the forces which destroy her father and sister, Amy, like Arthur, becomes a plain dealer, a refuser of the society which the comic resolution cannot change. It is a social order whose standards and conventions have lost any importance they may once have had—a world of hollow forms and illusions. The Circumlocution Office presents a front to cover its true nature, and the members of the system which spawned it also possess a surface which hides their reality. Dorrity's story reveals the personal isolation accompanying adherence to social dictates and requirements that leave no room for human values or relationships. The novel is filled with those who have adopted roles that enable them to function in society. Mrs. General is the living embodiment of the forces which pull Dorrity to his doom. She has no more substance than the behavior she teaches: "'You will find it serviceable, in the formation of a demeanour, if you sometimes say to yourself in company—on entering a room, for instance—Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism, prunes and prism'" (p. 529). Mrs. General is her "demeanour." Beneath it lie neither heart nor mind: "If her eyes had no expression, it was probably because they had nothing to express. If she had few wrinkles, it was because her mind had never traced its name or any other inscription on her face. A cool, waxy, blown-out woman, who had never lighted a will" (p. 503). Shaped by their environments, characters similar to Mrs. General have no identity apart from that which society requires of them. Known as the Patriarch, Mr. Casby is a cold, unfeeling fool who succeeds in business because of his benevolent, fatherly
manner. The Merdles are the most important couple in England because Mr. Merdle aimed them both toward that goal. Having money, he lacked appearance and so married Mrs. Merdle's bosom: "'It was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon. Mr. Merdle wanted something to hang jewels upon, and he bought it for the purpose... The bosom moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. Society approving, Mr. Merdle was satisfied" (p. 293). The facade is so convincing that even Arthur falls victim to the myth of his financial invincibility, a myth dispelled by Merdle's suicide and the disclosure of his fraudulence. Characters thus conforming to "Society" are alazons. They are impostors imprisoned by their roles more securely than they could be bound by any physical walls. Merdle's only escape is in death. The nature of the existing society makes Arthur's well-intentioned acts harmful rather than beneficial. Freeing the Dorrits from the Marshalsea, he ironically places them in more terrible bondage, to a social order that removes the human values to be found even in a prison.

Amy consistently serves as a satirical norm to whom such characters are compared. Although her family quickly adapts to the absurdities of society, she writes to Arthur: "I have been afraid that you may think of me in a new light, or a new character. Don't do that, I could not bear that" (p. 523). Because she will not change, she is castigated by her father in a chapter ironically titled "Something Wrong Somewhere": "'I--ha hum--am not pleased with you. You make Mrs. General's a thankless task. You--embarrass me very much' "
(p. 529). Yet it is Amy's task which has always been thankless, and her values, not Mrs. General's, which Mr. Dorrit, and society, should accept.

The ironic structure of the principal plot puts the comic emphasis on personal and moral relationships. Amy's refusal to submit to the society around her stresses what Lionel Trilling sees as the novel's main theme—the relation between the individual will and that of society. The conflict is found in its purest form in the contrast between Blandois and Amy. The villain of the tragic action surrounding Mrs. Clennam, Blandois is totally evil, his malevolence unmitigated by any spark of humanity. He is also a "gentleman," for he adopts all the empty forms of a society having no place for moral values and utilizes them to have his will in that society. Before the fall of the Clennam house, he feels his designs are about to be accomplished. More important to him than his expected wealth is the fact that he has always remained true to his role: "'You will enrich yourself. You have lived a gentleman; you will die a gentleman. You triumph, my little boy; but it is your character to triumph. Whoof!'" (p. 855) Amy, however, retains her moral integrity throughout, never surrendering it to the social system. It is her wilfull act of humility near the novel's end which makes possible the comic resolution. Burning the codicil, she rejects society for Arthur's love. The problem is complex, however, for as Arthur's case indicates, an unnatural society may deceive or pervert a will strong enough to resist its outward forms. Mrs. Clennam is isolated from public contact by choice as well as by physical disability, yet human affection
and moral values are as alien to her self-made community as to the outside world she rejects. And Miss Wade, twisted by her bitterness, contends not only with society as such, but against the few opportunities for meaningful human relationships which she encounters.

The perverseness of the society of *Little Dorrit* is frequently communicated by the inversion of comic conventions. There are several marriages before that of Arthur and Amy. None of them bring about any transformations in the existing system, and in each instance marriage is an unsatisfactory relationship. Affery was forced to marry Jeremiah by he and Mrs. Clennam. At the mercy of these two, she can only wonder "How could I help myself?" (p. 78) Pet Meagles and Charles Gowan overcome her parents' objections, but their union is not a happy one. Refusing to conform to the role usually played by an artist, Gowan adopts an unconventional but equally false identity which separates him from his wife. Fanny's determination to humiliate Mrs. Merdle with the weapons of social behavior bars her from being either wife or mother, and her neglected children eventually wind up with Amy. The possibility of a natural relationship in an unnatural world is severely questioned when the comic structure is employed most ironically. Miss Wade is a bitter, warped woman who has rejected all human and social intercourse, yet the basic comic elements are operative as she woos Tattycoram. Miss Wade plays the part of the comic hero as she overcomes the blocking characters—the Meagles and Arthur—to take the girl. There is of course no actual marriage, and Tatty eventually escapes her domination. There
is an implicit abnormality in the relationship, but the almost demonic inversion of conventional comic structure still functions powerfully to imply the perversity of a society in which girl wins girl through the strength of her hate.

The pessimism regarding personal relationships is not wholly alleviated by the novel's comic resolution. Due to his self-deception, Arthur thinks of Amy as a child rather than a woman through most of the book. He is brought to his senses by young John and undergoes a ritual death and rebirth which prepares him for union with Amy. She has never thought of Arthur in any way other than as a lover, and her monetary sacrifice makes their marriage possible. Incestuous overtones are not completely eliminated, however, for Amy nurses Arthur, apparently aged by his illness, in the same way and in the same Marshallsea room where she had cared for her father. The marriage is an optimistic resolution, but ambivalence remains.

As the unconventional relationships discussed above reveal the nature of the environment in which they are conceived, they imply a closely related theme—that of the failure of the family as an ideal society. For various reasons and to varying degrees the families in the novel are all found lacking. Marriage is a social arrangement for the Merdles. It has no more substance in terms of personal relationship than the "Society" to whose service it is dedicated. In spite of Arthur's efforts, there is little more warmth between him and Mrs. Clennam's strong-willed manipulation of religion to suit her needs, her creation of a debit and credit faith with no room on the ledger for natural affection. Mrs.
Gowan distorts even her motherhood into a social role and leaves such a mark on Charles that he is subsequently unable to be a true husband to Pet. The Meagles, bound together by love, are no more capable of imposing their values on society than they are of preventing their own daughter from falling victim to its dangers. It is among the Dorrits that a family's inadequacy is most forcefully presented. As their affections and moral values gradually disintegrate, the chance that any family can retain its integrity against society seems increasingly remote. The marriage of Arthur and Amy is the most promising union in the novel, but it does not remove the book's pessimistic attitude toward the family as a social order.

There is none of the festivity of a pragmatically free society to be found in *Little Dorrit*. Conventional comic festive elements are here ironically parodied. There is little joy connected with Fanny's career as a dancer, for dancing provides a means of survival for her family. The dinners and parties through which "Society" moves are not celebrations but plays in which each person has a part. Often characters have no names of their own, being abstractions of meaningless institutions. Social events are occasions for service to society, not for human intercourse. Merdle is an ironic host figure, and the irony is devastating in the account of his special dinner, a meal "eaten and drunk, specifically to the end that Lord Decimus and Mr. Merdle should have five minutes conversation together" (p. 624).
Lord Decimus, nevertheless was glad to see the Member. He was also glad to see Mr. Merdle, glad to see Bishop, glad to see Bar, glad to see Physician, glad to see Tite Barnacle, glad to see Chorus, glad to see Ferdinand his private secretary. Lord Decimus, though one of the greatest of the earth, was not remarkable for ingratiatory manners, and Ferdinand had coached him up to the point of noticing all the fellows he might find there, and saying he was glad to see them. When he had achieved this rush of vivacity and condescension, his Lordship composed himself into the picture after Cuyp, and made a third cow in the group (p. 617).

The traditional forms thus contain no festivity, but they ironically disclose the society which excludes the values they imply.

Near the novel's conclusion, there are individual attempts to revoke the will of society. Affery is confined within the Clennam house, at the mercy of a community composed of Jeremiah and Mrs. Clennam. She at last responds to her feelings for Arthur and rebels, telling her "dreams" and helping to perpetuate the fall of house and inhabitants. Pancks, whose nature is belied by his exterior, finally can no longer accept the role forced upon his by his employer. When he shears Mr. Casby's patriarchal locks, he reveals his own benevolence and the terrifying void beneath Casby's surface. In a similar way Tattycoram heeds the advice of Mr. Meagles and Arthur and breaks away from Miss Wade. Arthur himself undergoes the most significant personal alteration. With his self-deception gone, he can become the comic hero and participate in the resolution of the main plot. In such escapes from bondage these characters exhibit the strength of will and essential humanity which Amy has consistently embodied. Their endeavors place still more of the comic emphasis on the
individual, and the success of their efforts is the primary source of optimism in the novel.

Thus plots and subplots function together to accomplish Dickens' design. The ironic tragedy of William Dorrit shows the price which "Society" exacts from those who submit to its will. Mrs. Clennam's tragedy is that of an individual who is strong enough to reject society, but who sacrifices her own humanity in doing so. The principal myth operative in the novel is that of ironic comedy. Its resolution emphasizes the fact that the only source of resistance to the unnatural system that destroys Dorrit and Mrs. Clennam lies within the individual. Characters remain consistent as they function in various plots and subplots, for Dickens never allows conventional requirements to rule plausibility. Theme and action are skilfully integrated in the novel under his entelechy. Going far beyond institutional criticism, Dickens' *Little Dorrit* is an almost despairing condemnation of a society perverse and monstrous to its depths: "... and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar" (p. 895).

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is Thomas Hardy's best known work and Tess one of the most widely known characters in literature. The novel's basic plot is simple: Tess "was a country girl, seduced by a bounder, whose 'fall' prevented her from making a happy marriage with a respectable admirer, and who was provoked into murdering her seducer and, as a consequence, hanged." The action
is tragic, and Tess is a pathetic heroine. Beneath the fundamental simplicity, however, the source of much of the novel's strength may be discerned. Three subordinate tragic fictions are operative within the narrative, and their implications are significant.

The subplots are interrelated in several ways, most obviously through elements of theme and characterization. The unifying effects of these aspects and the corresponding impact made upon theme and character by the interrelationship of different actions will be indicated below. The narrative is also given solidarity by the Nature which pervades the novel. Immense and complex, its presence is constant, although it exists "in serene dissociation from these . . . wisps of human life." Indifferent to humanity, Nature intensifies mood as it reflects various situations and events. Immediately following Prince's accidental death: "The atmosphere turned pale, the birds shook themselves in the hedges, arose, and twittered; the lane showed all its white features, and Tess showed hers, still whiter. The huge pool of blood in front of her was already assuming the iridescence of coagulation; and when the sun rose a hundred prismatic hues were reflected from it" (p. 37). Similarly, after Tess has revealed her past to her husband, "Clare arose in the light of a dawn that was ashy and furtive, as though associated with crime" (p. 252). Because it is so realistic and concrete, Nature can also function symbolically. The red roses with which Alec decks Tess indicate the shame that he will later bring her. After Angel rejects her, Tess discovers wounded pheasants in the woods, left by
hunters to suffer and die. Their plight is symbolic of her own present and future condition, even to their deaths by having their necks broken. Symbols other than natural ones are present, of course, such as the red ribbon which Tess wears in her hair. The main plot is further drawn together as certain structural patterns recur in the novel. Clare sees Tess at the club-walking, but only as he is leaving. Subsequently she is seduced by d'Urberville. The connection between the two incidents is slight, but when the pattern of action is repeated, the relationship becomes important. When Clare rejects Tess as his wife, he opens the way for Alec to regain her. Thus various devices help to bind the narrative together, and its unity should be remembered. The following consideration of its subplots should reveal how they function within the frame of the novel and what their implications may be.

The first of the three underlying fictions is, of course, Tess's seduction by Alec d'Urberville. It is a second phase tragedy, that of youth and inexperience baffled by an adult situation. Tess's inexperience is bluntly put forth when she is first observed at the club-walking: "Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life was a mere vessel of emotion untinctured by experience" (p. 18). And Hardy quickly makes it known that despite her physical appearance, she is not yet a woman: "Phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still. As she walked along today, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then" (p. 18). It is to be her tragedy that "few knew, and still fewer considered this" (p. 18).
Alec certainly does not regard her as anything other than fair game. He is an obvious melodramatic villain, and he swoops down upon his prey at once:

He had an almost swarthy complexion, with full lips, badly moulded, though red and smooth, above which was a well-groomed black moustache with curled points, though his age could not be more than three- or four-and-twenty. Despite the touches of barbarism in his contours, there was a singular force in the gentleman's face, and in his bold rolling eye.

"Well, my Beauty, what can I do for you?" said he, coming forward (p. 44).

If any doubt as to d'Urberville's role remains after this introduction, it is soon dispelled: "He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the 'tragic mischief' of her--one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life" (p. 47).

Given Tess's youth and innocence and Alec's evil intentions, tragic consequences evidently lie ahead. Yet there is no critic of the tragic action. It is to her mother that Tess turns and whose advise, though often with reluctance, that she follows. In her improvidence and thoughtlessness, however, Joan Durbeyfield fails to correctly interpret her part in the action surrounding her daughter. She anticipates a low mimetic comic fiction, as she envisions Tess marrying Alec and thereby lifting her family and its tarnished name back to wealth and respectability. Thus she adopts the role of the tricky slave of
comedy in her attempts to bring Alec and Tess together. But the action is tragic, not comic, and Joan is an alazon, who because of her delusion cannot function as the plain dealer of her daughter's unfolding tragedy. Only after she has pushed Tess off to Tantridge does she reflect on the situation: "'Well, 'tis a chance for the maid--Still, if 'twere the doing again, I wouldn't let her go till I had found out whether the gentleman is really a goodhearted young man and choice over her as his kinswoman'" (p. 57). Characteristically, her contemplation is short-lived: "Joan Durbeyfield always managed to find consolation somewhere: '... if he don't marry her afore he will after'" (p. 57). Even in this Joan is wrong. Her proper role is defined not by herself, but by one of the "elderly boozers" in Rollier's: "'Joan Durbeyfield must mind that she don't get green malt in floor'" (p. 31). But Joan does not "mind," and as she fails to discover her role, she fails in her relationship with Tess. While her intentions seem good to her, they are shallow, and in her blindness she uses her daughter as a piece of merchandise. If Tess is merely a potential conquest to Alec, to her parents she is the meal ticket that will bring them money and position. Her position becomes explicit when her drunken father bids her a pitiful farewell as she leaves for Tantridge. If Alec will not have her, perhaps he will accept the family name:

"And tell'n, Tess, that being sunk, quite, from our former grandeur, I'll sell him the title--yes, sell it--and at no unreasonable figure."

"Not for less than a thousand pound!" cried Lady Durbeyfield.
"Tell'ni--I'll take a thousand pound. Well, I'll take less, when I come to think o't" (p. 55).

Thus Tess's individuality is violated by her parents just as surely as she is subsequently violated physically by Alec d'Urberville. To a great extent her larger tragedy is that of human relationships, and it is significant that the first to fail is that between parent and child. One of the most natural of human relationships, it becomes unnatural because of the Durbeyfields' self-delusion and esteem for conventional values.

The tragic mode of Tess's seduction is basically low mimetic. Innocent and inexperienced, she becomes a pathetic figure, helpless in d'Urberville's power. Her weakness arouses sympathy because it is on a common level of experience, and, because she often finds it difficult to express herself, the pathos is increased by her inarticulateness. Yet the protagonist of a second phase tragedy often survives to encounter new events and situations. Tess has fallen, but she is not defeated. Alec discovers this as he drives her back towards her home:

"I didn't understand your meaning till it was too late."
"That's what every woman says."
"How can you dare to use such words!" she cried, turning impetuously upon him, her eyes flashing as the latent spirit (of which he was to see more some day) awoke in her. "My God! I could knock you out of the gig! Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?" (p. 86).

Tess suffers as a result of her fall, believing that she has shamed not only herself but her family. And greater pain comes from the death of her baby. Tess
is ennobled rather than degraded by her experience, however. Her character momentarily takes on a new dimension as she struggles to baptise her infant before his death: "The ecstasy of faith almost apotheosized her; . . . The children gazed up at her with more and more reverence, and no longer had a will for questioning. She did not look like Sissy to them now, but as a being large, towering, and awful—a divine personage . . . " (p. 106). She is still young, but through her suffering Tess gradually increases in dignity and stature. As she reflects on her past life and her future death, "Almost at a leap Tess changed from simple girl to complex woman" (p. 109). And finally her youth re-establishes itself, "surging up anew after its temporary check, and bringing with it hope, and the invincible instinct towards self-delight" (p. 111). Tess's recuperative power is that of the Nature with which she is always in harmony, and her regeneration becomes complete amid the fertile surroundings of Talbothay.

Thus Tess is a better and stronger woman when she travels to Talbothay. Two tragic modes are operative in the single action which now begins. Regarded as the tragedy of Angel Clare, the mode is high mimetic, for his is the fall of a leader. His position at the dairy is far above anyone else's. He comes from a respectable family, his father and brothers are ministers, and to Tess and the milkmaids, "'he is quite the gentleman Born'" (p. 125). His background indicates that he is worthy of their esteem. He differs from his family and society as a whole in his insistence upon thinking for himself and his refusal to blindly
accept traditional conventions and beliefs. He studies farming because it is a vocation in which he can retain his intellectual independence. Despite these potentially isolating characteristics, Clare possesses warm natural feelings. He displays sensitiveness and consideration towards his family and readily becomes a member of the dairy community. The nobler aspects of his nature appear in a stronger light when he realizes that he and Tess are in love:

Clare was a man with a conscience. Tess was no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss; but a woman living her precious life... How then could he look upon her as of less consequence than himself; as a pretty trifle to caress and grow weary of; and not deal in the greatest seriousness with the affection which he knew that he had awakened in her—(p. 167).

In the world of Talbothay and, most importantly, in Tess's opinion of him, Angel Clare was of heroic stature: "She loved him so passionately, and he was so godlike in her eyes; and... her nature longed for his tutelary guidance" (p. 197).

Yet Clare has a crucial flaw, the hamartia of a fourth phase tragic protagonist. Hardy states that he is a man of faults and weaknesses, and while these are not extensively dramatized before his fall, there are incidents which suggest his shortcomings. In his preference for the country life he has developed "an unconquerable, and almost unreasonable, aversion to modern town life," (p. 128) and his dislike for "old families" is almost as strong. Such attitudes indicate the egoism and narrowness of vision which cause him always to see in Tess what he desires to find there. Although he comes to know the aspects of her character, he regards them as qualities of rustic innocence belonging not to
Tess but to "a visionary essence of woman—a whole sex condensed into one
typical form" (p. 143). When she tells him of her past, his illusion is shattered:

"I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you."
"But who?"
"Another woman in your shape" (p. 245).

When his mistaken conception of her is destroyed, he immediately forces another
role upon her: "He looked upon her as a species of impostor; a guilty woman in
the guise of an innocent one" (p. 245). And he rapidly refines the idea:

"Here was I thinking you a newsprung child of nature; there were you, the
belated seedling of an effete aristocracy!" (p. 249). Self-deceived in this
manner, Clare cannot recognize and confront Tess as an individual. In his
egoism he visualizes her in traditional terms of innocence and guilt to which
he can respond only in a conventional fashion. When he rejects her, he sins
against her much more deeply than did Alec. D'Urberville violates Tess physically,
but Clare violates her spiritually by denying her essential humanity.

As the parallel between himself and Alec suggests, Clare may be seen
not only as a fallen hero but also as the ruthless villain of low mimetic tragedy.
Tess also plays a dual part. In the high mimetic mode she is the suppliant
figure, a helpless female who pronounces judgment upon others by the response
she elicits from them. Thus Angel condemns himself by his treatment of her. In
the low mimetic mode Tess is once again the pathetic protagonist completely at
Clare's mercy. Angel fills Alec's role, and Joan Durbeyfield continues to be a
comic vice in a tragic action, although she is no longer effectual. Yet while
the basic action is similar to that of the previous subplot, its tone and implica-
tions are altered. The Tess who arrives at Talbothay is beginning a new life. She has paid more than was deserved for her youthful mistake, but she must suffer again. She is guilty only of failing to tell Clare of her past before their wedding, and her blame in that respect is small. She writes a letter containing her history and puts it under his door, only to discover she slipped it beneath the rug as well. It is Clare’s fault, to a large extent, that she is reduced to such measures in the first place. With his preconceived notions of Tess and her past, he constantly places his own words in her mouth before she can unburden herself. Her inarticulateness adds to the pathos, and because her punishment is causally inappropriate to her character, the ironic tone is deepened. The extent of her innocence and Clare’s guilt is made explicit when Tess forgives him for a sin identical to the one for which he then condemns her. Because of the strength of her love, her suffering is even more terrible than before. The tragic catastrophe is again a failure of relationship, and the responsibility rests almost solely with Angel Clare.

Within this tragic action the high and low mimetic modes are well balanced. Largely because of their interdependence, emphasis is placed equally upon Clare’s fall and Tess’s pathos. In the context of the novel, however, Tess is the dominant figure, and this fiction adds to the dimensions of her character. The pathos of her situation is increased by her blamelessness and the steadfastness of her love for the unworthy Angel: "'I will obey you like your wretched slave, even if it is to lie down and die!'" (p. 246). Clare’s attempts to find fault with
her tend instead to absolve her. The sense of her innocence and purity grows, and her dignity in contrast to those around her becomes proportionately greater. Thus she begins to assume the perspective of a first phase tragic heroine, for she meets her suffering with courage and endurance. As has been seen, Tess is in a sense reborn after her earlier fall. Even after the stunning blow of Clare's rejection, Tess will not succumb to misery and self-pity. She is at her lowest ebb when she discovers the wounded pheasants left to suffer and die. The incident gives her strength to accept her lot: "Poor darlings--to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours! . . . And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! I be not mangled, and I be not bleeding. And I have two hands to feed and clothe me!" (p. 298). Thus Tess gains in stature through her conduct in the face of tragedy. The traces of nobility glimpsed about her earlier are now becoming more substantial elements in her character, contributing resonance and depth to her strongly individualized personality. At the same time the novel's mode is moving towards irony, for the disparity between character and punishment begins to endow Tess with the connotations of a pharmakos. The low mimetic is still predominant, but the ironic tone continues to grow more pronounced.

The action to the final subplot is that of fifth phase tragedy, that of lost direction and lack of knowledge in the world of adult experience. Tess is always uncertain as to whether or not Angel will return to her, and she must finally submit to d'Urberville because there is no other alternative left open to
her. As the experiences which now befall her are added to the weight of her previous misfortunes, a sense of the inevitable becomes stronger. The death of her father forces her back to Alec, and Clare's return drives her to murder him. Circumstances and events work against her to such an extent that her persecutor is no longer human, but an inexorable Fate bent on her destruction. Both Alec and Clare contribute to her suffering, but they seem more like externally controlled instruments than individuals with Tess in their power. The society which has hounded her in the past now requires that she forfeit her life, but society too has become little more than a means for carrying out the inevitable.

As Tess's destiny is worked out in this final tragic fiction, the mode becomes still more ironic. Any guilt which may originally have lain with her has been totally absolved, and even murder cannot tarnish her essential purity. The killing of Alec is a natural and heroic blow at the forces which beset her. Thus the implications of her character are further enlarged as she takes on the qualities of the pharmakos, an arbitrary victim whose only crime is the fact of her human condition. The gulf between her nature and her punishment is eventually so great that the limits of irony are transcended and mythic elements appear. Tess's capture at Stonehenge is the ritual sacrifice of an innocent and goddess-like victim:

When they saw where she lay, which they had not done till then, they showed no objection, and stood watching her as still as the pillars around. He went to the stone and bent over her, holding one poor little hand; her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser creature than a woman.
All waited in the growing light, their faces and hands as if they were silvered, the remainder of their figures dark, the stones glistening green-gray, the Plain still a mass of shade. Soon the light was strong, and a ray shone upon her unconscious form, peering under her eyelids and waking her.

"What is it, Angel?" she said, starting up. "Have they come for me?"

"Yes, dearest," he said. "They have come" (p. 422).

Thus, while her role remains essentially the same throughout the novel, Tess's character is organic. She is the pathetic heroine in the hands of a merciless villain. The identity and nature of her antagonist may change, but her destiny is always dependent upon someone or something else. The response she arouses becomes increasingly complex, however, for her character is invested with more substance and implications as her story progresses. The process is one of accumulation rather than substitution, for she does not shed her former attributes whenever she is seen in a new perspective. Her individual identity, established in the early portions of the narrative, is continually re-emphasized. Her specific reactions to her various tribulations reinforce the intensity and realism of her personality. Simultaneously the irony of her undeserved suffering moves her through the ironic towards the mythic mode, for in her final condition Tess bears connotations of a Christ-like sacrificial victim. At the novel's end the tragedy of Tess's life is still fundamentally that of the low mimetic mode, as she retains her recognizable personality. Yet she has progressively gained new perspectives which tend to enoble and universalize her. At her death Tess's character possesses meaning and significance extending beyond the context
of her own tragedy. She is Tess Durbeyfield, but she is also a symbol for every woman who faces undeserved suffering with dignity and courage.

While the modal and mythic elements in the novel are instrumental in Tess's development, they also tend to lessen the thematic weight of other aspects of the work. The destructive force of social conventions and traditional values is disclosed as they shape the attitudes of other people, even her parents, towards Tess and create within her a conflict between the dictates of society and of her own nature. The recurring confrontation between Tess's natural selflessness and the self-deluding egoism of others is of more importance. As a melodramatic villain Alec is pure ego, and it is Clare's idealistic egoism which causes him to act as society requires and thereby deny Tess's essential humanity. There are various factors involved, but as has been indicated, Tess suffers primarily because of the failure of human relationships. As the novel's ironic tone deepens, however, the growing sense of impending doom about Tess de-emphasizes the significance of those things which contribute to it. Society kills her at last, but her death was inevitable and the specific instrument of her destruction is no longer of primary concern. Thus at its climax the novel's thematic and causational elements are subordinate to Tess herself. She has been the pathetic victim of society, human egoism, and finally her own tragic destiny, but as she has endured her suffering with purity and valor, she has become an archetypal figure. It is Tess above all that the novel is about, and it is in her character that its greatest power lies.
Thus examination of these novels indicates the ways their authors exploit the possibilities of underlying mythic form. Their divergent aims and methods naturally result in works differing in characterization, theme, and overall novelistic perspective. Dickens displaces comic myth in *Little Dorrit* to make it strongly ironic comedy and thereby portray a perverse and irrational dominant society. Hardy employs the mythos of tragedy to create in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* an archetypal tragic figure. These investigations should have demonstrated the utility of this critical methodology, indicating its premises and to what it can lead. It should now prove feasible to employ this Fryean approach in undertaking more extensive critical analyses of three of Thackeray's major novels: *Vanity Fair*, *Henry Esmond*, and *The Newcomes*. Each of these works will be considered individually in the succeeding chapters.
CHAPTER ONE

FOOTNOTES


2 Frye, p. 34.

3 Frye, p. 34.

4 Frye, p. 136.

5 Frye, p. 162.

6 Frye, p. 167.

7 Frye, p. 223.

8 Frye, p. 224.

9 Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (Baltimore, 1967), p. 69. Further references to this work will be noted in the text by page number within parentheses.


13 Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (New York, 1966), p. 35. Future references to this work will be noted in the text by page number within parentheses.
CHAPTER TWO

VANITY FAIR

*Vanity Fair* was Thackeray's first and greatest novelistic success. Its numbers appeared serially from January, 1847, to July, 1848, and his celebrity grew as it progressed. Upon the work's completion and publication in volume form, "the reviewers accepted the completed book as a masterpiece and Thackeray as a great writer."¹ The novel established him as belonging to the highest rank of contemporary novelists—a worthy, and not unconscious, rival of Dickens. Critical opinion concerning *Vanity Fair* has naturally varied since that time, but to a far smaller degree than in respect to his other novels and overall literary accomplishment. It continues to be regarded as Thackeray's greatest work and one of the outstanding novels in English literature: "*Vanity Fair* is one of the great landmarks in the broad stream of the English novel."²

Generally esteemed as a literary work, *Vanity Fair* still presents significant critical problems. The novel's unity remains a point of contention, as evidenced by efforts to discover unifying principles for the narrative.³ The story's obtrusive narrator also raises questions, largely because of apparent inconsistency in certain aspects of his commentary and his overall attitude.⁴ Such seeming discrepancies may in turn be seen to prevent thematic unity.⁵ These major considerations indicate a more general difficulty in relating and reconciling various aspects of the work within its context as a whole. The following
investigation of *Vanity Fair*’s underlying mythic structure should be useful in dealing with particular critical problems and in coming to terms with the novel as an entity.

The dominant mythos which informs *Vanity Fair* is that of satire—the mythos' first three phases—and irony—its last three. The mythos ranges from militant irony in which relatively definite standards encounter the absurd, to pure irony where the author's attitude and the reader's appropriate perspective are unclear. The novel’s underlying structure is an ironic phase of satire. Its form is dependent upon the narrator-satirist. He creates a token fantasy whose content is by implication absurd. Selecting the content of his story, he comments upon its events and characters with wit and humor. The satiric frame and the action and commentary within it are thus controlled by the satirist and are essential to his purpose. Through their interaction he shapes *Vanity Fair*, whose form and meanings are indicative of the author's own attitude. He doubts not only the validity of conventionally accepted standards and values but ultimately the innate goodness or perfectability of man. The vision of life presented in the novel, although complex, is finally close to the satiric norm in its informing cynicism. It follows that the satiric perspective of the work is strongly ironic, holding up to scrutiny not only the absurd ruling society but those standards and qualities against which the absurd is measured. *Vanity Fair* in its entirety is satire representing "the collision between a selection of standards from experience and the feeling that experience is bigger than any set of beliefs about it."
should be noted that the narrator is ostensibly Thackeray himself, but the identification is unimportant to this discussion. The "showman" will be dealt with only in terms of the artistic work of which he, as creator and participant, is an integral part.

As structure, "the central figure of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance." There are two principal plots operative in Vanity Fair. Becky Sharp is the protagonist of a parody-romance quest whose forms lack all traces of traditional romance values. William Dobbin and Amelia Sedley are hero and heroine of an ironically displaced comic fiction whose resolution fails to establish a new, more ideal society. Dobbin's role as comic hero is also an ironic romance quest, as he seeks and gains Amelia, an unsatisfactory goal. Numerous other subplots and fictional structures in the narrative are displaced to varying degrees, and the entire work is marked by the parody of form characterizing satire. The dominant mode of the novel is ironic. Although their novelistic world is similar to a low mimetic world, there is a feeling that its characters and situations are "being judged by the norms of a greater freedom." Because of the distanced perspective created by the narrator, there is a sense of looking down upon scenes of absurdity, frustration, and bondage within the narrative.

A satiric frame of reference for Vanity Fair is rapidly set up. In the short preface "Before the Curtain," the author refers to himself as "the Manager of the Performance," who "is proud to think that his Puppets have given satis-
faction to the very best company in this empire." Thus quickly the element
of fantasy necessary to satire is suggested. It is established within the narrative,
for the narrator assumes a relationship with his readers fundamentally similar to
that between Manager and patrons. As an omniscient storyteller, he speaks
directly to the audience, directing it through "Vanity Fair": "And, as we
bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not
only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform, and
talk about them" (I, 81). Making his "history" a fantasy, the narrator suggests
the absurdity of its content even as he separates himself and his readers from
its action. This shift in perspective, a method conventional to ironic satire,
provides author and audience an altered view of human existence. In keeping
with the general basis of satire as parody-romance, the play world inhabited by
authorially controlled puppet-actors parodies a romantic fairyland of little people.

Integral to the satirist's aims, the satiric framework remains operative
throughout the novel. The narrator keeps himself constantly in the forefront,
emphasizing his separateness from the story's content and the ostensible reliability
of his commentary. At the same time he carefully identifies his eiron position
and the viewpoint it affords with that of the reader. Assuming that he possesses
the audience's confidence and trust, his manner inspires that type of response.
Their relationship is established largely by the narrator's intimate and confidential
tone and his direct addresses to his readers. He speaks personally to "my kind
reader" or "brother wearers of motley" with whom, so he infers, he shares many
thoughts and opinions as well as "long-eared livery." The identification is mutual, and an important part of the satiric design. It tends to equate the audience's viewpoint with the novelist's own, as well as vice versa. It therefore helps to make acceptable to the reader the narrator's ideas and attitudes and, correspondingly, the novel's larger satiric perspective.

The narrative commentary of Vanity Fair interacts with the story's underlying structure to provide an ironically satiric view of its characters and their social and moral norms. The novel as a whole presents the narrator's cynical and pessimistic vision of human existence, one in which all standards are finally inadequate and all individuals and societies imperfect. Subsequent discussion will reveal that various fictional elements function together to make this perspective consistent and valid within the novelistic world. The work's narrative frame is essential, however, in enabling the satirist to extend meaning and significance beyond "Vanity Fair," to validate its content in the context of the reader's own experience.

A token fantasy, the nature of the "Fair" which narrator and reader perceive is strongly realistic. Its realism permits the author to make his relationship with his "patrons" still more extensive and important. Because of the similarity between the novelistic and "real" worlds, the satiric undercutting of assumed norms and values in the novel tends to also involve those of the reader. The novelist can thus appeal to the reader's personal experience for support of his observations and interpretations. Implicit in the work's satirist--audience connection, the author's requests are often explicit and direct: "let us have at
them, dear friends, with might and main" (I, 81). The narrator is more than a naive moralist who praises virtue and attacks vice, however. He is also an eiron who distrusts and questions all idealized forms such as codes of morality. The reader is frequently asked to agree with ideas and opinions which see the work's characters and society, and by extension himself, as foolish and self-centered. Miss Crawley, so the narrator feels, is beloved solely because of her wealth, and later events bear out his contention. He calls upon his audience to verify the accuracy and realism of the selfishness thus exposed, drawing upon their own human situation to do so:

What a dignity it gives an old lady, that balance at the banker's! How tenderly we look at her faults, if she is a relative (and may every reader have a score of such), what a kind, good-natured old creature we find her! . . . It is so, or is it not so? I appeal to the middle classes (I, 87-88).

Hypocrisy and vanity characterize those who deplore Lord Steyne's immorality and evil conduct, yet are eager to attend his prestigious entertainments. These qualities, so prevalent in the world of "Vanity Fair," are not confined within it: "In a word everybody went to wait upon this great man—everybody who was asked: as you the reader (do not say nay) or I the writer hereof would go if we had an invitation" (II, 63).

These examples, illustrating the manner in which the narrator gains support from his audience, indicate the importance of the satiric frame to the novel as a whole. It functions consistently, enabling the satirist to turn to
his reader, and hence to the context of human existence, for confirmation not merely of isolated statements, but of the inclusive content of *Vanity Fair*. The writer can attain external validation of his novel’s meaning as he broadens the relevance of that meaning to the world of everyday experience. The ultimate appeal is for affirmation of the work in its entirety, and of its creator’s melancholy and cynical view of humanity. The plea is at times specific:

O brother wearers of motley! Are there not moments when one grows sick of grinning and tumbling, and the jingling of cap and bells? Thus, dear friends and companions, is my amiable object—to walk with you through the Fair, to examine the shops and shows there; and that we should all come home after the flare, and the noise, and the gayety, and be perfectly miserable in private (I, 182).

The narrative’s obtrusive commentary and the ironic meanings of its operative fictions move *Vanity Fair* as a whole toward the point within the mythos of irony at which satire collapses and irony gains dominance—when satire’s "content is too oppressively real to permit the maintaining of the fantastic or hypothetical tone."¹¹ The work remains satire primarily because the narrative framework keeps a discernible distance between satirist and audience, and the story’s action, and maintains throughout an element of fantasy. The novelistic world is like real life, but in the final analysis it is not real life. While furnishing a new perspective from which human existence may be examined, the external structure insures a measure of "safety" for the reader. As Kathleen Tillotson notes, "It is needed merely as relief, from a spectacle that might otherwise be unbearably painful."¹² Skillfully employed by the author, it
permits a reader to perceive and confirm the book's meanings in terms of his own experience, largely because it separates and to a certain degree insulates him from the content of that novel and the full impact of those meanings.

Thus the narrative framework established by the satirist has great significance for Vanity Fair. It influences the interaction of interpretive commentary and underlying structure which makes the novel ironic satire focused upon all forms of romanticism—"the imposing of oversimplified ideals on experience." The work's satiric consistency and range are reflected by the narrator's rhetorical characteristics, principally features related to his wit and humor. Satire is traditionally marked by parody of form, for the romantic conception of "The beauty of perfect form, in art or elsewhere" is one of its objects of attack. As a consequence there is a "constant tendency to self-parody in satiric rhetoric which prevents even the process of writing itself from becoming an oversimplified convention or ideal." The tendency is prominent in the rhetoric of Vanity Fair, particularly during its early portions. The novelist keeps his role as author before the reader in conspicuous fashion. He points out advantages—"novelists have the privilege of knowing everything" (1, 32)—and stresses limitations: "If I had the pen of a Napier, or a Bell's Life, I should like to describe this combat properly" (1, 50). The audience is privy to the artistic possibilities open to him: "We might have treated this subject in the genteel, or in the romantic, or in the facetious manner" (1, 55), and is informed of the decision: "my readers must hope for no such romance, only a homely
story" (1: 56). Throughout his commentary an element of self-parody is to some extent present and meaningful. Directed at romanticized artistic ideals, it is therefore compatible with Vanity Fair's larger satiric design. It is also instrumental in maintaining the narrative's external structure, helping to distance narrator, and reader, from the action. The commentator's self-parody has thematic significance as well. The rhetorical technique not only attacks idealized concepts of art, it frequently suggests that the writer, as a man, has limitations and is aware of them. Substantiated elsewhere, the fact of his fallibility emphasizes the universality of a principal theme, that of human inadequacy and imperfection. Relating him with "puppets" as well as audience, the narrator's flawed nature helps to extend thematic implications to himself and his readers. Elements of self-parody thus disclose the satirist's consciousness of his deficiencies even as they implement his convincing and assured presentation of a particular point of view, one which in fact insists upon his own imperfection.

The wit and humorous insight displayed in the novelist's self-parody characterize much of the narrative. They are an important means by which he exposes irrationality and folly to the scorn and laughter of satire. His state of mind is distinguished by compassion as well as a sense of ridicule, however. The narrator frequently conveys understanding and pity for those whom he mocks. An apparent contradiction, the combination of pity and ridicule is central to his attitude and to the artistic work which embodies it. Both attributes show an awareness of the inadequacy of people to cope with circumstances. 16 Scorn
and sympathy arise naturally from the cynical and ironic perspective which informs the novel's satire. Man is to be mocked or pitied, individually and collectively, in his foolishness, absurdity, and ineffectualness in the face of his existence. Thus the satirist can view his characters, readers, and himself with amusement and compassion because of the pessimism of his comprehension of the human predicament.

The satiric perspective of *Vanity Fair* is infused with irony, then, manifesting the underlying cynicism of the narrator's attitude. The point of moral reference necessary to satire is present, however. As creator of the work, the novelist selects the content of his story, "and the act of selection is a moral act." The novel, as satire, retains the forms of comedy and romance but lacks their traditional meanings. If ideal moral norms and values are not ideally represented in the book, they are nonetheless implied by their absence from it. And the novel's action suggests that standards and situations opposing the terrible inhumanity of "Vanity Fair," while themselves imperfect and of doubtful meaning, do have a certain amount of value. Thus the moral perspective of the work is basically conventional within its ironically satiric context. Retaining a measure of intellectual detachment, *Vanity Fair*’s dominant satire presents a world in which the "stabilizing conservatism" of conventions, including those of morality, is necessary, at the same time revealing their absurdity and insufficiency in that world. The satirist's primary concern for his work is that it fully express and demonstrate the validity of this perspective. In the final analysis, his own
assessment of his artistic intention and accomplishment proves accurate: "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'" (I, 10). The satiric elements discussed above reveal and contribute to the purpose. The meanings of the narrative's fictional actions must be considered within the context of this inclusive satiric design.

Reflecting satire's tendency to contradict ideals of perfect artistic form, *Vanity Fair* contains two major fictions placed in conscious ironic juxtaposition, rather than a single unified action. Becky Sharp is the protagonist of a parody-romance plot. Becky functions as a romance hero instead of heroine, emerging from an obscure background to courageously undertake adventures and pursue goals. Her aims appear conventional: social prestige, wealth, and marriage. She achieves them all during the course or her career, despite having to face "Vanity Fair" alone. Yet Becky's role, her experience, and her entire quest lack traditional implications. As the narrator states, the world of "Vanity Fair is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falsenesses and pretentions" (I, 80). Her success within its social order therefore suggests that Becky shares those qualities and modes of conduct which it rewards. Rather than advancing conventional romantic values against evil opposition, Becky meets a corrupt and absurd order on its own terms. Her goal
is not to change that order but to alter her position within it. Throughout this action, irony produced by the clash of conventional romance forms and realistic content functions powerfully to reveal Becky's nature and that of the society in which she moves.

Rebecca's origin parodies that of a romance hero, the discovery of whose obscured identity reveals royal blood. The daughter of an opera singer and a drunken painter, the concealment of her background is always important to Miss Sharp's progress in society. The various aspects of the young woman's character are rapidly brought out. The courage and resolution which prove indomitable initially manifest themselves in her clashes with the schoolmistress at Cheswick: "Worthy Miss Pinkerton . . . had no will or strength like that of her little apprentice, and in vain did battle against her" (1, 23). That such generally admirable qualities are perverted by self-centeredness and a lack of human affection is equally evident: "I'm no angel." And to say the truth, she certainly was not. . . . she was never known to have done a good action in behalf of anybody" (1, 18-19). Upon leaving Cheswick, Becky scorns Miss Jemima's kindness, hurling the dictionary back at its giver. The incident is symbolic, for she always disdains such "womanly" qualities: "she had no soft maternal heart, this unlucky girl" (1, 22). Her rare moments of feeling parody the romance hero's times of temptation and trial, since Becky regards her own infrequent instances of human feeling as weakness.
Conduct and motivations in different adventures simultaneously characterize Becky more fully and expose the society she seeks to dominate. In "Vanity Fair" a young woman's future is dependent upon her ability to make a successful marriage, so it follows that Miss Sharp's aim is matrimony. The initial effort in this direction is her "campaign" to ensnare Amelia's brother. Even before meeting Jos, Becky discovers his wealth and immediately resolves to unite herself with both. Love and affection are irrelevant to the matter: "If Mr. Joseph Sedley is rich and unmarried, why should I not marry him?" . . . And she determined within herself to make this laudable attempt" (I, 25). She is unsuccessful, thwarted not by an eiron figure of superior virtue but by the same selfish vanity, in George Osborne, which motivates her.

In terms of romance plot, the ironic parallel to Becky's major adventure consists of the comic subplot involving herself and Rawdon Crawley, an action which is not completed until long after their marriage. Rawdon and his father Sir Pitt are rivals for Becky, although she is actually the aggressor. Thus there are two potential comic fictions operative. In the unresolved action, Sir Pitt's wife prevents his union with Becky, refusing to die until Miss Sharp has already married. Therefore Sir Pitt is an unsuccessful blocking character for Rawdon and Rebecca, the older, richer member of an absurd order whose opposition is overcome by hero and heroine. But Becky's tearful response to his proposal suggests that her marriage is not all she would have it: "Rebecca gave way to some very sincere and touching regrets that a piece of marvelous good fortune
should have been so near her, and she actually obliged to decline it. . . .
surely, surely we may respect the agonies of a young woman who has lost the
opportunity of becoming a baronet’s wife” (I, 149-150). The defeated rival
would have been preferable as a husband for the very reasons such a character
is traditionally unacceptable—he possesses the wealth, power, and values of an
irrational ruling society. The comic action is displaced, then, for implied
values of human love and understanding are absent from Becky’s union with
Rawdon. For Rebecca marriage is not an end in itself but a means to the
security of wealth and rank. Ironically, the resolution of the particular comic
fiction prevents the realization of that goal through marriage to Sir Pitt. The
union also meets with Miss Crawley’s displeasure and, despite skillful efforts to
regain lost favor, causes Becky and Rawdon to forfeit their chances of inheriting
her fortune. Thus marriage, having value only as a means to money and position,
instead temporarily denies those things to Rebecca. It thereby obstructs the
achievement of her quest. Nonetheless, it is as Mrs. Rawdon Crawley that
she eventually comes nearest to complete success.

The Crawleys’ day-to-day existence is a displacement of a romance
hero’s progress through an unreal world: “No one in a romance . . . ever
asks who pays for the hero’s accommodation”. Becky and her husband move
through cities and society with much the same absence of visible support. To
do so, they cheat, swindle, and give every appearance of possessing the wealth
and rank which they lack. It is of small concern to the two that those who are
less clever or ruthless must suffer from their exploitation: “yet somebody must
pay even for gentlemen who live for nothing a-year—and so it was this unlucky Raffles was made the representative of Colonel Crawley's defective capital" (I, 372). Having few social and financial advantages, Becky must utilize methods of deceit and dishonesty to force her way upward in society. She practices her arts upon Lord Steyne to obtain money and an entrance into his society, the finest in "Vanity Fair": "After Becky's appearance at Lord Steyne's private and select parties . . . some of the very greatest and tallest doors in the metropolis were speedily opened to her" (II, 90). Granted an audience with the king, she "moved among the very greatest circles of the London fashion" (II, 94). Persuading Lord Steyne to obtain a governorship for her husband, Becky nears realization of her social and mercenary goals. Rawdon uncovers her treachery even as she and Steyne are celebrating its success.

As noted previously, the displacing elements of their subordinate fiction are indicated when the marriage is initially disclosed. The union is founded on illusion, for both hero and heroine are alazons. Their obsessions are significantly different, however. Rebecca has no misconception about her husband or what the marriage will offer. Her self-deception is that of the society which she emulates, the blind selfishness and vanity which leave no room for human values. Wedded life is never marred by their absence, because she never expected it to contain them. For Becky, then, the comic action is displaced by Rawdon's discovery and the resultant loss of her social position, not by the lack of meanings which her obsession never permits her to acknowledge. At the same time it is the power
of illusion which causes her to purposefully deceive the officer. Rawdon marries for a more conventional reason—love: "Mr. Rawdon's marriage was one of the honestest actions which we shall have to record in any portion of that gentleman's biography" (I, 152). He is totally captivated by the role which Rebecca displays for that very purpose. Because he is necessary to her, she continues in the part after their marriage: "but she never let him perceive the opinion she had of him" (I, 165). Unaware of the duplicity and heartlessness beneath his wife's affectionate demeanor, the Captain remains enamoured and dominated: "that veteran rake, Rawdon Crawley, found himself converted into a very happy and submissive married man" (I, 166).

Thus Rawdon, because of his deception, finds in marriage its traditional characteristics of love and trust. That delusion in fact makes him an elion figure, for through it he turns to values which place him in opposition to the absurd norms of society. Rawdon becomes a refuser of social festivity and, by example, an unknowing critic of Rebecca's quest and the tragic action surrounding himself. The festive elements associated with a pragmatically free society are missing from their conventional forms in "Vanity Fair," and their absence further reveals the essential nature of the dominant social order. Parties and other gatherings are not occasions for meaningful human intercourse but battlefields where the unceasing struggles for social prestige and wealth are carried on. Lord Steyne is an ironic host figure, driven to debauchery and extravagance by fear of impending insanity. In his magnificent entertainments there is no
true joy or mirth: "So there was splendour and wealth, but no great happiness
perchance behind the tall carved portals of Gaunt House" (II, 62). Yet his
wealth and nobility make his parties the most attractive in "Vanity Fair": "In
a word everybody went to wait upon this great man—everybody who was asked"
(II, 63).

The charade party given by Lord Steyne most emphatically illustrates
the realities upon which the workings of society are founded. Becky's partici-
ipation in the theatrics is significant in several respects. Her role as Clytemnestra,
with Rawdon as Agamemnon, is symbolic of her betrayal and spiritual murder of
her husband: "Steyne's strident voice was heard roaring over all the rest. 'By
_____ she'd do it too,' he said between his teeth" (II, 102). She does, not
once but twice. Her later involvement in Jos Sedley's death is more literally
that of Clytemnestra. In her second charade Becky portrays a singer, the part
paralleling her mother's occupation and being more generally representative of
Mrs. Crawley's background. Ironically, she demonstrates in the drama those
bohemian qualities she has employed with great success in society itself, qualities
which undisguised would cause her downfall. Thus Rebecca's roles symbolize her
part in "Vanity Fair" not only as they foreshadow future events, but in the
sense that her entire life is an act suited to her purposes. As her success in
both areas suggests, society too places such emphasis upon visible, material
attributes that an individual's internal qualities come to have little or no im-
portance. A world defined by externals, "Vanity Fair" and its inhabitants are
emotionally and spiritually sterile, devoid of essential humanity.
It is this society from which Rawdon turns, finding human values in his love for Becky and his son. His devotion to his wife endures, but to his dismay she moves higher in society and away from him: "Rawdon Crawley was scared at these triumphs. They seemed to separate his wife farther than ever from him somehow" (II, 107). The Colonel's opposition to Becky's society and conduct is not articulate nor even fully conscious, but he comments upon them by his contrasting example. The difference and relative worth of their respective standards are implied by their attitude toward young Rawdon. He is the conventional supplicant figure, often a child, who focuses the tragic mood, in this case that of the emerging tragic action involving his parents. The narrator indicates that he becomes a moral touchstone in this role: "for the hearts of all women warm towards young children, and the sourest spinster is kind to them" (II, 18). The ties between the boy and his father are strong, for "Rawdon Crawley, rascal as the Colonel was, had certain manly tendencies of affection in his heart, and could love a child and a woman still. For Rawdon minor he had a great secret tenderness" (II, 382). His paternal love becomes in its depth and sincerity the source of Rawdon's spiritual and moral redemption. When he must leave his son at school, the Colonel "came away with a sadder, purer feeling in his heart than perhaps that poor battered fellow had ever known since he himself came out of the nursery" (II, 110). Becky's feelings are completely antithetical to those of her husband. Young Rawdon inspires no motherly affection within her; indeed she regards such inclinations as weakness and so ignores her son. The division
between them becomes irreparable after she discovers him listening to her singing to Steyne: "His mother came out and struck him violently a couple of boxes on the ear. . . . They were separated from that day of the boxes on the ear" (II, 34). Becky is guilty of spiritual rather than physical abuse. She violates the almost sacred human relationship of mother and child. Thereafter she stands condemned as an unnatural mother, implicitly by Rawdon's example and explicitly by Lady Jane, and "the awful kitchen inquisition which sits in judgment in every house, and knows everything" (II, 34). Becky's betrayals of her son and husband are basically identical—they are violations of essential humanity. Her behavior toward young Rawdon is crucial to Rebecca's characterization for it reveals unmistakably the depth of her inhumanity. She is finally afforded the awful judgment made against those who reject a suppliant figure. 21

Deceived and in love with Rebecca, Rawdon's obsession is removed in the climactic scene when he returns from jail to find his wife and Steyne together. Only then does he realize his own blindness and Becky's duplicity. Whether or not she has been physically unfaithful is uncertain and finally unimportant. Rebecca stands convicted of spiritual treachery, of failing to return the love and trust she received from Rawdon. His accusation is one she cannot refute: "'You might have spared me a hundred pounds, Becky, out of all this—-I have always shared 'with you'" (II, 125). With Becky's exposure the displaced comic situation becomes tragic for Rawdon. He loses a wife, his beloved son, and eventually his life. Despite his many shortcomings, his unselfish love and courage in the face of
suffering imbue him with dignity, so that Rawdon in his fall possesses a measure of tragic stature.

Rawdon's history is thematically significant. His is a tragedy of human relationships, those between Becky and himself, and his wife and son. Their failure illustrates a theme stated most explicitly in connection with George Osborne and Amelia—that there are no reciprocal human relationships. There can be none is a society in which, as the Colonel's story shows, even the traditionally intimate ties of matrimony and parenthood exist for purposes of exploitation. The ironic action is meaningful in respect to another important novelistic concern as well; the idea, in Swift's words, that happiness is "the perpetual possession of being well deceived." Rawdon was an alazon, deceived and manipulated by his wife. Yet when the illusion is removed and he sees Rebecca clearly, the consequence for him is suffering and exile. The Colonel's happiness and Becky's selfish designs were dependent upon the same deception, and he is crushed by its removal. Rawdon later serves well as a governor and perhaps finds a measure of meaning and satisfaction in his work. His family was his most precious possession, however, and it is irrevocably lost to him. Therefore the possibility that human happiness and contentment are based on delusion, that facing reality brings dissatisfaction and misery, is strongly implied. The theme, a major one, will be considered further in relation to other aspects of the work.
The action involving the Colonel and Rebecca also provides a particular example of the functional unity of the novel's satiric perspective and its fictional structure. The subplot parodies with devastating force the idealized notion that virtue is rewarded and evil punished. It is Rawdon and not Becky who suffers most. The ironic discrepancy between assumed moral concepts and the reality of Crawley's experience implies strong doubts concerning the adequacy and even the relevance of such norms when confronted by the complexities of existence. As previously discussed, similar questions are inherent in the established satiric perspective. This relationship between the meanings of narrative action and point of view is specific and limited, but it nonetheless indicates the satiric consistency of *Vanity Fair* as a whole.

Becky's "crucial struggle" ends in failure with Rawdon's discovery of her treachery. She is rejected by high society, left alone in the world, and for a time drops from view. The full significance of the catastrophe becomes more apparent when it is seen in light of the larger parody-romance action. Rebecca's disappearance and re-emergence ironically parallel the ritual death and recognition scene, or exaltation, of a romance hero. She sinks to disreputable levels of society and eventually rises again to attain wealth and seeming respectability. The process involves no alteration of character, however, for her values and methods remain the same. Becky's despair at her misfortune leads not to self-examination and awareness but to a period during which she "absolutely neglected her person, and did not even care for her reputation"
It is this portion of her life, then, which comprises the recognition scene. What it exposes is not nobility and heroism but the nature and extent of Becky's immorality and lack of humanity. Mingling with the dregs of society, she openly displays the qualities which she hypocritically disguises in the higher echelons of "Vanity Fair." Those attributes were responsible for her earlier success in society, however, and the recovery of social position depends upon re-establishment of a reputation to cover them, not upon the acquisition of virtue or morality. The recognition reveals completely Mrs. Crawley as she has always been: "a woman without faith—or love—or character" (II, 231-2). And the crucial struggle, important though it is, is merely one adventure to be followed by many others.

Rebecca's fall from high society parallels Rawdon's exile in superficial respects, but as the continuation of her career implies, hers is a parody of the tragic situation. Unredeemed by any moral or spiritual qualities, Becky lacks the dignity and stature necessary to a tragic hero. Irony is intensified by the suggestion that she falls from an achieved position which has proven unsatisfactory. Rebecca has moved steadily upward through the ranks of society, yet on each level she feels unfulfilled. When the Crawleys are among Paris' elite, Becky "was growing tired of this idle social life ... and longed for more substantial benefits" (I, 367). But after she has gained money—unknown to Rawdon—and a place in the finest society, she finds these things insufficient: "Her success excited, elated, and then bored her. ... the poor woman herself was yawning
In spirit" (II, 94). The conventionally tragic fall from an exalted place is in fact a loss of objectives which Becky has discovered to be of small value. This idea is substantiated during her subsequent descent into the social depths, for her adaptability enables her to find amusement in any company: "she was happy enough at this period of her boarding-house life" (II, 238). When Becky openly becomes what in essence she has always been, a "perfect Bohemian", her association with companions "whom it would make your hair stand on end to meet" (II, 239) is far from disagreeable: "Their life must be one of great excitement. Becky ... took to this life, and took to it not unkindly" (II, 240).

In the final analysis, then, the larger action of Rebecca's career is the most ironic parody of conventional romance structure--the quest whose goals are not there. In idleness or upon realization of certain objectives, life becomes tedious for Becky. Her aims are ultimately unimportant in themselves--it is the seeking itself in which she finds meaning. Lacking essential humanity, she is pure aggressive will. Defined wholly by externals, her identity consists entirely of the role through which that will functions. Rebecca does not in fact exist apart from the exercise of will, and it is exercised in the agon, or conflict, which characterizes romance. As the ironic quest suggests, therefore, particular goals are unimportant. Becky finds meaning in the seeking itself, even as it defines her. She therefore bears a strong ironic resemblance to the most naive of romance protagonists, a character who experiences interminable adventures without development or aging.
As has been discussed, Becky's ability to operate successfully within an absurd ruling society indicates that she shares its values and standards. Thus it follows that her own qualities and career serve to characterize further that social order. The gradual disclosure of Rebecca's nature is a revelation of "Vanity Fair." Her progression through various social classes clearly shows that the qualities displayed on the lower levels are those which, hypocritically masked, rule in high society. That society's inhumanity and perverseness are in evidence throughout, but the novelistic society progressively approaches the terrible world of extreme irony where life is presented "in terms of largely unrelieved bondage." ScenEs of obsession and imprisonment accumulate in the narrative with powerful impact, scenes whose actors tend to become figures of madness or misery. Old Sir Pitt's wife is without mind or will, "a mere machine in her husband's house" (I, 82). Sir Pitt himself is an unfeeling monster whom Becky's marriage makes a "frenzied old man, wild with hatred and insane with baffled desire" (I, 159). He ends a terrible figure—"a whimpering old idiot put in and out of bed and cleaned and fed like a baby" (I, 409). George Osborne's father, obsessed by pride and vanity, isolates himself first from his son and then from any human contact. In his selfishness he dominates and imprisons his eldest daughter: "he tyrannized over his unmarried daughter... the sweepers at the crossing... was happy compared to that unfortunate and now middle-aged young lady" (II, 13).

The greatest of aristocrats, Lord Steyne becomes almost inhuman, an ogre figure whose immense cruelty and depravity are suggested by his physical appearance:
The candles lighted up Lord Steyne's shining bald head, which was fringed with red hair. He had thick bushy eyebrows, with little twinkling bloodshot eyes, surrounded by a thousand wrinkles. His jaw was underhung, and when he laughed, two white buck-teeth protruded themselves and glistened savagely in the midst of the grin (I, 379).

His family is cursed with insanity, and he is haunted by fear of madness. The women of his household are prisoners, victims of Steyne's sadistic oppression:

"To see his wife and daughter suffering always put his lordship into a good humor" (II, 75). The magnificent testimonies accorded him by society after his death are parodies of the traditional romantic exaltation of a noble hero, for Lord Steyne dies a "worn-out wicked old man" (II, 244).

Thus "Vanity Fair" is a world with strong suggestions of the demonic in its savagery and oppression. It is filled with misery and oppression, with those imprisoned and destroyed by others or by their own destructive obsessions. Such a society of inhumanity and bondage is the extreme ironic opposite to the pragmatically free, "redeemed" society conventionally established in comedy. The almost hellish order remains in control at the work's conclusion, for at that point the assumption can be made "that the lust for sadistic power on the part of the ruling class is strong enough to last indefinitely."²⁷ It is this society, then, which is reflected in Becky's character and adventures to the extent that she becomes the embodiment of its essential nature.

Becky's individuality is carefully delineated and maintained throughout the narrative. As her story develops, however, she becomes an increasingly
ironic figure, and eventually mythic elements appear around her. The previously noted ironic relationship between the adventuress and a naive romance hero contributes a suggestion of deathlessness and immortality. With her fall and parody "exaltation," Rebecca's character is disclosed in such a manner that her malignancy and wickedness seem almost demonic. The narrator likens her explicitly to figures found near the limits of irony, such as the "siren with the imprisoning image of shrouding hair" and she who sits eternally among the rocks, "the femme fatale or malignant grinning female." 28 Becky is a "syren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling. . . . They look pretty enough when they sit upon a rock, twanging their harps and combing their hair, and sing, and beckon to you to come and hold the looking-glass; but when they sink into their native element . . . we had best not examine the fiendish marine cannibals, revelling and feasting on their wretched pickled victims" (II, 231).

In retrospect, descriptive elements which have surrounded Rebecca previously gain resonance and meaning. She has consistently been presented in terms suggestive of those terrible beings to whom she is at last definitely compared. The malignant grin associated with the "femme fatale" becomes one of Becky's most noticeable features. It is displayed almost immediately upon her introduction in the novel, after she has hurled Miss Jemima's dictionary back at the poor woman: "the young lady's countenance, which had before worn an almost livid look of hatred, assumed a smile that perhaps was scarcely more agreeable" (I, 17). She is frequently associated with images of reptility as she
"was writhing and pushing onward towards what they call 'a position in society' " (II, 35). In the climactic scene with Rawdon and Lord Steyne, such allusions and their implications are strikingly prominent: "At the next instant she tried a smile, a horrid smile, as if to welcome her husband . . . She clung hold of his coat, of his hands; her own were all covered with serpents, and rings, and baubles. 'I am innocent' " (II, 123-24). The demonic nature explicitly attributed to Mrs. Crawley during her period of "despair" is therefore implicit in these and related elements of the novel. The utterly damning "recognition scene" is carefully prepared for and consistent with her overall characterization. Becky, as she has been dramatically and descriptively presented, is a monster whose "hideous tail" may be discerned below the water's surface "writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling round corpses" (II, 231).

Thus Becky is a natural inhabitant of the terrible "Vanity Fair" world of madness and obsession, bondage and misery. Although her "quest" never ends, it is during her final adventure that Rebecca comes to epitomize fully that ruling society. This last struggle takes the form of a tragically ironic action centering around Jos Sedley. The structure draws together the stages of Becky's career, for Jos was her initial goal. He resembles a miles glorious in his braggadocio and cowardice, but any function he performs as an entertainer is powerfully displaced. Sedley is a mass of neuroses unable to confront and cope with his own human situation. He creates a fantasy world, projecting romanticized and
heroic conceptions of himself—tiger hunter, war hero—which become the reality according to which he lives. Thus Jos' eccentricities are most important as manifestations of deeper psychological deficiencies. Completely neurotic, he becomes a helpless and pathetic supplicant figure who is easy prey to Becky's designs upon him. Jos is not evil, only weak, and the ironic discrepancy between his character and fate reveals and condemns Becky and the society which she represents. Mythical and demonic elements gather more powerfully about her, for her oppression and cruelty are inhuman. Jos is a pitiable, miserable prisoner whom she murders spiritually and physically: "'she'd kill me if she knew it. You don't know what a terrible woman she is,' the poor wretch said" (II, 284). The force of society's immorality, vanity, and acquisitive will here is centralized in Becky and unleashed upon Sedley. Despite Dobbin's ineffectual efforts as a tragic critic, Jos' sufferings are unendurable, and he finds release only in death: "The Solicitor... swore it was the blackest case that had ever come before him" (II, 284).

This final operative subplot, briefly recounted though it is, is significant. Jos becomes an embodiment of the neurotic romanticism which in varying degrees and forms affects the novel's major characters. Projecting obsessively idealized conceptions upon reality, individuals such as Dobbin and Amelia are blind to certain aspects of their respective situations. The existence and removal of these delusions invariably results in hardship or disaster. In Jos' pitiful life and death the power of such obsession and its potential consequences are dis-
played with tremendous impact. Defined entirely by the romanticized fantasies of his own creation, Sedley is literally unable to exist when they are at last destroyed by Becky and "Vanity Fair."

Rebecca's role is that of a terrible figure akin to the siren and malignant grinning female of extreme irony. Her function therefore demonstrates dramatically those mythical demonic qualities ascribed to her previously. As has been seen, these elements grow increasingly prominent, so that while the individuality and realism of her characterization are not lost, she becomes symbolic of the absurd and immoral society of "Vanity Fair." Thus Becky's meaning for the novel as a whole can be more clearly perceived. Irony is often devastating in the action surrounding her, but as stated earlier the mythic form underlying Vanity Fair is satire, "which defines the enemy of society as a spirit within that society." ²⁹ During the culminating action of her parody-romance quest, Rebecca in effect becomes the "source of all evil in a personal form" ³⁰ found near the boundaries of irony—the source being that hostile spirit within society delineated by the narrative's dominant satire. Her role is therefore a powerful revelation and condemnation of the vanity and aggressive will which makes "Vanity Fair" a world suggestive of an inferno. That hellish society and its principal representative remain undefeated, and Becky's last fleeting appearance, once again in the guise of respectability, reiterates all their implications: "Emmy, her children, and the Colonel, coming to London some time back, found themselves suddenly before her at one of these fairs. She cast down her eyes demurely and smiled as they started away from her" (II, 285).
Thus the parody-romance plot functions consistently within the novel's informing satire. Its irony reveals both Rebecca and "Vanity Fair" in a manner which substantiates the narrator's moral commentary concerning them. The fiction contributes to the larger satiric design as well. It suggests in various ways—Rawdon's catastrophe and the enduring power of Becky and the ruling society—that those values confronting and judging Rebecca are themselves of doubtful validity. These norms and standards are more closely called into question by the other principal action operative in the novel, the comic plot featuring Amelia and Dobbin. Hero and heroine possess many moral and humanitarian qualities and their characters, values, and aims in life are largely antithetical to those of Mrs. Crawley. Despite their "goodness," however, their experiences end without the attainment of complete satisfaction. After all material obstacles to their marriage are removed, they do not find happiness. Both Amelia and Dobbin are self-deceived alazons whose obsessions cause them years of suffering. When the delusions are at last eliminated, their union still lacks much of its traditional meaning. Thus the comic structure, whose major figures and final resolution are in many respects conventional, is ironically displaced, and the implications are significant within the overall context of Vanity Fair.

The fundamental discrepancies between Becky and Amelia are rapidly established and kept in focus as their histories unfold. Where Rebecca is aggressive will untempered by essential humanity, Amelia is all compliance and feeling. Becky is hypocritical, vain, and immoral, while Amelia's norms and
values are generally admirable. It follows that Mrs. Crawley seeks those vanities and earthly pleasures offered by society, and Amelia desires fulfillment through love. She thus stands in opposition to the standards of Rebecca and her society. However, Amelia's effectiveness as an eiron figure is nullified by her own faults. If Becky is a parody of a comic and romance heroine, Amelia is a conventional one whose flaws, and "virtues," are ironically exposed. 31

As he does with regard to Rebecca, the narrator brings forth Emmy's limitations as well as her virtues. Her sensibilities are so extreme and undiscriminating that they are often ludicrous. There are numerous occasions in the novel when "between her two customs of laughing and crying, Miss Sedley was greatly puzzled how to act" (I, 15). Undisciplined by intelligence or reason, the exercise of Amelia's feelings has serious consequences for herself and others. Not solely responsible in either matter, they help to lead her blindly into marriage with George Osborne and later contribute to Jos' calamitous end, for she foolishly allows Becky into the household. Any moral commentary which Emmy furnishes concerning Rebecca is the implicit result of their contrasting values, since her own character lacks features necessary to an eiron. Her usual uneasiness in society is perhaps as strong a reflection upon herself as upon that society, for Amelia's dullness and insipidity are symptomatic of more serious flaws. Mrs. Osborne demonstrates little insight in regard to the vanity and hypocrisy which she encounters. When she does discern such elements--most noticeably in George and Becky--she lacks the courage and will to confront them. And finally, even
in the relationships in which she seeks happiness, Amelia too is vain and egotistical. In her love of Osborne, her treatment of Dobbin, even her late renewed friendship with Rebecca, Amelia is selfishly obsessed, wanting always to gratify her emotional desires and needs.

Dobbin is closer to a conventional satiric norm in his role as comic hero. He is an eiron, a self-deprecator who has the capacity to see the absurdities of society and the courage to reject and oppose them. William discerns Becky's falsity almost instinctively: "He never had had the slightest liking for her; but had heartily mistrusted her from the very first moment when her green eyes had looked at, and turned away from, his own" (II, 251). He comments upon her primarily by the example of his own conduct. The two come into significant personal contact only near the narrative's conclusion, when Mrs. Crawley sees that "Major Dobbin . . . as her instinct assured her at once, was her enemy" (II, 261). Dobbin's nature also emphasizes Amelia's shortcomings, for his active goodness and more reasoned affections contrast meaningfully with her passive "virtue." Thus Dobbin is characterized by qualities of feeling and intellect appropriate not only to comic hero and satiric eiron but romance hero as well. His pursuit of Emmy is a quest, with her as the single goal which he seeks and remains devoted to through years of suffering and trials. But as indicated by ironic displacement of conventional form, particularly that of comedy, Dobbin too is an alazon, a self-deceived impostor.
The initial obstacle to the larger comic movement is the comic subplot involving George Osborne and Amelia. The action is ironically displaced, for both are alazons. In love with the illusion of Osborne she has projected, Amelia is oblivious to his selfishness and vanity. George cares only for himself, marrying Emmy as an act of condescension worthy of the noble character he fancies himself to be. Dobbin is a too-successful comic voice, an alazon in an eiron role. Motivated by a foolish regard for Osborne and his own love for Amelia, Dobbin forces them into a union with disastrous consequences for its partners and himself as well.

The marriage situation is rapidly displaced and begins to evolve into tragedy. Within a week Amelia finds her wedded life far from ideal, and shortly she grows aware of George's susceptibility to Rebecca's charms. Becky is a siren figure who successfully draws Osborne away from his wife. His death, however, fails to remove Mrs. Osborne from her predicament. The illness and recovery she undergoes parodies a conventional ritual death and rebirth. Her recovery is dependent upon the birth of her son, an event which becomes a parody resurrection. It restores to Amelia her god—her husband—in all his un tarnished glory: "The elder George returned in him somehow, only improved, and as if come back from heaven" (I, 389). Therefore no psychological regeneration parallels Emmy's physical renewal; ironically, her delusion is strengthened rather than dispelled by her experience. Osborne, through his son, remains Dobbin's principal rival even after his own death, and Amelia's obsession continues to be the primary obstacle to a comic resolution.
Amelia thus locks herself into a role as a lonely and grieving widow. In many respects, however, she parodies a traditional pathetic figure. The situation is one which allows her to indulge her emotions, joyous and sorrowful, in worship of her deceased husband. Because George exists only as she chooses to remember and see him in Georgy, Amelia is free to love and suffer over Osborne as an idealized conception, not as an imperfect reality. Emmy is not totally unhappy in her delusion, which endures for "many long, silent, tearful, but happy years" (I, 389). The selfishness of Amelia's obsession is suggested by her displaced heroine role in the larger comic action. Her absurd devotion to George enables her to refuse Dobbin as a lover while accepting him as a slave: "She didn't wish to marry him, but she wished to keep him. She wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all" (II, 266). The situation is finally too much for William to bear, and Amelia confronts her folly too late—his love has been "flung down and shattered" beyond perfect repair.

If for a long period Amelia obstructs their union, Dobbin's own self-deception leads him to frustration and disappointment. William persists in loving and seeking Emmy long after he has learned her faults. His courtship is an ironic quest for an objective which is unworthy of his efforts, and parody-romance elements ironically imply the reality which he eventually comes to admit. Dobbin's unheroic appearance is belied by his manly qualities and military honors, yet such things are for years ignored by Amelia. Like a romance hero he returns faithfully to his mistress after a long absence across the sea. His reward is not love but tolerance.
and domination: "This woman had a way of tyrannising over Major Dobbin (for
the weakest of all people will domineer over somebody), and she ordered him
about, and patted him" (II, 258). Despite Amelia's lack of response to his
love, Dobbin cannot overcome his attachment: "the Major was a spooney" (II, 258).
He breaks with Emmy at last when she repays with scorn and cruelty his efforts
to protect her and Jos from Becky. Only then does William confront the delusion
which has misdirected the course of his life: "'No, you are not worthy of the
love which I have devoted to you. I knew all along that the prize I had set
my life on was not worth the winning; that I was a fool." (II, 266). Ironically,
the attainment of Dobbin's goal becomes possible because of the realization that
its achievement cannot bring fulfillment. His rebellion shocks Amelia into an
awareness of her self-deception, and with its removal she is free to love William.
At her summons Dobbin returns and they are united, but the principal element of
displacement in the comic resolution has already been established: "William had
spent it all out. He loved her no more, he thought, as he had loved her. He
never could again" (II, 275).

The displacement of the major comic structure has importance for the
novel's more general themes. The "histories" of Amelia and Dobbin indicate that
within the novelistic world virtue is not merely unrewarded, but that the ideal of
"virtue" is not a reality there. The fiction shows that adherence to assumed
moral values or possession of certain qualities is no proof against self-deception
nor guarantee of perfect happiness. Ironic displacement also contributes signifi-
cantly to development of a theme previously mentioned—that happiness is dependent upon being "well deceived." The consequences of the conventional comic movement from illusion to reality are not totally satisfactory for Amelia and Dobbin. Emmy is much happier in her blind worship of George, both before and after his death, than she is when in company with George himself. The loss of her obsession enables her to love Dobbin, yet it also brings the realistic knowledge of their situation. William endures years of neglect and longing because of his self-delusion, yet its elimination makes impossible for him complete fulfillment. For Amelia and Dobbin the loss of illusion opens the way for marriage, but it also prevents their satisfaction with that union. The comic progression from illusion to reality, while bringing a measure of joy and contentment, results in disappointment as well, and the ironic displacement strongly implies that perfect happiness is unattainable—an illusion—in a realistic world.

The displaced resolution of the principal comic action is also meaningful in relation to another novelistic concern—the concept that there are no reciprocal human relationships. Discussion has revealed the lack of true human contact in "Vanity Fair" and that all relationships, even those traditionally most personal and intimate, exist only for purposes of exploitation. The idea is reflected in Becky and Rawdon's union, as she unfeelingly manipulates his love to achieve her own ends. In the subordinate fiction involving George and Amelia, the theme is both dramatically shown and explicitly stated: "there are two parties to a love-transaction: the one who loves and the other who condescends to be
so treated. Perhaps the love is occasionally on the man's side: perhaps on the lady's" (1, 119). In this instance, Amelia loves and George is loved. Irony is more complex and thematic impact correspondingly greater in the larger comic movement. An imbalance in the relationship of Emmy and William persists for years because of their respective self-deceptions. Infatuated with George, Amelia is loved by a blindly adoring Dobbin. Irony is intensified, however, when their delusions are removed. Until that point, they, like Rawdon, Becky, and George, are alazons whose relationship is based on illusion. Upon gaining self-awareness and becoming eiron figures conventionally suited to enjoy reciprocal love, the two remain unable to do so. With an awakening to reality comes a reversal of the earlier situation—Dobbin is beloved by an Amelia for whom his own feelings are now altered and diminished. Even their final relationship, founded on self-knowledge and mutual understanding, cannot achieve a true and equal reciprocity. Viewed within its overall context, this displacement of comic convention forcefully asserts that such ideal relationships cannot exist in the novelistic world of *Vanity Fair*.

The ironic discrepancy between intention and result, another thematic element in the novel, is seen in Becky's attempts to function as a comic vice to Dobbin and Amelia. Dobbin shuns her and she tells Amelia to call the Major back, only to discover that her advice has been taken in advance. Her ineffectual-ness suggests a more universal lack of correlation between the motivation inspiring actions and the consequences of those actions. There are various instances
throughout the narrative which possess similar implications. George Osborne is an alazon whose motives for opposing Becky's marriage to Jos Sedley are completely selfish, yet he functions successfully as a plain dealer in the ironic comic fiction, preventing the union and saving Jos. Dobbin too is an alazon in an eiron role, that of comic vice, as he accomplishes the marriage of George and Amelia. Despite his honorable intentions, however, the consequences of his efforts are disastrous. In his self-deception he fails to discern his proper eiron function as plain dealer of ironic comedy. On his later attempt to keep Jos from Becky's clutches, Dobbin acts unselfishly and clear-sightedly as a critic of the tragic action, but Sedley is destroyed nevertheless. Such examples demonstrate the gap between intention and result which exists in a realistic world. Osborne's self-serving act rescues Jos from Rebecca, while Dobbin's later unselfish efforts cannot do so. Dobbin tries unsuccessfully to arrange happiness for Amelia, and Mrs. Crawley's plan to unite Emmy and William proves inconsequential. Thus the divergence of intention and consequence is consistently and artistically presented in the novel, yet the dichotomy remains unreconciled in *Vanity Fair* just as it does in human experience.

Consideration of the comic plot also provides insight concerning the underlying significance of the progressively developed relationships of Becky, Amelia, and Dobbin. Examination of her comic role has shown that Amelia's character is almost pure feeling, defined primarily by the human relationships which permit its expression, whereas Becky is an aggressive will defined by the
external role through which that will functions. The extent of their dissimilarity makes powerfully ironic their most important resemblance—the selfishness and vanity which in different forms obsesses and motivates them. As Bernard Paris points out, Amelia and Becky are in essence representatives respectively of compliant and aggressive neurotic approaches to existence. Thus Amelia's various faults and shortcomings, diverse as they are from Rebecca's, are clearly related to the qualities which the two women hold in common. This psychological relationship, in light of the otherwise wide divergence between Mrs. Osborne and Mrs. Crawley, emphatically suggests the universal pervasiveness and power of vanity, perhaps the novel's principal theme.

The relationship has further importance for thematic aspects of the novel. Displacement reveals that Amelia, like Becky, is a seriously flawed character. She is an alazon rather than an eiron figure, discovered to share in the selfishness of Rebecca and "Vanity Fair." Yet Amelia's other and different weaknesses are such that the irony of displacement in regard to her function is somewhat lessened, and her thematic impact in some areas thereby decreased. Emmy's failure to achieve satisfaction, to be rewarded for her virtue, to be free of vanity—all are less surprising and ironic and, within their larger context, less meaningful because she is in many respects "an insignificant little chit."

The principal subject of Vanity Fair is human vanity, which in some sense relates to and encompasses other aspects of the novel. The treatment of this theme indicates the essential manner in which the narrator and his commentary interact
meaningfully with the content of his narrative, particularly its two main actions. In accordance with announced intention, the author speaks continually of vanity, pointing it out in all its forms and warning of its power and pervasiveness. The establishment of a satiric perspective, with its element of fantasy and direct relationship with the reader, infers a separation from the story and the vanity to be exhibited there. The narrator labels fashionable society and its antecedents "Vanity Fair," where vanity is to be found in all its selfishness and diversity. Yet the boundaries of "Vanity Fair" are never specifically drawn. The lower classes are discovered to share its values even as they hypocritically criticize individuals and groups of superior social standing and wealth. That these attributes are held in common by the various levels of society is intimated in numerous ways, such as the eager attendance of Steyne's parties by those of lesser rank who condemn his immorality. As has been shown, it is Becky's progress through the spectrum of society, from the aristocracy to Bohemia, which most clearly discloses that self-centered vanity is itself classless. To leave the loftiest elevations of society is not to leave the realm of "Vanity Fair." Characters are seen to be outside the "Fair" as they exhibit values and qualities antithetical to it. Amelia, Dobbin, Lady Jane, and a few others are not inhabitants of "Vanity Fair" because of their morality and humanity—their social position and wealth are finally irrelevant. And Rawdon Crawley departs from it when he turns from its attractions to find meaning in love and human affections. It appears to be bounded, then, not by external concerns such as financial standing or class
distinctions, but by internal human factors. The "Fair" extends to the lines
delineated by the ascendancy, within an individual or a group, of moral values
and essential humanity. It is at this point that the vanity exemplified in "Vanity
Fair"—excessive self-regard—is confined. As displacement of the Amelia-Dobbin
plot indicates, however, vanity in its Biblical and more inclusive sense—the
fallibility of all human desires—is universal. It is present even in those, like
Emmy and William, outside "Vanity Fair," even, as the narrator suggests, in
those outside the novel—"do not say nay." The selfishness of the "Fair" may
be tempered by certain standards and qualities. The imperfection and delusion
of man's wishes and their inevitable consequences are inescapable in the human
condition. This in essence constitutes the statement of theme expressed within
the novel through the interaction of narrative comment and underlying structure.
The narrator's description and interpretation, as they add meaning and dimension
to the action related, are substantiated by that action. In light of the novel as
a whole, the final authorial remarks summarize succinctly its thematic treatment
of human vanity: "Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! Which of us is happy in this world?
Which of us has his desire? Or, having it, is satisfied" (II, 285)?

The pessimism evident in the narrator's closing words is inherent in the
novel's dominant mythos of satire and irony, as investigation of its meanings for
theme and character has shown. The narrator's ironically satiric perspective,
Becky's parody-romance quest, the displaced Dobbin-Amelia comic plot; all func-
tion together to call into question the adequacy and validity of accepted moral
standards and human qualities within a world of realistic human experience. There are few conventional, and optimistic, implications to be derived from the narrative's underlying structure. It does indicate that assumed norms of morality and behavior, while ultimately questionable, are nonetheless preferable to those of Rebecca and "Vanity Fair." As seen earlier, Becky and the ruling society are not revealed and judged by the narrator's commentary alone. The irony of the parody-romance quest and other fictional elements exposes the terrible, near-demonic nature of herself and the world she inhabits and symbolizes. This inhumanity, contrasted with those values outside "Vanity Fair," suggests that accepted norms do have a measure of validity in a realistic existence. Dobbin and Amelia find some affirmative meaning in their final relationship, imperfect though it is. Religion is briefly offered as a solution to the human predicament, in one instance enabling Amelia to overcome her selfishness and discover joy through helping her parents. Apart from the particular incident, however, the possible transcendence of earthly concerns through spirituality receives little substantive consideration. The most affirmative mythic element within Vanity Fair is the hint that a more ideal order may be evolving. Lady Jane's family, which includes young Rawdon, and the Dobbins comprise a small social group whose traditional norms and rural location are suggestive of a new comic society apart from the absurd ruling order. These different structural features are tentative and of comparatively small force within the novel's irony. But they are meaningful to its operative satire, indicating that conventions and ideals which are doubtful in themselves can yet have
a certain value. They are finally what separates society outside "Vanity Fair" from an inhuman one which is almost an inferno.

Thus *Vanity Fair* is informed by the mythos of satire. The external framework creates a satiric point of view from which the absurdity of a ruling society can be exposed. Ironic elements within that viewpoint, however, imply that the norms against which the dominant order is measured are themselves of doubtful validity. The ironic fictions operative in the narrated action call such ideals of morality and behavior into question. The ironic discrepancy between form and content in the parody-romance quest reveals the essentially inhuman, near-demonic nature of "Vanity Fair" and its principal representative, Becky Sharp. The displaced comic action involving Dobbin and Amelia, the progression of which parallels Becky's adventures, reveals the universality of the vanity which rules absolutely in the "Fair." Their histories, as well as those of Rawdon and others, indicate the tentative value of morality and "virtue" in a realistic world, and, by implication, in the world of narrator and reader. Although powerfully ironic, operative fictions yet suggest that such standards may have some meaning. The token fantasy and intellectual detachment in the novel's narrative framework prevent its dominant satire from collapsing into pure irony. Finally, then, the novel is very ironic satire. Its perspective is created by the interaction of narrative commentary and underlying structure. As they contribute to characterization and thematic statement, fictional elements function meaningfully under Thackeray's entelechy. In *Vanity Fair*, he presents a world ruled by selfishness,
hyocrisy, and inhumanity, in which conventional norms and values, if not totally devoid of worth, are at least inadequate. The overall satiric view is marked by irony and cynicism, recognizing the complexity of human experience, definitely ambiguous and probably absurd, as "bigger than any set of beliefs about it." 33 It is the element of fantasy and detachment which insulates the reader from the full ironic impact of the narrative action and maintains the operative satire. With all its realism and depth of seriousness, Vanity Fair is not real life. When his purposes have been achieved and his meanings conveyed, the satirist can say: "Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out" (II, 285).
CHAPTER TWO

FOOTNOTES


7 Frye, p. 239.

8 Frye, p. 223.

9 Frye, p. 34.

10 William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero, "Edition de luxe" 2 vols. (New York, [n.d.]), Vol. I, p. 10. Further references to this work will be noted in the text by volume and page numbers within parentheses.

11 Frye, p. 224.

12 Tillotson, p. 84.

13 Frye, p. 231.

14 Frye, p. 233.

15 Frye, p. 234.

Frye, p. 224.

Frye, p. 232.

Ray, p. 422.

Frye, p. 223.

Frye, p. 217.

Ray, p. 425.

Frye, p. 239.


Frye, p. 186.

Frye, p. 238.

Frye, p. 238.

Frye, p. 238.

Frye, p. 47.

Frye, p. 239.

Tillotson, p. 79.


Frye, p. 229.
CHAPTER THREE

HENRY ESMOND

Thackeray completed Henry Esmond in 1852. He made a concerted attempt in this novel to answer his critics and create a truly artistic work. To do so he gave up serial publication and its financial rewards to organize and write the book as a whole. Thackeray himself was pleased with his efforts: "I stand by this book, and am willing to leave it, when I go, as my card." Despite its well known biographical elements—his association with the Brookfields in particular—public and critics gave it only a mixed reception, one which caused Thackeray to strive thereafter for popularity before excellence. Critical perspectives have varied since the novel's publication, and it has been viewed at different times as a romance, because of its historical setting and adventures, and as a domestic drama centering around the relationships within the Esmond family. Beatrix Esmond's reputation furnishes an example of the alterations of viewpoint. Disreputable and immoral to many of Thackeray's contemporaries, she came to be regarded in some quarters as an "incomparable character ... the one complete woman in English prose fiction." At the present time Henry Esmond is ranked with Vanity Fair among Thackeray's greatest achievements, but important problems remain largely unresolved. Divergence of critical opinion still exists concerning such questions as, in general, the fundamental nature and extent of his literary accomplishment in the work and, in particular, the develop-
ment and thematic implications of the Esmond-Rachel love story. The following analysis and discussion of the novel's underlying mythic structure--how it functions within the narrative and what meanings it possesses--should prove effective in coming to terms with the novel in its various aspects and as a whole.

The principal plot structure or mythos which informs Henry Esmond is that of romance. Narrated by Esmond himself in memoir form, the novel recounts his life from his early boyhood through the time when "the drama of my own life was ended." Like a conventional romance hero, Esmond emerges from an obscure background, passes through a series of adventures, engages in a final "crucial struggle," and is eventually rewarded. Neither the novel's structure nor its meaning are as simple as this would seem to indicate, however, for romance convention is often significantly displaced. Esmond's crucial adventure is found in his scheme to restore the Pretender to the throne of England and thereby gain Beatrix in marriage. His efforts fail in both respects—he does not restore the Prince or win Beatrix. On another level, however, these same events result in the successful resolution of his quest, for through them he gains an increased self-knowledge which leads to his union with Rachel. This example indicates the basic manner in which underlying structure functions throughout the novel. The conventional forms of romance are ironically displaced in order to reveal the actual nature of Esmond's quest and to contribute to its conventional development and resolution.
Although he knows nothing about his mother, Henry Esmond's background is not completely hidden. It is common knowledge that he is Thomas Esmond's illegitimate son, and the social stigma is one he begins to endure at an early age. When the boy lives with his "godfather" and the Viscountess his wife, "he apprehended the truth in a very short time afterwards, and learned it, and thought of it with no small feeling of shame" (p. 20). It follows that an important part of his story concerns his search for knowledge of his origin which hopefully will establish for him an identity acceptable to himself and to society. This information, when Esmond attains it, provides him with the potential to become a successful romance hero. Convention is not fulfilled at this point, however, and its displacement results from Esmond's conscious rejection of its forms.

Esmond receives little affection from Thomas Esmond or his wife because of the boy's supposed bastardy. His close but brief relationship with Father Holt is the nearest approximation to a parental tie which the child experiences in that household. In the aftermath of one of Holt's innumerable, always futile plots, however, young Harry and the Castlewood estate pass into the hands of Francis Esmond and his family. With them, especially Rachel, he finds love and kindness previously denied to him:

He had lived to be past twelve years old now; and had never had a friend, save this wild trooper [Steele] perhaps, and Father Holt; and had a fond and affectionate heart, tender to weakness, that would fain attach itself to somebody, and did not seem at rest until it had found a friend who would take charge of it (p. 56).
It is Rachel who commands his complete devotion, and "to watch, follow, adore her; became the business of his life" (p. 56). Although his illegitimacy does separate him officially from the Esmonds, it does not prevent his being treated in many respects as a beloved member of that family. Esmond's action upon discovery of his birthright is a response to such treatment.

Only after his fatal duel with Mohun does Viscount Castlewood reveal the secret which he and Esmond's father have kept from the boy. From Castlewood's dying confession Harry learns that he is legitimate—that Thomas Esmond and his mother were married, and that he himself is the true Lord Castlewood. Thus this element of Esmond's quest appears to be rapidly achieved. To declare himself will remove the stigma from his name, establish him as the head of his family, and endow him with the wealth and prestige of an English noble—in short, with those rewards traditionally bestowed upon a romance hero. Yet he does not claim what is rightfully his: "Esmond went to the fire, and threw the paper into it. . . . On the Dutch tiles at the bagnio was a rude picture representing Jacob in hairy gloves, cheating Isaac of Esau's birthright. The burning paper lighted it up" (p. 139).

The displacement of convention is significant in several respects. Harry's action helps to reveal the qualities and values which make up his character. His renunciation of his own vindication and social advancement demonstrates that such matters are of less concern to him than the happiness and welfare of those he loves. The deed is not without compensation for Esmond: "Perhaps he took a
greater pride out of his sacrifice than he could have had in those honors which he was resolved to forego" (p. 169). It should be noted that the strength and nobility which Esmond shows are aspects of character generally associated with those things he has rejected. In the mythos of romance the material wealth, social prestige, and worldly power attained by the hero are external manifestations of more ideal forms of treasure or wealth--power, wisdom, nobility. The character of a romance protagonist is or comes to be such that the rewards he eventually wins are commensurate with and indicative of his integrity and merit as an individual. At this point, however, personal worth and its conventional, public rewards are inconsistent with one another. Esmond, by refusing the traditional forms, asserts his possession of some measure of the values they imply.

Therefore disparity exists between romance form and its conventional meanings which causes ironic displacement. On another level, a more private, psychological one, this action is successfully resolved. Although Esmond does not employ his newly gained knowledge to procure wealth and prestige, the knowledge in itself provides him with a new self-sufficiency and confidence: "ever since he had learned that secret from his poor patron on his dying bed, . . . he had felt an independency which he had never known before, and which since did not desert him" (p. 159). In short, discovery of his origin and birthright adds to his character a sense of security, the material correlative of which he declines.

This fictional pattern is fundamentally representative of the novel's underlying mythic structure and its function. Throughout the narrative convention is
displaced on one level even as it is fulfilled on another. Traditional forms are so consistently discovered to lack their conventional content that the displacement comes to imply the presence or attainment of those meanings elsewhere. Important in regard to various aspects of Henry Esmond, the implications of its structural basis are most significant for the central figure of the dominant mythos, Esmond himself.

As the action discussed above suggests, Esmond's story is essentially a psychological romance. His mysterious background, numerous adventures, and admirable values and aspirations provide him the attributes of a romance hero, an eiron figure. His greatest difficulties do not arise from confrontation with his moral opposite, although Mohun and Beatrix do act against him. Perceptive and discerning in many respects, Esmond is nevertheless self-deceived and obsessed—a lazon who proves to be his own worst enemy. As he eventually discovers, he supports the wrong political party, pursues the wrong woman, and most significantly, lacks knowledge of himself and the world he inhabits. Thus Esmond's quest, which can be accomplished only when he himself is fully conscious of its nature, is primarily a process of maturation, a gradual progress toward self-awareness and self-fulfillment. Further consideration of the narrative's underlying structure will provide insight into the larger nature of his self-delusion and its removal, and the resulting implications for the novel as a whole.

Romance, with its emphasis on elements of adventure, is "naturally a sequential and processional form." As Esmond functions within various subplots
and structural patterns, the interrelationship and frequent displacement contribute to the progressive development of the narrative's dominant fiction and Esmond's role within it. As he passes through his youth and learns of his origin, Esmond participates in an important subplot. Francis Esmond and Rachel are hero and heroine of an ironically displaced comic fiction. Both are alazons rather than eiron figures, for they are both self-deceived. They do not marry for love of each other as individuals, but because they love the ideal conception which each has imposed upon the other. Rachel weds a god rather than a man: "first and foremost, Jove and supreme ruler, was her lord, Harry's patron, the good Viscount of Castlewood" (p. 56). Lord Castlewood marries Rachel simply for her youth and beauty and the adoration she offers. Their illusions are soon shattered. Castlewood chafes under his wife's exacting and jealous affection and, as he rebels against it, Rachel "perceives that the god of the honeymoon is a god no more; only a mortal like the rest of us" (p. 59). As a consequence, "They live together, and they dine together, and they say 'my dear' and 'my love' as heretofore; but the man is himself, and the woman is herself: that dream of love is over..." (p. 59).

As their marriage becomes devoid of any traditional elements of love and human sympathy, it evolves into a potentially tragic situation. The smallpox is a form of nemesis, for it mars that part of Rachel which Castlewood had married, "and his love does not survive her beauty" (p. 76). She cannot win him back, and while she forgives his own cowardly flight from the disease, she cannot forgive
his subsequent rejection of her. Misery and sorrow rule their household until Castlewood seeks and finds death at the hands of Lord Mohun.

Esmond functions within this operative fiction as a plain dealer, a critic of the tragic action. Aware of the division between his lord and lady, he attempts to reconcile them in various ways. It is Harry who persuades Mohun to leave Castlewood and who later tries and fails to duel Mohun in place of his master. Finally, Harry is ineffectual, unable to restore Castlewood's love to Rachel or to deter Francis Esmond from his suicidal course. This action, however, forms an integral part of the narrative's dominant romance structure, for its movement and resolution enable Esmond to discover his birthright. In his role of plain dealer, then, Harry operates as romance hero as well, without loss of consistency as a character. The principal motivation for his conduct is his previously mentioned devotion to Rachel, whose role in the romance mythos will later be considered more fully. At this point she is a kind of wise mother-figure, the "lady for whose sake or at whose bidding the quest is performed." Such a figure is conventionally ambiguous; she is a potential bride, but one psychologically related to the mother-figure in an Oedipus fantasy. As will be seen, the nature of her role has numerous implications, particularly in respect to her gradually evolving relationship to Esmond. He now regards her as an almost divine being, a protector and mother whom he loves and worships. His valiant but futile efforts to halt the subplot's tragic action are attempts to serve his lady,
and they constitute the initial adventure within the inclusive romance structure of the novel.

Esmond unselfishly rejects his claim to the title of Lord Castlewood, but he does expect his mistress to reward his faithful service on a more personal and meaningful level. She is hardly her former divine and loving self, however, when she visits her wounded champion in his imprisonment. Rather than bringing him comfort and solace, "his lady, so fond and gentle but yesterday--this good angel whom he had loved and worshiped--stood before him, pursuing him with keen words and aspect malign" (p. 144). Rachel's conduct is contradictory to that which Esmond expects and requires of her as an idealized romance figure. Already in love with him, she assails Esmond cruelly, striking out at him in her grief and guilt. The spiritual pain she therefore inflicts on him, together with his physical wound, causes Esmond to undergo the suffering and ritual death of a romance protagonist. Thus displacement of a conventional form again contributes to the working out of the novel's dominant mythos.

Esmond's ritual death and rebirth are essential stages in his development and maturation. George Worth has termed Esmond's movement through the novel an educational process whereby he learns to renounce the romantic and spectacular, wherever he may encounter them. 11 Harry's idealized conception of Rachel is shattered, but its destruction implies gain rather than loss. He is not yet aware of the emotional turmoil which underlies Rachel's behavior, but the fact is driven home to him that she is a flawed and imperfect human being. He remains faithful
to her, but his love and loyalty are now based on a more realistic perspective. Even more importantly, the removal of his illusion causes Esmond to discover within himself an inner strength and resourcefulness: "The blow had been struck, and he had borne it" (p. 148). As he realizes, "he had to bear him up, at once the sense of his right and the feeling of his wrongs, his honor and his misfortune. . . . no man knows his strength or his weakness, till occasion proves them" (p. 148). Esmond emerges a wiser, more self-aware, and consequently a more self-sufficient individual. He himself thinks of "this past trial as an initiation before entering into life" (p. 149). His initiation is far from complete, but the episode is indicative of the manner in which actions causing the displacement of romance convention help to bring Esmond an ever increasing knowledge of his own character and the universe he inhabits.

When Esmond returns from his first campaign, the elements necessary for a resolution to the narrative action appear to be inherent in his reunion with his mistress at Walcote. The romance structure implied in his discovery and rejection of his title has now been more elaborately developed. The title, of course, remains to be claimed if Esmond should want it. And he has passed through a ritual death and rebirth—an initiation—into a manhood marked by worldly experience and a corresponding development in character. His military exploits have publicly demonstrated his courage and resourcefulness, and Rachel, somewhat equivocally, now reveals herself as the potential bride-figure usually included in the reward for a successful quest. Although Esmond hesitantly accepts his role
and proposes to Rachel, the action is again left unresolved, this time by Rachel's refusal of Esmond's offer of wedlock. The underlying structure of the novel's dominant romance mythos is strongly suggested here, and displacement indicates what is yet necessary for the resolution of Esmond's quest.

With all the structural elements of a complete romance plot apparently present, displacement again arises from an ironic disparity between form and its conventional meanings. A salient characteristic of the union between romance hero and heroine is erotic love. Esmond's earlier conception of Rachel as a goddess-like protectress has been removed, and he discovers that the mother role to which he has consigned her is and has been inappropriate. Rachel has loved him not primarily as a mother would but in an erotic and, in her eyes, sinful way. 12 Esmond's proposal is a reaction which would place them both in a new but conventional relationship—marriage—but Rachel's answer indicates that the elements which matrimony ideally embodies are lacking. Her decision is the result of her own internal struggles, as well as of her recognition of Henry's psychological state. She is fully aware that he does not return her love in kind: "'You never loved me, dear Henry—no, you do not now" (p. 188). Better than Esmond himself, Rachel can see that his attitude toward her is ambivalent, that the factors which induce his proposal do not include the mature love essential to her as a woman and to their relationship as man and wife. She therefore refuses him, attempting to step back into her role as a mother-protectress figure: "And as a brother folds a sister to his heart; and as a mother cleaves to
her son's breast—so for a few moments Esmond's beloved mistress came to him and blessed him" (p. 188).

Thus Esmond is not yet psychologically prepared to complete his quest. He is confused about his own attitude toward Rachel, and until he can accept her both intellectually and emotionally as a lover rather than a mother, neither of them can fulfill their roles as romance hero and heroine: "and as for his mistress, 'twas difficult to say with what a feeling he regarded her. 'Twas happiness to have seen her; 'twas no great pang to part; a filial tenderness, a love that was at once respect and protection, filled his mind as he thought of her" (p. 203). There are other significant considerations involved in Esmond's development and maturation, as will be seen. But his tentativeness and lack of self-knowledge concerning his relationship to Rachel is at this point representative of his psychological condition in a larger sense.

Even though they displace this romantic substructure, Esmond's uncertainty and Rachel's refusal contribute to the progression of the narrative's dominant action. Esmond becomes infatuated with Beatrix immediately after his rejection by Rachel. Because Rachel chooses to remain ostensibly a mother-figure, Henry is free to pursue her daughter, and Beatrix can function as a romantic heroine. This romantic subplot is operative throughout the latter half of *Henry Esmond*, and its entire action constitutes the final stage in Esmond's quest, the crucial struggle of the novel's larger romance structure. Within this operative fiction Esmond acts as a romance hero, winning more military honors and a measure of public
esteem. Now, however, his deeds and devotion are for Beatrix, and his gallant attempt to restore the Pretender and so win her is his crucial struggle. But the action is ironically displaced, for Esmond is unable to make James the king or Beatrix his wife. Further consideration of this subplot will reveal the reasons for its displaced conclusion and the resultant meanings in relation to the overall narrative structure.

This subordinate action closely parallels the movement of the dominant plot. Where Esmond had earlier tried to protect Lord Castlewood from Mohun, had failed, and was scorned for his efforts, he now duels and defeats Mohun to protect young Frank Esmond and is honored for this feat. He is not rewarded with Beatrix’s hand, however. Rivalled by her many suitors, principally Ashburnham, the Duke of Hamilton, and finally the Pretender, Esmond is ultimately thwarted, not by them, but by the fact that Beatrix cannot love him even if he possessed the wealth and prestige she desires. However, when Esmond’s true heritage becomes known to her, Beatrix exhibits enough interest to inspire him to one final effort. Esmond’s plot to establish the Pretender as King is in fact a romance structure within the larger subplot, the action which serves as the subplot’s crucial struggle.

Within this fiction Esmond functions as romance architectus, resembling both the “old wise man” and the faithful companion of the hero. The Prince is the protagonist who returns home disguised and discards his rags to reveal himself as royalty. Despite Esmond’s aid, however, the Prince does not gain
the throne. His inability to play the part his disguise demands foreshadows his inadequacy for the greater role he seeks to assume: "Monsieur Baptiste was constantly neglecting his part with an inconceivable levity" (p. 368). He lacks these ideal qualities associated with the rank and power he seeks, and as a consequence he cannot seize them. And Beatrix is the siren or beautiful witch to whose temptation the Prince succumbs. Both are alazons—impostors—and their characters are not suited for the roles to which Esmond has mistakenly assigned them. Thus neither this plot nor the larger subordinate fiction can be successfully resolved.

Displacement of this romance subplot, then, leads to the resolution of the narrative's dominant action. While Esmond questions his own motives even as he conceives the restoration intrigue, it is the Pretender's weakness and betrayal which fully bring home to Henry the enormous folly and hypocrisy of his and his ancestors' sacrifice for the royal cause: "What cared he, in his heart, who was king? Were not his very sympathies and secret convictions on the other side—on the side of People, Parliament, Freedom?" (p. 376). As Esmond perceives Beatrix's role in this action, he can at last recognize his own self-delusion, his foolish and willful conception of her as a true heroine and the object of his quest: "As he looked at her he wondered that he could ever have loved her. His love of ten years was over" (p. 411). As she has lured James from his throne, so Beatrix has been a siren figure for Esmond within the novel's larger romance plot. Rachel and her daughter form the conventional polarization
between the ladies of duty and pleasure—"the light and dark heroines of Victorian romance." While its thematic significance will later be discussed more fully, this dichotomy makes implicit in the rejection of Beatrix Esmond's acceptance of Rachel and fulfillment of his true quest. Therefore recognition of the younger woman's actual role in the plot of his own life forms an essential part of Esmond's final self-awareness. It makes possible the discovery of his proper relationship to Rachel, that of lover and husband as well as loyal "knight-errant."

Esmond's new understanding of his relationship with Rachel, with all its implications, is indicative of the larger self-knowledge he attains. As a consequence of his crucial struggle—his displaced romance quest for Beatrix—his progressive development as an individual is completed. Elements of obsession and self-deception in Esmond's character are removed, bringing insight and knowledge concerning himself, other people and the reality of the world around them. With this new perspective comes a corresponding faculty to act with confidence and assurance and so fulfill himself. In short, Esmond has arrived at full maturity and, as he himself perceives, it is toward this essentially private end that his life has moved. Thus the mythos of romance which informs the novel as a whole is conventionally resolved on a psychological level. Only after this resolution are the traditional rewards for a successful quest—a wife, wealth, an estate in the New World—bestowed upon him, for only at this point is Esmond's character such that it invests these forms with their conventional implications. These public manifestations are now commensurate to his nobility
and stature as an individual. Romance ideals and their conventional forms, disparate throughout the narrative, are reconciled in the conclusion of its primary action.

Thus the essential nature of the novel's underlying mythic structure has been indicated. Largely through the ironic displacement of romantic conventions, the dominant romance action is developed and finally resolved. The progress and culmination of Esmond's psychological quest have been set forth and its significance suggested. Further investigation of structural aspects will provide greater insight into the nature of his obsession—what elements are removed or altered to form his final perspective and how, through the exercise of that individual consciousness, romance form and implied content are brought into accord.

The mythos of romance is characterized by an "extraordinary persistent nostalgia," a powerful desire to return to some type of imaginative golden age in the past. Such a time is associated with fulfilled wishes and goals, and the realization of these aims is implicit in the regaining of that age. This "nostalgia" is a potent force in Henry Esmond. Present in various forms, both explicit and implied, a longing for the past is discernible in many aspects of the novel. A frequent source of thought and action, it is of course integral to the action of the romance quest which informs the narrative. However, if attainment of certain goals characteristic of romance implies the re-establishment of that earlier age, failure to achieve them suggests the impossibility of regaining it. Thus the
previously noted ironic displacement of romance structure strongly indicates that "nostalgia" is in most instances destined to remain unfulfilled.

The early subplot involving Father Holt, Thomas Esmond, and Lady Isabella exemplifies the manner in which displacement of convention contributes to the novel's consideration of nostalgia and its associated meanings. The plot is basically a romance quest with Thomas Esmond as an aspiring hero whose aim is to return King James to England. Holt is an architectus, a "wise man" figure who directs the action, and the Viscountess adopts the role of a "wise mother/bride" at whose inspiration the adventure is attempted. The action is unsuccessful, however, culminating in the Viscountess's capture, the flight of Holt and Esmond, and eventually the latter's death. Because this operative fiction is not an isolated example, the significance of its failure extends beyond the individual intrigue. In its underlying quest structure, and even in the primary aim of that quest, the subplot is representative of the innumerable and always unsuccessful attempts to restore the Stuarts to power. It is also a foreshadowing of Henry Esmond's later effort to win Beatrix by placing the Pretender upon the throne of England. The two subplots are closely parallel in many respects, with Esmond adopting Father Holt's architectus role, Beatrix replacing the Viscountess, and the Prince himself as potential hero, Thomas Esmond's earlier part. And they are similar in the failure which concludes their action. Such operative fictions are explicitly concerned with reaffirming a past order, and their continual displacement emphasizes the fact that the past cannot literally be regained. The idea is substantiated by the displacement of other
romance structures, less specifically oriented towards recapturing the past, whose goals are still associated with the recovery of an earlier and better age.

If the past order—i.e., a more ideal age—cannot be regained, it follows that those characters whose motives and actions are primarily determined by a nostalgic longing or its various manifestations are self-deceived alazons. Isabella, Henry Esmond’s stepmother, embodies a romantic devotion to the past carried to its most foolish extreme. She is closely akin to the buffoon or entertainer of comedy, for her obsessions make her an absurd and frequently humorous figure. Her stubborn refusal to age typifies Isabella’s sometimes fantastic efforts to regain the bygone days of her glory. A portrait of herself as the young huntress Diana is her most prized possession, and, as if she were a goddess, the old lady "believed to the day of her death that she never grew older: and always persisted in supposing the picture was still like her" (p. 158). Far past childbearing age, she continually announces that she expects a child, and "This absurdity of hers was one amongst many others which the wags used to play upon" (p. 13). Such eccentricities are often amusing, but the obsessed viewpoint underlying them is not, as the Viscountess’s role in the subplot discussed above reveals. She eagerly conspires in the abortive plot of Holt and her husband, and is captured because her lengthy toilet prevents her flight. An alazon, Lady Isabella cannot function as a romance heroine, and her ludicrous posturings make her an ironic parody of such a character: "At first my Lady was for dying like Mary, Queen of Scots (to whom she fancied she bore a resemblance in beauty), and, stroking
her scraggy neck said, 'They will find Isabell of Castlewood is equal to her fate'" (p. 42). Her fate is not death or even long imprisonment, for her eccentricity insures her own safety. Yet her self-deception has involved her in an adventure which culminates in exile or death for others, including her husband. And, despite the difference in consequences, Isabella's participation in the action implies certain psychological similarities between herself and her fellow conspirators.

The Viscountess' dedication to regaining the past is quite literal and often absurd, but it is shared in more varied and complex forms by numerous other individuals. The attitude is more readily seen in those also involved in the same operative fiction. Father Holt's role here is that which he assumes throughout the novel. He operates as an ostensible eiron figure who, as he oversees, directs, and participates in the action, functions as a romance architectus whose schemes and disguises make him similar to a comic vice. The priest is a man of mystery with his many identities, continual intrigues, secret doors, even in his Jesuit faith. Intelligent, courageous, and persuasive, Holt's influence is felt by a young Henry Esmond: "indeed, he had a vast power of subjecting those who came near him; and among the rest, his new pupil gave himself up with an entire confidence and attachment to the good Father, and became his willing slave almost from the first moment he saw him" (p. 22). Greater concerns soon draw Holt away from Castlewood and Henry, just as they bring him back to mastermind Thomas Esmond's effort to place James again on the throne of England. And in spite of the priest's apparent resourcefulness, the plot fails, and the action
is displaced. The meanings of the displacement for his character become evident when his part is the subplot is discovered to be representative of his larger role.

The initial adventure ends with tragic finality for Thomas Esmond, but it is only one of many for Holt. Indeed, his entire life is occupied "in the transactions which always kept Father Holt employed and traveling here and there, under a dozen different names and disguises" (p. 101). He consistently chooses an eiron role, but as displacement of the initial subordinate fiction indicates, the priest is in fact a self-deceived alazon. As Henry Esmond gradually realizes, his once seemingly omniscient mentor possesses foibles and blind spots both trivial and fatal: "he smiled to think that this was his oracle of early days; only now no longer infallible or divine" (p. 237). His struggles to bring the Stuarts back to power are finally no more effectual than the futile antics of the Viscountess. Indeed, Holt's obsession is such that his assumed role becomes a self-defining end instead of a means to an ostensibly noble goal: "I think Holt loved to make a parade of mystery, as it were" (p. 239). Because of his self-deception, Father Holt is actually the impostor which he believes he only pretends to be. Lacking awareness of his own character and motivation, he is correspondingly incapable of realistically coming to terms with the political and psychological climate in England: "--he was nearly right, but not quite--" (p. 237). Never does Father Holt succeed, for he never confronts his own folly: "he never played a game but he lost it; or engaged in a conspiracy but 'twas certain to end in defeat" (p. 413).
Despite their obvious differences, then, Isabella and Holt are akin in the essential nature of their self-deception. The old lady seeks to recapture the literal past, and Father Holt is locked into a role the purpose of which is to restore an earlier order. Both try to fulfill desires and goals conventionally associated with the mythos of romance, and, as their continual failure suggests, it is self-delusion which leads them to do so. They are fundamentally representative of others whose conduct and aims are determined by the traditional concepts of romance. And as ironic displacement indicates, attempts to function according to an essentially romantic and unrealistic viewpoint are inconsistent and impractical in a low mimetic universe. Adherence to such a perspective within the realistic world of the novel is frequently tragic as well as foolish.

Thus the various implications of the Viscountess and Holt—their fictional roles and the subordinate plots in which they act—are interrelated with the novel's principal underlying structure. Their meanings are most significant for Esmond himself, for the inadequacy of a romanticized view of existence is powerfully demonstrated in his psychological quest. His blindness reveals itself in assorted ways. Acceptance of traditional values and standards lacking their implied content, unquestioning devotion to individuals and causes which prove undeserving; these are among the manifestations of Esmond's self-deception. Concern with reaffirming the historical past forms a portion of his psychological condition, and as the final displaced subplot suggests, he must at last confront the
past without illusion. A clear-sighted vision of the past is implicit in Esmond's altered point of view.

The consequences of an obsessed romance perspective within a realistic world have been clearly demonstrated. However, it is essential to better understand such a psychological viewpoint in order to comprehend the nature of Esmond's eventual outlook. When their relationship to him is seen, the characters of individuals like Isabella and Holt suggest what the role of romance protagonist implies—that psychological factors underlying Esmond's thoughts and actions are predominately emotional and/or irrational. Such intrinsic elements are discernible in other personages who make their personal affections, desires, and loyalties, ineffectually tempered by knowledge and reason, the principal determinants of their attitudes and conduct. Rachel Esmond and her children support the Stuarts because their family has done so for years, and because they are attracted by the adventure and danger involved. Whether or not the policies of their party would be best for England is almost immaterial: "Young Frank was ready to fight without much thinking, he was a Jacobite or his father before him was . . . and with respect to the women, as is usual with them, 'twas not a question of party but of faith: their belief was a passion" (p. 363).

Esmond's own perspective is shaped by similar or related elements. Particularly in his youth, his religion and his politics are those of whomever claims his love. He initially wishes to become a Jesuit priest, because "Mr. Holt obtained an entire mastery over the boy's intellect and affections" (p. 26).
Affection takes precedence over intellect, however, for his theology changes with his loyalty. Once under Rachel's influence, "It did not require much persuasion to induce the boy to worship with his beloved mistress" (p. 82). Both Holt and Rachel lead him to adopt the Stuart cause. Emotional rather than rational response determines Esmond's support of General Webb in his disputes with Marlborough: "Had the great man said but a word of kindness to the small one . . . no doubt Esmond would have fought for him with pen and sword to the utmost of his might" (p. 214). And, while he is gradually gaining an increasing knowledge of himself and his environment, many of his important decisions and actions are yet the results of non-rational considerations. Fully aware of the horrors of war, Esmond still campaigns for glory and fame, not because they are meaningful in themselves, but in order to win favor from his ladies: "His desire for military honor was that it might raise him in Beatrix's eyes" (p. 277). Esmond makes his attempt to place the Prince on the throne for the same reason—"it is his final chance to attain Beatrix's love.

Thus Esmond's perspective is most strongly influenced by various but interrelated psychological elements which, especially as they move beyond reason, are readily identifiable with the nostalgia and unrealized desires of the mythos of romance. And as has been seen, ironic displacement emphatically indicates that such a viewpoint is distorted and obsessed in a world of human experience. Esmond, who perceives the folly and self-delusions of others, is slow to discern his kinship with them. Not until his restoration plot fails does he become fully
aware of his own misdirection. In pursuing the wrong woman, in aligning himself with unworthy kings and causes, he has accepted conventional romanticized concepts and functioned according to an immoderately romantic viewpoint. Only when Esmond recognizes his obsession and its basis can it be removed and his perspective altered. Consideration of the narrative’s dominant romance action reveals the nature and the greater significance of that alteration.

George Worth states that what Esmond learns through often painful experience is to reject the romantic, heroic perspective and the thoughts and actions which it inspires, in favor of more solid, stable, and less exciting alternatives. This observation has an apparent measure of validity, for the hero’s loss of obsessions does entail rejection of many blindly romantic conceptions which contribute to his self-delusion. It is ultimately unsatisfactory, however, to describe Esmond’s internal growth and development as simply a process of repudiation, for such a view is belied by the conventional resolution of the romance structure informing the novel as a whole. Throughout the narrative ironic displacement results from the clash of romance values and ideals with the realities of human existence, revealing that those meanings are not to be found in their conventional forms in the real world. But the successful completion of the principal action is an affirmation of those same values, strongly implying that a reconciliation between romance ideals and human experience is in fact possible. The quest is resolved on a psychological level, as Esmond moves toward and achieves an insight and maturity that then enables him to gain traditional goals. Thus it is through
this essentially private and internalized progression that the affirmation must, and does, occur.

Esmond's eventual psychological awakening, then, enables him to see his self-deception, but he does not therefore reject the romantic elements which in excess contributed to his obsession. To deny their validity would be equally self-deluding. Experience causes Esmond to confront and so hate the reality of war, and he admonishes Addison for failing to portray it truthfully: "'I tell you 'tis an uncouth, distorted savage idol; hideous, bloody and barbarous... You great poets should show it as it is—ugly and horrible, not beautiful and serene!'" (p. 224). Yet bravery and leadership, so often demonstrated and tragically wasted in warfare, remain admirable and precious: "'Twas heartrending for an officer who had a heart to look down his line on a parade-day afterwards, and miss hundreds of faces of comrades—humble or of high rank—that had gathered but yesterday full of courage and cheerfulness round the torn and blackened flags" (p. 283). Knowing the impossibility of actually bringing back the words, events, even the gestures of the past, Esmond is fully aware of the deep power and universality of a nostalgic longing for things and times gone by: "... kind glances shine out of the past—oh, so bright and clear!—oh, so longed after!—because they are out of reach; as holiday music from withinside a prison wall—or sunshine seen through the bars; more prized because unattainable—" (p. 83). And Esmond's devotion and loyalty, so often misdirected, are finally those personal qualities which he values most in himself: "he had made a vow
to be faithful and never desert her dear service. Had he kept that fond boyish promise? Yes, before Heaven; yes, praise be to God!" (p. 349)

Thus Esmond, through his new awareness, is confronted with the task of affirming the traditional meanings of romance in the face of a reality which distorts and contradicts them. He must accommodate such values and goals to his own individual situation within the world of the novel. Esmond has sought these things in their conventional public forms and discovered that convention and its implied meanings are disparate. He must therefore find different and meaningful forms which are consistent with reality. This is not accomplished by embarking on a new adventure after his self-deception is removed. His life has been lived, for the drama is ended with the failure of the plot and the crowning of George. The accommodation is made with what has already taken place. Re-examining the past from a changed viewpoint, Esmond reinterprets all that has happened. By doing so, he alters its implications and significance: "We have but to change the point of view, and the greatest action looks mean: as we turn the perspective glass, and a giant appears a pigmy" (p. 214). And as he sees the past in a new light, Esmond reorders and imposes a personal, essentially private form upon it, a form appropriate to the meanings which he now discovers. This order is the underlying romance structure which informs the entire narrative. Marriage to Rachel and immigration to America manifest the resolution of Esmond's psychological quest. As he discerns the course his life has taken, these actions impose upon it an external, public form capable of containing the traditional romance
meanings even within the framework of human existence. His marriage concludes
the novel's dominant movement, and his repudiation of Beatrix to choose Rachel
strongly suggests what elements are rejected or affirmed during the process of
learning and accommodation which he experiences.

As Esmond at last perceives Rachel's role to be that of romance heroine
and Beatrix's that of a siren figure, the sharply contrasting characteristics of the
two women become significant in several respects. Beatrix's outward charm and
beauty are not matched by her personal qualities. From early childhood she is
able to manipulate even her parents for her own purposes. She grows into a
supreme coquette, employing her charm and intelligence in her pursuit of the
wealth, social rank, and prestige which lure her. She values such things as
goals in themselves, not as rewards or symbols of other ideals. As Beatrix her-
self is well aware, she sacrifices her essential humanity to the demands of her
selfishness, vanity, and ambition: "I think I have no heart; at least, I have
never seen the man that could touch it" (p. 353). Her undeniable courage and
spirit, while often causing her shortcomings to appear insignificant and even
attractive, are therefore perverted by her many faults and unredeemed by com-
penating qualities: "She was imperious, she was light-minded, she was flighty,
she was false, she had no reverence in her character" (pp. 264-65). Esmond,
blinded by his love, does not or will not fully comprehend her character until
she betrays him: "The treacherous heart within her had surrendered" (p. 407).
His love for her is the final and greatest self-deception, and his true quest can be resolved only when the obsession is removed, when "The love was dead within him" (p. 407).

Thus Beatrix becomes basically representative of all Esmond rejects. She is herself a deceptive form, a beautiful woman devoid of humanity, a potential romance heroine lacking the requisite intrinsic qualities of that role. The disparity between external appearance and the inner reality of her character parallels the discrepancy, which Esmond continually encounters, between the conventional forms of romance and their actual meanings. Therefore his repudiation of Beatrix can be seen as symbolic of the repudiation of meaningless conventions in favor of those ideals which they imply.

Rachel is almost completely antithetical to her daughter, who "was in everything, even in beauty, the contrast of her mother, who was the most devoted and the least selfish of women" (p. 265). Rachel is the embodiment of those womanly qualities which Beatrix lacks. If Beatrix has no "heart," her mother is in most instances ruled by her own. Rachel's motivations and actions tend to be emotional and subjective rather than reasoned. Her religious convictions are those appealing less "to reason and antiquity than to the passions," and her literary opinions are similarly determined: "She was a critic, not by reason but by feeling" (p. 81). These examples suggest her capacity for deep affection and loyalty which characterizes her relationships to various individuals, Esmond in particular. As her role in the fiction of her first marriage reveals, Rachel's
essentially romantic viewpoint is not initially moderated by rationality and an awareness of human experience. She expects but fails to find certain qualities and meanings in Francis Esmond and the marriage, for neither his character nor the institution can match her conceptions of them. Through this action, however, she gains a knowledge of herself and of reality.

Rachel's struggle with smallpox emphasizes the differences between herself and her daughter. Removal of the older woman's beauty and the consequent loss of Castlewood's love show the inherent limitations of such extrinsic qualities as those Beatrix embodies. At the same time, the illness and recovery is a physical ritual death and rebirth immediately foreshadowing her ritual death and renewal on a psychological level. She confronts the loss of her husband both figuratively—of his love and of her illusions about him—and literally—when he is killed. Tormented by grief and the guilt associated with her love for Esmond, Rachel emerges from her suffering with increased self-awareness and spiritual strength. She is an eiron figure, suited to become a romance heroine.

Rachel learns, then, to balance the dictates of her heart with intelligence and reason. She loves Esmond deeply, but aware of his confused feelings towards her, she refuses his proposal of marriage. An ardent supporter of the Stuarts, Lady Castlewood rapidly discerns the Prince's weaknesses and the threat he poses to both Beatrix's honor and the plot: "Beatrix is best out of this house while we have our guest in it" (p. 380). And although her awareness has grown, Rachel continues to be motivated primarily by her private, personal affections
and relationships. The success or failure of the political cause is finally secondary to the welfare of her daughter and Esmond: "She wasn't thinking of Queens and crowns" (p. 412). The intrinsic qualities Esmond displays in relinquishing his title endear him to his mistress far more than would his possession of any socially desirable rank. Therefore Rachel, as she goes beyond convention to affirm implied values, undergoes an alteration in perspective analogous in important respects to Esmond's own experience. Accommodating her fundamentally romantic view to her human predicament, his mistress becomes, at least in Esmond's eyes, the epitome of his final, "mature" psychological state.

Rachel is far from being a perfect or even totally likeable character. She is jealous and possessive, and her first husband discovers that her excessive devotion can become unbearable. As Beatrix points out, however, Esmond requires such loyalty, nor is this surprising, since it is a trait he demonstrates and values highly in himself. More importantly, Esmond discovers in Lady Esmond those qualities, values, and meanings he has sought and missed in various individuals and institutions. Thus he makes Rachel his goal and places her in a role—that of romance heroine—which enables him to fulfill his quest as he now sees it. His rejection of Beatrix and acceptance of her mother are therefore to a great extent symbolic of the alteration and accommodation of perspective which Esmond accomplishes.

The characters of the two women—Beatrix' literal defiance of time and Rachel's embodiment of timeless values—also suggest the way in which Esmond
confronts and resolves the problem of the past. His re-examination and reordering are clearly a process of internalization. Aspects of the past, which cannot literally be recaptured, can be retained or recovered on the level of individual consciousness, as the resolution of his psychological quest implies. Throughout the narrative there appear "spots of time," scenes or incidents which Esmond recalls vividly. An example is the first encounter with a grown-up Beatrix, a meeting which begins his infatuation: "there was no single movement of hers but was beautiful. As he thinks of her, he who writes feels young again, and remembers a paragon" (p. 189). Such events and emotions have a psychological impact which is never lost: "... I should say such a past is always present to a man; such a passion once felt forms a part of his whole being, and cannot be separated from it" (p. 340). From his final viewpoint Esmond can see these elements of the past as contributing to that perspective: "Our great thoughts, our great affections, the Truths of our life, never leave us. Surely they cannot separate from our consciousness; shall follow it whithersoever that shall go; and are of their nature divine and immortal" (p. 341). The nature of that perspective in turn necessitates the re-examination of the same aspects and their implications in order to attain a more wholistic view of his life within its historical setting. Through reinterpretation of the past and the romance structure he discovers and then imposes upon it, Esmond affirms the ideals and values which inhere in his mature psychological condition. As that structure implies, these meanings are essentially timeless. Like Rachel's intrinsic qualities, his "great thoughts" and
affections are private and internal and capable of transcending external, temporal situations. The past is most significant and enduring, then, as it interacts with the present within the individual consciousness. Through the exercise of that consciousness the past can be internalized and subsequently recreated in a form which implies its values. In a realistic universe, the potential for realization of romance "nostalgia" for the past exists on a private, psychological level.

Thus Esmond, as he reviews and reinterprets, gives his narrative as a whole an underlying romance movement and resolution. It has been seen that his choice of Rachel as heroine-wife imposes an order upon his life which he feels will imbue it with the desired meanings. Yet their marriage, which concludes the principal action, has been a focal point of critical controversy since the novel's publication. The union has been variously condemned, morally as incestuous and artistically as unrealistic and arbitrary, and it has of course been defended against such criticisms. As this investigation has shown, the relationship between Rachel and Esmond is one of the narrative's most important and carefully elaborated thematic concerns. The displacement of subordinate romance fictions indicates the complex development of their mutual devotion, just as the conventional resolution of the dominant romance action suggests the essential nature of its final stage. In short, the novel's treatment of the love theme is firmly grounded in its underlying structure. There are other aspects of the work which further manifest Thackeray's careful preparation for the marriage, many of which have been noted by John Tilford. It is continually, often
emphatically foreshadowed through such devices as Esmond's daughter's preface to the memoirs, statements made by various characters, and Esmond's many narrative hints and remarks about the course his life took. The difference in their ages is carefully minimized, as Lady Castlewood's youthfulness and Esmond's maturity are constantly stressed, and Beatrix herself points out that the two are perfectly suited to each other. And, considering the psychological aspects of the problem, Tilford indicates how Rachel's behavior dramatically reveals her turbulent emotional state, particularly her feelings toward Esmond. He feels two key episodes—her visit to an imprisoned Esmond, and their later reunion—greatly clarify the nature and development of their relationship. The narrative's underlying structure lends support to his view, for as discussed earlier, each incident concludes a thematically significant, ironically displaced romance substructure.

Thus, various aspects of the novel, including its informing generic plot, contribute to the presentation of this theme. But the novel's conclusion, and therefore its thematic implications, are flawed. Despite Thackeray's artistic endeavors, the relationship between Rachel and Esmond remains, in the final analysis, ambiguous. Esmond chooses her because of his alteration of perspective, which is generally well defined by structural implications and his own commentary. Changes in his emotional attachment to Rachel, however, are never made sufficiently clear. He does not, as narrator, make a definite statement about his final attitude toward her, as he does regarding other major concerns. The order he discerns and imposes upon his life implies that viewpoint, yet he does not in fact demonstrate
it in his own fictional role. Rachel's full emergence as romance heroine has been discussed. The dominant elements of her character change perceptibly from those of an ambiguous "wise-mother" into those of a potential bride figure. A mature erotic love characterizes her final attachment to Esmond. Realizing the nature of her love during the reunion at Walcote, Esmond's feelings toward Rachel, tenuous at that time, appear to remain uncertain. His devotion to her continues undiminished as he pursues Beatrix, but as their roles in that operative fiction suggest, he does not regard his mistress as a potential lover. The novel's completed romance action should imply that because self-deception is removed she is at last viewed in such a light. But Esmond's narrative comments are evasive concerning his attitude, and even when presented in retrospect, he does not visibly function as a clearly defined romance protagonist in relation to Rachel.

Esmond's marriage to Rachel is in many ways an appropriate, perhaps inevitable conclusion to the "drama" of his life. The union, however, implies a relationship as lovers which is not demonstratively present. In fact, it is almost as though their fictional roles have reversed during the course of the novel. The proposal scene suggests that it is now a wiser, stronger Esmond who has become a "wife-father" figure, a protector who seems both brother and son to the weak and dependent Rachel:

my dearest mistress felt that she was severed from her children and alone in the world--alone but for one constant servant on which fidelity, praised by Heaven, she could count.... I found my mistress one day in tears, and then besought her to confide herself to the
care and devotion of one who, by God's help, would never forsake her. And then the tender matron, as beautiful in her Autumn, and as pure as virgins in their spring, with blushes of love and "eyes of meek surrender," yielded to my respectful importunity, and consented to share my home (p. 414).

Even given Esmond's character, this is hardly a confrontation of romantic lovers. In any case, despite Rachel's love and because of his uncertainty, the elements of erotic, heterosexual love traditionally inherent in a hero-heroine relationship are not evident in their union. The marriage thus violates the novel's artistic integrity, for it fails in this crucial respect to emerge realistically from the narrative's underlying structure. The ambivalence of the relationship creates a disparity between form and implied content, an aspect of displacement of the romance mythos which informs the work as a whole. Therefore the ending retains an apparent arbitrariness, and the concluding situation is not completely free from incestuous overtones. And this displacement of the dominant structure, which indicates the essential nature and meaning of Esmond's psychological quest, suggests further ambiguity concerning his final perspective. In order to attain a conventional romance reward—marriage—he has sacrificed a measure of its meaning, and the fact calls into question the overall adequacy of the protagonist's private and internal attempts to accommodate his romantic viewpoint to his realistic human condition. In the final analysis the nature of Esmond's accomplishment and the validity of his "successful" position on this psychological level must remain tenuous.
Thus comprehension of the underlying structure of *Henry Esmond* furnishes substantial critical insight. Interrelated by elements of characterization and theme, various structural forms, particularly those of romance, are a primary source of novelistic unity. Implications of their continual displacement contribute to the development and resolution of the narrative's principal romance plot on a psychological level. Esmond experiences a process of learning and loss of self-deception which culminates in his initiation into a mature awareness of himself and the human situation. Maturity is his proper goal, and as displacement of romance convention indicates, essential to its attainmment is the alteration of an obsessively romantic perspective. He must temper his viewpoint with reason and knowledge and thereby accommodate his values and desires to the realities of a low mimetic world. Esmond accomplishes this by re-examining and reinterpreting his past, discovering in it a form able to imply and affirm those meanings which he discerns in retrospect. Marriage to Rachel and immigration to the New World are conventional rewards of a romance hero which, by his claiming them, manifest publicly the outcome of his internal progression. Esmond's quest is resolved, then, as he reorders the past and so creates a personal and private romance mythos whose meanings are consistent with its external form.

Investigation of mythic structure thus reveals the manner in which it functions under Thackeray's entelechy to create and realize Esmond's primarily psychological romance, in its sequential stages and its entirety. Analysis further indicates the implications, previously discussed, which the nature and conclusion
of that quest possess for the novel's various characterizational and thematic concerns. However, consideration of his own fictional role also reveals the narrative's crucial flaw. Esmond, even seen from his own retrospective viewpoint, does not function as a fully defined romance hero in relation to Rachel. He does not, either as narrative actor or commentator, demonstrate towards Lady Castlewood the reciprocal erotic love implicit in the hero-heroine, man-wife relationship of romance. Because the nature of the relationship remains ambiguous, the marriage, appropriate in many respects, does not arise convincingly from the novel's underlying structure. Thus the artistic integrity of the work is violated, creating an element of displacement in its principal mythos which makes problematical the final nature and implications of the quest of Henry Esmond.
CHAPTER THREE

FOOTNOTES


2 Ray, The Buried Life, p. 79.


6 William Makepeace Thackeray, Henry Esmond "Edition de luxe" (New York, [n.d.]), p. 413. Further references to this work will be noted in the text by page number within parentheses.


8 Frye, p. 195.

9 Frye, p. 186.

10 Frye, p. 195.


13 Frye, p. 196.
14 Frye, p. 186.
15 Worth, p. 346.
16 Dodds, p. 163.
19 Tilford, pp. 127-46.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE NEWCOMES

The Newcomes was regarded with general although not unanimous approval by Thackeray's contemporaries. The character of Colonel Thomas Newcome captured Thackeray's reading public and was the subject of particular critical enthusiasm as well. One of his longest and most elaborate works, the novel has aroused a wide divergence of critical opinion since that time. It has been disparaged for its length and discursiveness and corresponding lack of a center of interest—"great shell of a novel"—and praised for similar qualities—"it stands, in its scope and variety, with Vanity Fair at the head of all the novels." Disagreement remains concerning The Newcomes' relative merit, but whatever the judgment, the book presents an intricate and detailed novelistic world. An analysis of the mythic structure which underlies this complex novel should reveal the source of much of its enduring power.

The principal mythos which informs The Newcomes is that of comedy, and its mode is consistently low mimetic. The novel presents all three phases of the total comic structure. The ternary form of the mythos includes a stable and harmonious society which is disrupted by obsession, forgetfulness, folly—an irrational society—and then is restored. The equivalent to this movement on a psychological level is "the removal of a neurosis or blocking point and the restoring of an unbroken current of energy and memory." It is this comic
fiction, operative on both levels, which dominates and possesses significant implications for the work. Several subordinate fictions are also operative within the narrative, most notably the comic action involving Clive and Ethel. These are related to each other and to the larger comic structure by various means, most obviously through elements of theme and characterization. The unifying effects of these aspects and the corresponding impact made upon theme and character by the interrelationship of different actions will be indicated in the following discussion. Consideration of these fictions should provide insight into their function in the novel and what meanings they hold for it.

Colonel Newcome emerges as the central figure in the ternary comic action. Gordon Ray in *The Buried Life* has indicated the biographical background for the Colonel, as well as that behind other characters and situations. Newcome is strongly based on Thackeray’s own step-father, Major Carmichael-Smyth. The Major aroused both admiration and impatience in Thackeray with his many good qualities and his excessive narrowness of perspective and interests. The blind affection Thackeray felt toward his step-father as a youth evolved into a more critical view of his kinsman. Ray feels Colonel Newcome’s portrayal reflects the change in Thackeray’s attitude which occurred as he matured. There is also evidence that the characterization was influenced by other factors, particularly esteem for *Don Quixote*, which Thackeray read prior to and during the early numbers of *The Newcomes*. To whatever sources he owed his inspiration, Thackeray creates in Colonel Newcome a person who can function at the center
of the novel's dominant mythos and in interrelated subordinate fictions without losing his individuality and consistency of character. It is the Colonel around whom the relatively stable and harmonious orders form in the first and third phases of the comic action. And in the Colonel the parallel action can be seen taking place on a psychological level. While the two actions do not always coincide, they are so intimately related as finally to be inseparable. The Colonel's personal obsessions are largely responsible for the inherent instability of the earlier desirable society, and the regaining of his equilibrium contributes to its restoration. An understanding of the implications of his role is needed in order to come to terms with the novel's underlying structure.

The better society of the opening phase of the comic mythos is rapidly established by the resolution of a comic fiction early in the novel. Colonel Newcome serves as the comic hero, an eiron figure, in this subplot, although he appears unsuited for the part in some ways. A flashback reveals that the young Tom Newcome had been the hero of a first phase comic fiction. In love with Leonore, he loses her because her parents command her to marry according to their wishes. Rather than gaining Leonore and displacing the ruling order, he is defeated by it and seeks refuge in India. This recounted action exemplifies the manner in which ironic form is frequently employed in the narrative, as the displacement of comic convention indicates the strength and perverse nature of the dominant society. The Colonel and Leonore are its victims for the remainder
of their lives; she is trapped in a loveless marriage, and he suffers through lonely years in a distant country.

Thus Colonel Newcome is unlike a typical comic hero in several respects. He returns from India an aged man, and he comes to regain his son, not to take a wife. In other ways, however, the Colonel is eminently qualified for this fictional role. Absent from England for many years, he is an outsider to the environment which he enters upon his return. Not conditioned by English society to accept without question its current conventions and standards, he has a perspective which allows him to discern many of its absurdities and shortcomings. The Colonel also possesses his own values and principles with which he confronts those of the irrational ruling order. And, although it is with Clive rather than in marriage that he hopes to find happiness, he does attempt to establish a better society, one based on love and mutual understanding.

For a time it seems that Colonel Newcome has achieved his desire, for action of the subplot is quickly resolved. The conventional basis for a new society is easily founded, for nothing mars his reunion with Clive. His joy is beyond description: "The Colonel said a grace over that meal: the life was begun which he had longed and prayed for, and the son smiling before his eyes who had been in his thoughts for so many fond years." If he confronts much heartlessness and egoism in society, he also finds a substantial amount of human sympathy and good fellowship. Whatever their individual faults and eccentricities, numerous characters demonstrate their affinities with the Colonel. Binnie, of
course, is his dearest friend and great admirer. Miss Honeyman, with her often foolish formality, is nonetheless kind and considerate. The character flaws of the redoubtable Fred Bayham are more than compensated for by his generosity and affection. Paul de Florac, the son of Colonel Newcome's former love, is absurd and even morally culpable in some respects, but his heart is his redeeming feature. These and other widely differing individuals are members of the loose and informal society which gathers around the Colonel, each in some way affirming the values of reciprocal human fellowship.

Thus Colonel Newcome encounters no obstacles which hinder his rejoining his son. Around them gather individuals who accept the values and standards of his small family circle. Drawn together by benevolence and affection rather than bound by rigid and dehumanizing forms, this society, if it does not displace the dominant order, yet refuses to submit to it. Its existence furnishes an implied but forceful comment on the society it opposes. It is not a perfectly ideal social order, but within the world of the novel it appears to be the relatively stable and harmonious society of the first phase of comedy's ternary form. The Colonel therefore seems to have functioned successfully as a comic hero. On another level, however, the fundamentally comic situation of this subplot is ironically displaced, and the Colonel and his society prove to be flawed. The nature of this displacement and its meanings for Colonel Newcome and the narrative's structure as a whole will be dealt with later.
Closer consideration of Colonel Newcome's role in this subordinate fiction should provide additional insight into his character and reveal clearly the discrepancies between his order and the dominant society. Effective presentation of the differences in the moral norms and values of these respective social orders was essential to Thackeray. One of his goals in the novel is to conduct an "inquiry into the nature of 'respectability' as the governing code of the upper and middle classes of Victorian England." He believed them to be "the most polite, and most intelligent, and best informed, and best dressed, and most selfish people in the world," and so he wished to anatomize "the respectability of the consciously virtuous." He does so primarily through his use of comic form and convention in this subordinate fiction, as he does in the novel as a whole. Those qualities which enable the Colonel to function as a comic hero make him an eiron to the follies and absurdities of the society he attempts to displace.

The Colonel's fundamental role quickly takes shape in the opening tavern scene: "There came into the 'Cave' a gentleman with a lean brown face and long black mustachios, dressed in very loose clothes, and evidently a stranger to the place. At least he had not visited it for a long time" (1, 7). The Colonel's strange appearance tends at first to inspire amusement and ridicule among the frequenters of the "Cave of Harmony," but his warmth and openness of character rapidly overshadow any false impression created by his external features: "He spoke in a voice exceedingly soft and pleasant, and with a
cordiality so simple and sincere, that my laughter shrank away ashamed; and gave
place to a feeling much more respectful and friendly" (1, 8). In deference to
Colonel Newcome and his son, the company's behavior is exemplary and the "Cave
of Harmony " lives up to its name. When Captain Costigan and his ribald song
burst onto the scene, however, the Colonel's wrath is aroused: "'Silence!' he
roared out. . . . 'I thought I was coming to a society of gentlemen. . . . I never
could have believed that Englishmen could meet together and allow a man, and
an old man, so to disgrace himself'. . . . And Shouldering his stick, and scowling
round at the company of scared bacchanalians, the indignant gentleman stalked
away, his boy after him" (1, 12). It is important to note that the Colonel does
more than simply protest against Costigan's conduct—he proceeds to call into
account the tavern society which fosters such behavior: "that uplifted cane of
the Colonel's had somehow fallen on the back of every man in the room" (1, 12).
And, by implication, the rebuke extends to yet another level, to the larger social
environment of which the tavern group forms a part. This incident is essentially
characteristic of other events and encounters, as Colonel Newcome's values and
conduct confront those of individuals and their society. Simultaneously his norms
are presented as the basis upon which the Colonel will attempt to construct a
better order.

The folly and heartlessness which Colonel Newcome opposes are sometimes
revealed by his inner reactions to them. As they talk at Maria Newcome's
party, Colonel Newcome becomes disgusted and dismayed as Barnes' character
grows clear to him: "Here was a young fellow as keen as the oldest curmudgeon: a lad with scarce a beard to his chin that would pursue his bond as rigidly as Shylock. 'If he is like this at twenty, what will he be at fifty?' groaned the Colonel. 'I'd rather Clive were dead than have him such a heartless worldling as this!'" (I, 81-82). He is reacting to Barnes as an individual, and the young man does subsequently justify his unfavorable opinion. Yet the relationship between Barnes' qualities and their origins in society is evident: "And yet the young man's life was as good as that of other folks he lived with... He thought his life a most lucky and reputable one" (I, 82). The Colonel can see the terrible lack of human feeling and sympathy in Barnes' makeup, but Barnes, shaped and conditioned by his environment, accepts himself and that society without question.

Colonel Newcome, then, may discern and describe the immorality and folly he confronts. It should be made clear, however, that he is not primarily a conscious commentator. The basis for his role lies in characterization and the underlying structure of the novel's early portions. Immediately after his arrival in England, the Colonel, by means of visits to various members of his family, rapidly encounters the qualities of their society. Like a picaresque hero, he is an outsider who journeys through a new country, meeting and exposing the irrationality of its conventions. The juxtaposition of the standards of society and the Colonel, who embodies the norms and values advocated by the narrative, is enough to imply what judgment is passed. The process which reveals and
condemns the unnatural society simultaneously begins the comic polarization of that society and an order established by the Colonel.

Thus Colonel Newcome's initial visit to his stepbrothers does not result in the affectionate reunion which he anticipates. He is disturbed by his reception, for nothing matters less to them than himself, and nothing so much as their own personal and materialistic affairs. The Colonel's brief stay clearly demonstrates that his stepbrothers share none of the filial affection which appears to him a natural part of any family: "In fact, Thomas Newcome had overdrawn his little account. There was no such balance of affection in that bank of his brothers as the simple creature had expected to find there" (1, 65). His subsequent call upon his sister-in-law Maria is hardly less perturbing. The worthy lady offers him a deluge of meaningless chatter and gossip rather than true hospitality: "Mrs. Newcome slowly uttered the above remarkable remarks to the Colonel on the threshold of her house, which she never asked him to pass" (1, 76). But Lady Maria is in almost every respect a product of her environment, and it is not strange that her values and conduct are so different from those of her brother-in-law: "She had not the faintest idea but that the hospitality which she was offering to her kinsman was of the most cordial and pleasant kind. She fancied everything she did was perfectly right and graceful" (1, 76). As in his meeting with his brothers, this confrontation of Colonel Newcome and another person, Lady Maria in this instance, comments not only on that character but on the society which shapes her and places her in a position of prominence.
The responses which Colonel Newcome produces in such confrontations are important to Thackeray's portrayal of "the heartlessness of London." The Colonel is an outsider and hardly an inconspicuous one at that. With his long mustachios, his old-style clothes, and his courtly but equally antiquated manners, Colonel Newcome's external attributes are unusual to most of those he meets. And the Colonel, whose character is essentially commendable, has his share of blind spots and eccentricities. His interests are limited, all his thoughts and actions being centered on Clive's welfare, and he can bore companions to tears in talking only about his son. Simplistic and naïve to an extreme about many worldly concerns, he is frequently unaware of the fact. These and similar characteristics, in conjunction with his striking physical appearance, make the Colonel a different and often amusing figure. Always, however, his better qualities are much in evidence. Thus the manner in which individuals or groups respond to Colonel Newcome provides insight into their natures: "But they who laughed at the Colonel laughed very kindly; and everyone who knew him loved him; everybody that is, who loved modesty, and generosity, and honor" (1, 58). The Colonel's praiseworthy characteristics tend to call forth, if present there, similar attributes in others. Such qualities must be expressed against the dictates and pressures of a society which has no place for them. Those who return his affection and kindness with coldness and indifference are correspondingly exposed and identified with the "heartless" ruling society. Those who respond to him in kind indicate that they possess the potential to assert their natural humanity, to
resist society's demands, and to confirm their individuality—"one of the elements of well-being."\textsuperscript{12} The possibility of individualism is not always fulfilled and, as in Belsize's case, its assertion, when not tempered by other factors, may have terrible consequences. Kew and Ethel, however, eventually realize their potential, and the affirmation of their individuality does lead to well-being and free them from the oppression of society.

The hard-hearted and materialistic dominant society which Colonel Newcome opposes is largely ordained by Lady Kew. She is in many respects an ironic equivalent to Colonel Newcome. Just as he attempts to make Clive happy and provide for his future, Lady Kew handles the affairs of her family. While the Colonel's efforts are founded on unselfish and understanding affection, however, the Countess operates on far different principles. She is the embodiment of her society's standards, and thus her aims are predicated on placing her dependents in situations insuring them wealth and social prestige. Like a comic Prospero figure she orders the lives of others and brings about matrimonial unions. These marriages are seldom accompanied by any conventional happiness, for they are the "made" marriages which Thackeray so abhorred.\textsuperscript{13} There is little more room for human affection in them than there is within the bosom of their architectus:

[Belsize:] "She is uncommonly sentimental, you know, Lady Ann."
"My daughter Ann is the greatest fool in the three kingdoms," cried Lady Kew (I, 116).

As in the case of Barnes and Clara Pulleyn, the Countess's
efforts sometimes have not only unhappy but tragic results. As her motives and actions are seen in contrast to those of Colonel Newcome, the similarities of their roles in their respective contexts ironically and powerfully reveal the great discrepancies between them. Even here implications extend beyond Lady Kew. As she ruthlessly manipulates others, she violates them spiritually in her domination of their minds and hearts. Doing so, she follows to the utmost extreme the norms of her society. She knows nothing else and can never change, but even for her there is some sympathy: "Perhaps I have been wrong all through life, and in trying to teach my children to do as I was made to do. God knows I have had very little comfort from them: whether they did or whether they didn't" (I, 410).

The different natures of the Colonel's society and that which he opposes are emphasized by the elements of comic festivity within them. Conventionally characteristic of a pragmatically free society, the true festive spirit is noticeably lacking in the parties of the fashionable world. These are primarily occasions for service to society rather than for human intercourse. Lady Maria at her party is an ironic host figure, for she brings together notable personages in hopes that association with them will reflect credit and importance upon herself. Most of her guests attend for similar reasons, not to participate in a happy and enjoyable occasion. In fact, "The refreshment was rather meagre" (I, 86), and the scant physical nourishment is indicative of the more significant lack of other essential human requirements. The Colonel here acts as a plain dealer,
a refuser of a festivity which is only an ironic parody of comic convention. In this and other instances throughout the novel, the absence of comic festivity within its traditional forms ironically reveals the society excluding its values.

The Colonel's initial dinner party in England is, in contrast, a genuinely festive event. The guests are a collection of widely varying and even odd characters, but they come together in good fellowship. There is abundant food and drink and the occasion is filled with mirth and cheer. Colonel Newcome serves as a true comic host: "All the time of the dinner the host was challenging everybody to drink wine, in his honest old-fashioned way, and Mr. Binnie seconding the chief entertainer" (1, 141). Barnes functions as a refuser of festivity, behaving so offensively that he finally provokes Clive and spoils the party. But the comic conventions possess their elements of celebration and joy, and Barnes, a representative of a "heartless" order, rejects the values which they imply.

It appears obvious, then, that Colonel Newcome's social order is in all respects better and more ideal than the dominant society. Finally, however, the comic subplot which established it is ironically displaced. As noted above, the Colonel is in some regards short-sighted and even foolish. Such flaws give him the potential qualities of a second phase--quixotic--comic hero. Such a character is to some degree, like the order he resists, deluded or irrational. The Colonel's faults are not such that they prevent him from confronting and opposing the irrational order as a fundamentally sound comic eiron. On a psy-
chological level, however, his self-delusion causes the ironic displacement of comic convention. Colonel Newcome, concerned only with his son, does not impose his desires on Clive. Their relationship is founded on mutual affection, and the Colonel's parental judgment is usually sound. The two have many happy moments together, and the Colonel's dream appears to be realized: "The Colonel insisted that he was perfectly happy and contented. What could he want more than he had—the society of his son, for the present; and a prospect of quiet for his declining days? . . . And yet, in spite of his happiness, his honest face grew more melancholy" (1, 206). Society had kept him from Leonore—it cannot keep him from Clive, and yet complete happiness does not follow.

An eiron to that society, the Colonel is self-deceived concerning the possibilities of his relationship to his son. Unable to find contentment for so long, he deludes himself as he wraps all his hopes up in Clive. His illusion is eventually dispelled: "Together they were, yet he was alone still" (1, 211). Despite all his efforts and the love between them, there must be a distance between himself and Clive as there is between all individuals. It is this fact that Colonel Newcome recognizes and accepts. Comic convention cannot be ideally fulfilled because of the reality of human existence.

Thus there can be no perfectly ideal society. This knowledge, while it saddens and disappoints the Colonel, also enables him to develop a more realistic and unselfish relationship with Clive. Removal of his delusion displaces the newly established order, although not its basic norms and values. It also
places Colonel Newcome psychologically in the first stage of the comic ternary action. Free of obsession and aware of the implications of his and Clive's relationship, he can better see what he should do to bring about his son's happiness. His state of mind, resigned and loving rather than blissfully happy, is yet relatively stable and sound. The action of the comic subplot, therefore, establishes an improved though not dominant society which corresponds on a relative basis to the harmonious order of comedy's first phase, but which is not actually ideal because of the facts of the human situation. But the inability to establish an ideal society helps to bring the Colonel's mental and emotional condition to a point psychologically equivalent to the same initial stage of the comic form. Those factors which disrupt Colonel Newcome's "ideal" social order create an "ideal" psychological order in him. It is this psychological state which is subsequently disrupted and then restored, in conjunction with a corresponding social order, during the course of the narrative's overall comic action.

Colonel Newcome's new knowledge of himself causes him to leave his son and return to India for a time. His departure places Clive largely on his own and initiates the novel's major comic subplot. The Colonel acts here as a benevolent Prospero figure, one who begins a comic action by leaving and attempts to resolve it when he returns. Clive becomes a potential comic hero, trying to win Ethel and thereby establish a new and better society. This operative fiction proves to be an integral part of the novel's larger comic action, for the nature
of the relationship between Clive and his father is such that their stories are finally inseparable.

The Colonel's departure from England causes a breakdown in the novel's underlying structure. He has been the central comic figure, with regard to the novel's dominant comic mythos as well as the early subplot. His sudden removal leaves The Newcomes temporarily lacking a strong focus of interest. After the rapid resolution of that initial comic subplot, no clearly evident action takes shape while the Colonel remains on the immediate scene. The displacement of his better society and his gradual self-awakening, so essential to the novel's meanings and overall comic structure, are dependent less on plot elements than on disclosures of character and theme. These are accomplished primarily through the detailed and continually developing confrontation of normal and unnatural societies. And the action surrounding Clive and Ethel is not initiated until after Colonel Newcome is gone. Therefore no definitely established mythos bridges this gap. In terms of the larger comic structure, the Colonel's departure and Clive's removal to the Continent completes the breakup of the society which centered around them. This dispelling of their relatively ideal order corresponds to the second phase of the ternary form of comedy. Because of the Colonel's absence, continuity of action is disrupted. The movement toward restoration of a better society is re-established when Clive becomes a conventional comic hero. As an eiron who tries to displace the ruling order, Clive replaces his father, on one level, as the primary figure of the overall comic movement. On a psycho-
logical level, the Colonel remains central to that action. His departure for India postpones the action in this respect, for only upon his later return to England does his altered perspective, psychologically equivalent to the comic second phase, become evident. It is only after his return that the third stage, involving removal of the Colonel’s obsessions and establishment of a new-old society, can be achieved. Thus Colonel Newcome’s departure causes structural weaknesses which lessen and diffuse the emphasis, for varying periods of time, on these two interrelated aspects of the dominant comic mythos.

Elements of theme and character contribute strongly to unity throughout the novel, and they are especially important at this point. Colonel Newcome himself is gone, but other major figures are still present. The characteristics and thematic meanings of Clive, Ethel, Barnes, Lady Kew, and others are richly developed. They subsequently gain additional perspectives as they function in various fictional roles, but their earlier implications are retained. The comic polarization of societies also remains, although its focus is less definite without the Colonel as the central eiron figure. The respective values and norms of his company and Lady Kew’s fashionable society are already carefully delineated, however, and therefore serve as a frame of reference to later developments of character, theme, and plot. Thus not only various individuals but the contrasting sets of standards they have helped to establish continue to contribute meaning and unity.
An example is Clive's discovery that his fellow artists in Rome comprise a society based on values similar to those of his father. They form a class unconcerned with wealth or social prestige, bound together by good will and fellowship. Beyond their common pleasures in art and social activities, they demonstrate humanity and benevolence in various acts of kindness and sacrifice. In many instances money, food, and care are devoted to a friend whose welfare or even life is at stake: "If one or the other was ill, how nobly and generously his companions flocked to comfort him, took turns to nurse the sick man through nights of fever, contributed out of their slender means to help him through his difficulty" (II, 3). J. J. Ridley is portrayed and frequently praised as an ideal artist, happy in and totally devoted to his craft: "J. J., in his steady silent way, worked on every day, and for many hours every day... the hundred pleasant dexterities and manipulations of his craft were ceaselessly interesting to him;... His was a fortunate organisation indeed" (II, 3-4). J. J., however, usually remains withdrawn and secluded, although he is benevolent and kindhearted to his friends. He is isolated from many of the unpleasant and trying aspects of life with which Clive and others come in contact: "Ridley shrank away from such lawless people with the delicacy belonging to his timid and retiring nature" (I, 287). Clive and his companions, then, while not so dedicated to their art nor so "perfect" as J. J., are more realistic and functional representatives of Colonel Newcome's fundamental values. It is in this larger group that the novel's assumed standards are seen as viable within the world of the
narrative. The artists throughout stand in ironic opposition to the dominant order which regards them as a classless and undesirable society.

Clive and Ethel are hero and heroine of the comic plot, which forms a principal part of the novel's dominant comic mythos. Their personal qualities and their affinity for each other are indicated early, but the fiction centering around them does not become operative until after the Colonel departs. Clive and J. J. tour the Continent with Ethel and her family, but only when he sees the unhappy plight of Belsize and Clara does Clive fully realize his love for Ethel. Simultaneously he becomes aware of the apparently insurmountable obstacle between them: "Ethel was all that was bright and beautiful, but—but she was engaged to Lord Kew" (I, 312). Whether or not Ethel loves Kew is unimportant—the marriage has been "made" and human affection is not considered an essential part of matrimony in "respectable" society. Parental authority is supreme, and Clive sees that to challenge it as Belsize does will bring pain to Ethel and Kew as well as himself. He therefore decides to remove himself from the scene, showing "not only that he could feel love in his heart, but that he could give proof of courage, and self-denial, and honour" (I, 313). Clive's action, unselfish as it is, is not that of a conventional comic hero, for he retreats before opposing forces. The use of ironic form here is significant, for it implies the power of the ruling social order. The fact that Clive does not even struggle, that he sees no chance of success, indicates more strongly than does his later open opposition the impotence of an individual in the face of such a society.
It must be confronted before an engagement or a similar, definite, social contract has been made. Once such an agreement is established, it becomes futile to resist any longer. Clive does attempt to gain Ethel when Kew is removed as a rival, even though he realizes his possibilities of winning her are slight. When she becomes engaged to Farintosh, however, he relinquishes all hope and soon marries Rosey.

Thus Clive's temporarily subdued love bursts forth again when he learns that Kew and Ethel have parted. His role as comic hero becomes more conventional as he returns to England to pursue Ethel and oppose "respectable" society. An eiron figure, Clive can see the absurdities and false values of that society and in his attempts to win Ethel he demonstrates many of the qualities it lacks. His good nature and generosity are always in evidence but, after his initial selfless act of renunciation, his own character is the subject of less emphasis and interest. The focus shifts more definitely to those blocking elements which confront him. His financial condition, social position, and artist's occupation all weigh against him. Barnes continually seeks by various means to thwart Clive and his father, whatever their aims may be. And Lord Farintosh has supplanted Kew as a rival. Farintosh is an alazon, a foolish blusterer whose identity consists almost wholly of his money and title. These, however, are Lady Kew's prerequisites for an acceptable marriage. Such particular obstacles are basically extensions of society, whose concepts and standards constitute larger
and more formidable obstructions. Without wealth or prestige, Clive has small chance for success.

Ethel herself, however, is the major obstacle to a conventional comic union with Clive. The source of much of the novel's power, she is worthy of the attention she receives: "She is unequivocally Thackeray's greatest heroine, with the wit and intelligence and verve of Becky or Beatrix, but with a gentleness and sympathy denied those brilliant adventuresses."^14 Possessor of many admirable qualities, Ethel is yet a self-deceived alazon. She chafes against her situation and the standards imposed upon her by family and society, but does not disavow them. Many aspects of the "respectable" society hold attraction for her: "Give her her part of vanity, of youth, of desire to rule and be admired" (I, 344). Blinded by vanity to the ultimate significance of her submission to parental and social dictates, she permits them to curb her true nature and outweigh her affection for Clive. There are extenuating circumstances, but responsibility rests finally with Ethel herself: "... let us be perfectly sure, that to whatever purpose Miss Ethel Newcome, for good or evil, might make up her mind, she had quite spirit enough to hold her own. She chose to be Countess of Kew because she chose to be Countess of Kew; had she set her heart on marrying Mr. Kuhn, she would have had her way, and made the family adopt it" (I, 392). As a result, she is hardly a conventional comic heroine: "But a girl of great beauty, high temper, and strong natural intellect, who submits to be dragged hither and thither in an old grandmother's leash, and in pursuit of
a husband who will run away from the couple, such a person, I say, is in a very awkward position as a heroine" (II, 73). The complex and often contradictory elements of her character, however, give Ethel an extraordinary richness and interest, even as they enable her to function both as alazon and eiron without inconsistency. The self-delusion which makes her a comic alazon is not dispelled until she has seen the tragic consequences of Bames and Clara's loveless marriage. Ironically, she becomes an eiron figure fitted to the role of comic heroine only after Clive has married Rosey.

The marriage of Clive and Rosey seems to make impossible a conventional resolution of the comic action involving Clive and Ethel. They are united, but only after the deaths of Rosey and the Colonel is the apparently ironic conclusion overturned. Many critical readers and Thackeray himself felt that his bringing the two together is an artistic blunder, that he violates the consistently realistic tone of his novel in order to provide a happy conclusion and so satisfy his public: "What could a fellow do? So many people want 'em married." Rosey is the final blocking element, and Thackeray believed that her death is excessively contrived: "To be sure, I had to kill off poor little Rosey rather suddenly, but shall not a man do what he will with his own?" Other critics, such as John Dodds, feel that "it takes a severely critical reader, after those last hundred pages of the novel, to want to deny Clive and Ethel a peaceful harbour after such stormy seas." The problem is complex, and because this plot forms an essential part of the novel's overall structure, it must be viewed in this larger
context. Before dealing with the resolution of the narrative's dominant comic movement and its implications, two important subplots should be considered.

Ordained by Lady Kew, the potential comic fiction involving Kew and Ethel moves in concert with rather than against the ruling social order. Ethel, influenced both by her family's wishes and by her own vanity, does not refuse Kew. But while she does not reject her presumed duty, she is fiercely resentful of her situation: "'I think, grandmamma,' Ethel said, 'we young ladies in the world, when we are exhibiting ought to have little green tickets pinned on our backs, with "sold" written on them; it would prevent trouble and any future haggling, you know. Then at the end of the season the owner would come to carry us home!'" (I, 292). Her rebellious spirit leads her to treat Kew with an unwarranted cruelty which awakens him to the reality of their situation: "'My dear,' he said, 'if you had loved me you never would have shown me that letter.' . . . Ethel knew it was a renunciation on Kew's part—she never liked him so much as at that moment" (I, 359). The marriage, despite Lady Kew's efforts, never takes place. Kew, in a stronger position than Ethel to oppose the dictates of family and society, refuses to commit them both to a union without love and its potentially tragic consequences.

This comic subplot is strongly ironic. It not only remains unresolved, its form contains none of the elements which would create a new and better social order. Lady Kew is an ironic vice, seeking to promote a marriage which would propagate rather than displace the norms of an irrational society. In pre-
venting the resolution of the fiction, Kew and Ethel in fact reaffirm the conventional comic values. Their actions possess thematic implications, for they indicate that possibilities for true happiness rest largely with the individual. An assertion of will is necessary to understand and resist the controlling society, for beneath its oppressive weight there is little room for human considerations. Kew's renunciation of Ethel is a part of his gradual self-development and rejection of his earlier dissipated conduct. Later wounded in a duel, he undergoes a punishment and ritual death. He emerges as a wholly changed man, one who marries happily and becomes known for his benevolence and goodness. Kew's regeneration is a process of Christian spiritual redemption. The importance of this thematic aspect will later be seen in relation to the structure and meaning of the novel as a whole.

Optimism generated by Ethel and Kew's successful resistance of social pressures and demands is countered by the subplot involving Barnes, Belsize, and Clara. As has been seen, the ironic comic action which joins Clara and Barnes and banishes Belsize prompts Clive's courageous retreat from Ethel. Barnes is the principal alazon, a hypocrite whose exterior covers not only his scandalous behavior but his total lack of humanity: "In a word, he was as scrupulously whitened as any sepulchre in the whole bills of mortality"(1, 82). He is a living extension of his environment, and he is able to make a marriage of convenience with Clara because he possesses the wealth and position that society esteems. Clara herself has not the strength to protest or even question the demands made
upon her. The consequences of their union are disastrous, culminating in Clara's abandonment of her children and elopement with Belsize.

Forcing upon Ethel an awareness of the latent misery in such a marriage, the desperate steps taken by Belsize cast additional light on the problem of the individual will within a restrictive society. Having once bowed to its dictates, he and Clara lock themselves into an irreversibly tragic situation. The marriage of Barnes and Clara, devoid of any conventional meaning, indicates the perverseness of the environment which sanctions it. Because that social order remains dominant, Belsize's subsequent and belated refusal to conform to it leads to an even more unnatural displacement of comic myth. His union with Clara is condemned by society and fails to recover the happiness denied them by her "made" marriage: "So Lady Clara flies from the custody of her tyrant, but to what a rescue? The very man who loves her, and gives her asylum, pities and deplores her. She scarce dares to look out of her new home upon the world, lest it should know and reproach her" (II, 219). Ironic displacement of convention in this subplot emphasizes the novel's basically realistic perspective. As Kew's story shows, society can at times be successfully resisted by those strong enough to examine and oppose its norms and values. As in this instance, however, once a social contract is established and people are locked into a socially ordained form or institution, further defiance is useless. No matter what forceful or well-intentioned character attempts it, actual protest becomes futile and self-defeating. The problem of intention and consequence is also implicit in the discrepancy
between the nature of Belsize's motivation and the results of his actions. This theme emerges clearly in the overall comic movement and in the Colonel's role in its development.

The alteration of Colonel Newcome's perspective develops soon after his return from India. He tries unsuccessfully to function as a Prospero figure in the Clive-Ethel plot, attempting to resolve it by arranging their marriage. After his failure, it becomes clear that disappointment and frustration have at last destroyed his mental and emotional balance. On a psychological level, then, the Colonel enters the second phase of the ternary comic form. His resigned and relatively stable frame of mind is disrupted, and he becomes an obsessed and self-deceived alazon. The nature of the change is indicated by the Colonel's role in the ironic comic movement centering around Clive and Rosey.

While Colonel Newcome fails to unite Clive and Ethel, he unfortunately succeeds as a Prospero figure in his efforts to arrange the marriage of Clive and Rosey. Each of the two young people acts as alazons. Rosey, completely dominated by her mother, simply has no thoughts or feelings of her own. She accepts Clive rather than Captain Hoby because Mrs. Mackenzie wishes her to. Clive has given up his pursuit of Ethel, but he has few illusions concerning his feelings for Rosey. Yet he too is an alazon, for he marries primarily to make the Colonel happy and thus fails to consider fully all the implications of what he does. The result is a situation which involves at first unhappiness for Clive and eventually
misery for all of them. Mrs. Mackenzie tries, often in blatant fashion, to act as vice. From her initial appearance after Binnie’s injury, she is husband-hunting for her daughter. She has no luck with Clive, however, until circumstances and the Colonel lend support to her cause. Mrs. Mack’s role parallels that of Lady Kew in several respects. Although they operate on different social levels, Mrs. Mackenzie too wants a "made" marriage for her daughter, one which will provide as much money and position as possible. Whether or not love and affection are involved is unimportant. Neither does she make any pretensions about her aim, but she is, unlike Lady Kew, a hypocrite, an impostor whose exterior covers her essential nature. Only after the marriage does the "Campaigner" fully reveal herself. Finally, it is Colonel Newcome who arranges the union. He likes Rosey himself and feels that, since Ethel remains unattainable, Clive can find happiness with Miss Mackenzie. In functioning in an eiron role, he forgets the lessons of his own experience and helps to resolve an ironically displaced comic movement. There is no true love between Rosey and Clive, and the conventional values are missing from their marriage. It gradually evolves into a tragic situation.

Colonel Newcome’s role within the action is therefore indicative of the alteration of his character, and the displacement of comic convention gives the subplot additional thematic significance. Despite their often frenzied efforts, Lady Kew and Mrs. Mackenzie were unable to make marriages for Ethel and Rosey. Playing society’s game according to its rules and standards, both fail as vice figures. But Colonel Newcome, whose personal qualities and values are
antithetical to theirs, actually engineers a marriage fundamentally similar to those for which they were striving. He promotes a union which is in fact for all of those involved—himself, Clive, and Rosey—a marriage of convenience. Wanting only to insure his son's happiness, the Colonel creates a situation which denies it. Thus the ironic displacement of myth conveys a major thematic concern, the problem of intention and result. The ironic, sometimes tragic divergence dividing aims, good or bad, and their eventual consequences here emerges clearly. Clive marries to please his father, but in so doing he helps establish a tragic situation. And the Colonel, whose whole life has been devoted to Clive, leads his son into that situation. The theme is implicit in many aspects of the novel, such as the subplot involving Barnes, Clara, and Belsize. Belsize's intentions are basically good in that he wishes to remove Clara from a miserable existence and give her love and a better life. As previously seen, however, the consequences of his actions are terrible. There are other instances in which the process is reversed. Lady Kew's motives, in terms of the novel's assumed standards, are certainly bad, but their results are also ironic. Her attempts to arrange marriages between Ethel and Kew, and Ethel and Farintosh, are both foiled, the first by Kew's maturation and repentance and the second by her own death and Ethel's self-awakening. Here again the displacement of the underlying myth contributes strongly to the revelation of theme. The narrative's perspective in regard to this discrepancy between aim and achievement is realistic. It is honestly and thoroughly presented and examined, but it is not removed. The
ironic gap between intention and consequence remains in the novel, just as it exists in human experience.

Thus Colonel Newcome's earlier, relatively ideal state of mind has been overthrown. The resolution of the narrative's dominant comic action is therefore concerned with the removal of his blocking obsessions as well as with the surmounting of those obstacles to the union of Clive and Ethel. The action which brings about the conclusion of this action takes the form of tragic fiction centering around Colonel Newcome. Even while the previously established, harmonious order of comedy is disrupted on both levels, however, an ideal society is not absent from the novel. In the Pendennis family community, it is there in explicit form to be aspired to and regained.

Laura Pendennis is not introduced until she is married and the novel is approximately two-thirds complete. Her personality is hardly a welcome addition. Laura is benevolent, kind, loving, devoted to God and her family--and an unbearable prig: "Laura is intolerable." Despite her personality, her values and standards are those endorsed by the novel and make her character important to its structure in several ways. Laura is an eiron, able to understand the ultimate values in life and to comment upon the folly of society and various individuals within it. She acts as critic of the tragic action which envelopes Clara and Belsize. Quickly suspicious of their intentions, she sends Pen to reason with Belsize while she entreats Clara not to abandon her children, in a futile attempt to prevent their elopement. Laura also protests the potentially
tragic course leading Ethel toward marriage with Farintosh, even as she acts as a vice for Ethel and Clive. She foresees and implicitly criticizes the ironic comic movement—centering around Clive and Rosey:

"I can't help thinking, Arthur, that Rosey would have been much happier as Mrs. Hoby than she will be as Mrs. Newcome."

'Who thinks of her being Mrs. Newcome?'

'Her mother, her uncle, and Clive's father . . . '"

(1, 193).

Thus Laura obviously contributes strongly to the unification of various structural components. She does not thereby relinquish her primary function as a conventional comic heroine, the role most meaningful to the narrative's larger comic mythos. Possessing the qualities endorsed by the novel, she is a wife to be emulated by all women. It follows that her marriage establishes a nearly ideal family, the potential basis for a better society. In her union with Pen may be found the moral concepts and mutual affection denied to marriage by a heartless social environment. Their society does not displace the dominant order, but it confronts and comments upon it. Laura and her family become the main source of comic tone in the latter part of the book, the most powerful assertion that a measure of conventional happiness may be achieved in the world of the novel. This function is suggested by the point at which Laura enters the narrative. She appears immediately before Colonel Newcome again returns from India—just in time to replace him as the comic focus.

It is clear that the time of Laura's introduction is meaningful to the development of structure and theme. It must also be noted that her sudden
appearance greatly weakens her effectiveness. She is a comic heroine whose marriage creates an ideal social order. Yet the comic action is completed—she and Pen are married—before Laura enters the narrative. The union is not accomplished in the face of various blocking elements or an opposing society, for, despite being the first-person narrator, Pendennis reveals nothing about his role as a comic hero. Thus neither Laura nor the marriage arises from the world of The Newcomes—they are just there, and this makes the near-perfection of both more difficult to accept. In conjuring her almost out of thin air, Thackeray seriously flaws the structure and consequently the fundamental realism of his novel and so mitigates the force of Laura’s meanings for it. As previously indicated, however, Laura and her family are not the sole conveyors of the themes and values they express. Thus other elements in the narrative help to compensate for Thackeray’s faulty conception of Laura, and while the implications of her character are somewhat lessened by it, they are not thereby invalidated.

The fundamental similarities between Laura’s society and that earlier, more loosely organized order founded by Colonel Newcome are readily apparent. They are based on much the same moral norms and values, and although Laura’s better community is achieved within marriage, neither of them proves powerful enough to displace the dominant society. On the equivalent psychological level, Laura is free of obsession, aware of herself and the realities of human existence. Her state of mind is therefore relatively "stable and harmonious,"
much as is the Colonel's at the time of his departure for India. Laura's perspective, however, is founded more definitely on her religious beliefs than is Colonel Newcome's. This is largely a matter of degree and emphasis, for the Colonel is also a staunch Christian, but her reliance on spiritual values is the primary difference between Laura's ideal psychological condition and that of the Colonel. This divergence has certain related effects on the nature of their respective societies, creating dissimilarities which imply that the resolution of the narrative's comic ternary form will involve more than simple restoration of Colonel Newcome's previous social order or unobsessed state of mind.

The religious theme is not new when Laura appears, for the importance of religious concerns is acknowledged throughout the narrative. The comic subplot involving Kew's renunciation of Ethel and society possesses religious overtones. Kew repents his former conduct and undergoes a ritual death which prepares him for his marriage to Henrietta Pulleyn. Kew's attitude and that of his mother bring forth the latent Christian connotations of the underlying mythic structure. Kew repents, atones for his sins through suffering, and is spiritually reborn. The absence of authentic spirituality from respectable society is made explicit by the portrayal of Charles Honeyman, who epitomizes religious hypocrisy as an utterly fraudulent minister. Colonel Newcome on the other hand astonishes some by saying grace at his table and praying for his son, and Madame de Florac finds patience and consolation for her suffering in her religion.
It is Laura, however, who most explicitly articulates and practices the Christian virtues. The novel’s assumed norms of course have implicit associations with those of Christianity, and she to a great extent defines the relationship between worldly and spiritual values. Always motivated by Christian concerns, her performance in various fictional roles is thematically significant. Viewed from one perspective Laura is almost entirely ineffectual. In her different eiron roles, she consistently fails to impose her will upon the ruling society. On another level, she has more success. If she fails to alleviate circumstances which cause pain and suffering, she is yet able to impart a portion of her own inner strength to those around her. To the Colonel, Clive, and especially to Ethel, Laura is a kind of spiritual watering hole: "You are the island in the desert, Laura, and the birds sing there, and the fountain flows; and we come and repose by you for a little while, and tomorrow the march begins again, and the toil, and the struggle, and the desert" (II, 304). It is to her they retreat to rest and gather the patience and courage to go on, to endure their earthly toils in hopes of heavenly bliss. The viable power of her Christian values implies an ultimate triumph over the oppressive society and the hardships, however severe, of human life, for "Christianity . . . sees tragedy as an episode in the divine comedy, the larger scheme of redemption and resurrection."\(^{19}\)

The Pendennis family, then, is more than an ideal comic social group, it is a Christian society. By their own situation, they assert the feasibility of achieving earthly happiness. And Laura’s spirituality carries the comic tone to
another perspective, implying that a true Christian may attain heavenly consolation for his earthly trials. Such knowledge in turn provides a measure of strength and comfort to endure suffering and misfortune. In terms of the overall comic structure, religion provides Laura the courage and resourcefulness needed to maintain a firm and harmonious psychological state in the face of the human condition. This enables her to create a relatively ideal earthly society, which is in turn based on the anticipation of a perfect heavenly community. It is a society essentially like Laura’s that the resolution of the larger comic action involving Clive, Ethel, and the Colonel eventually establishes.

As previously stated, the completion of the novel’s comic movement is accomplished principally through the action of a subordinate tragic fiction centering around Colonel Newcome. His displaced eiron role in the Clive-Rosey plot reflects the fundamental alteration of his character. In many similar instances the Colonel lets anger, frustration, and disappointment distort his perspective and blind him to the actual nature of his motivation and conduct. He becomes a tragic alazon, a self-deceived impostor. His actions against Barnes demonstrate vividly the basic nature of his self-deception, for he fails to recognize his own vindictiveness. Circumstances have also eroded the unselfish patience with which the Colonel faced the more unpleasant realities of his relationship with Clive:

In former days, when his good father recognized the difference which fate, and time, and temper, had set between him and his son, we have seen with what a gentle acquiescence the old man submitted to his inevitable fortune, and how humbly he bore that stroke
of separation which afflicted the boy lightly enough, but caused the loving sire so much pain. Then there was no bitterness between them, in spite of the fatal division; but now, it seemed as if there was anger on Thomas Newcome's part, because, though come together again, they were not united, though with every outward appliance of happiness Clive was not happy (II, 265).

The society which now surrounds him also indicates the alteration of Colonel Newcome's character. In his efforts to procure well-being for Clive and Rosey the Colonel turns to the values of "respectable" society, placing them and himself amid all the fittings of high life: "The simple gentleman . . . desired that his children should have the best of everything" (II, 254-255). But the festivity of his earlier gatherings in tavern or home is now missing from his dinners and parties. The Colonel is pleased that they bring joy to his daughter-in-law, and as for Rosey: "No one, I am sure, could be happier than she, but she did not impart her happiness to her friends; and replied chiefly by smiles to the conversation of the gentlemen at her side" (II, 255). The guests are no more conversant, being "occupied with their victuals, and generally careless to please." And Clive is unhappy, almost an outsider. As Pendennis says: "I confess that a dinner at the Colonel's, now he appeared in all his magnificence, was awfully slow" (II, 255). In short, the absence of true festivity within its traditional comic forms points out the essential similarity of Colonel Newcome's festive occasions and those of the ruling society.
There are thus several related aspects of the Colonel's self-delusion and various manifestations of it. His essential nobility, clearly established earlier and now clouded by his obsession, is continually emphasized and helps to define his current motives and actions. Other individuals criticize the tragic progression to various degrees. Both Fred Bayham and Sherrick foresee the collapse of the B.B.C. and ineffectually protest the folly of the Colonel's continued involvement. Laura and Pen are the most persistent critics, not only of the Colonel's outward conduct but of the distorted thoughts and feelings which inspire it: "'I don't think... he has acted like the dear Colonel, and the good Colonel, and the good Christian, that I once thought him'" (II, 272). It is Clive, however, who finally reaches his father. His evident unhappiness in his marriage and his disapproval of the Colonel's political and business affairs have provoked much of the latter's misguided conduct. Eventually the strength of their love bridges the gap which has opened between them:

"The father saw the son's mind more clearly than he had ever done hitherto... And he began to own that he had pressed him too hastily in his marriage; and to make an allowance for an unhappiness of which he had in part been the cause... '... you are right; ... and I'm wrong--thank God I am wrong--and God bless you, my own boy!'" (II, 307-308)

Within this subordinate fiction, then, Colonel Newcome comes to a point much like the crucial moment, or augenblick, of tragedy, although his nemesis has not as yet appeared. He is able to perceive how things might have been
had he acted more wisely, and he can anticipate, though not perfectly, the general course to which his and Clive's lives are now committed. Despite his new awareness, the tragic process has been started and will inevitably be fulfilled. Seen in the context of the novel as a whole, this same crucial moment marks the removal of the Colonel's illusions and obsessions. He thereby regains a realistic and clear-sighted perspective essentially similar to his earlier, relatively ideal attitude. Even before Colonel Newcome's fall it therefore appears that the third and final phase of the comic mythos has been achieved on a psychological level. As previously noted, however, the comic resolution not only restores but implements the disrupted society in several respects, and the Colonel's fall and suffering add dimensions to the ideal order he finally enters.

The tragic nemesis first appears in the form of the crash of the Buncleund Bank. Colonel Newcome's management of the bank is as short-sighted and willful as his other deluded actions. The bank collapses, financially ruining the Colonel and many of those who had trusted his judgment. He falls within the context of society and the material world, but his greatest suffering is mental and spiritual. More keenly than his own loss he feels responsible for the financial state of those, especially Clive and Rosey, who had depended on him. The Colonel's anguish is soon increased by Mrs. Mack's persecution, which finally involves Clive and Rosey as well as himself in an unendurable situation.

The fundamental mode of this tragic fiction is the same low mimetic mode which informs the entire novel. The Colonel's punishment gradually becomes ex-
cessive and causally inappropriate for his character, and elements of irony appear. He has been foolish and self-deceived, but nothing he has done merits the spiritual torment to which he is subjected. The disparity between Colonel Newcome's nature and his punishment gives him the qualities of a pharmakos, a scapegoat figure. As tribulation is heaped upon him, whatever guilt he may have had is absolved and cast back toward the forces which oppress him, and the tragic mythos moves toward the ironic mode.

Mrs. Mackenzie is the primary agent of persecution, afflicting Clive and Rosey as well as the Colonel. Her essential character is carefully prepared for throughout the novel, and gradually the power of her grasping will becomes clear. Binnie's high spirits and finally his very life are dampened and then extinguished by Mrs. Mack: "He passed into the Campaigner's keeping, from which alone he was rescued by the summons of pallid death" (II, 277). When disaster strikes the Colonel, she siezes the opportunity to gain total dominance over his household. Her power over Rosey, a completely pathetic figure, is horribly absolute: "The overpowering mother had taken utter possession of this poor little thing. Rosey's eyes followed the Campaigner about, and appealed to her at all moments. She sat under Mrs. Mackenzie as a bird before a boa-constrictor, doomed--fluttering, fascinated" (II, 351). Her hold on the Colonel is equally strong, as she plays upon his feelings of guilt and remorse: "the good man ... bowed his noble old head in silence under that cowardly persecution"
(II, 346). Clive too must suffer from her cruelty, cut off by the Campaigner from his own wife and child and forced to view his father's pain.

Thus the tragic mythos moves into and to the very boundaries of the ironic mode. Colonel Newcome, Clive, and Rosey endure a life of unceasing bondage and suffering, and as their punishment and the Campaigner's maliciousness increase, mythic elements appear. All of the undesirable aspects of society and its members are channeled into Mrs. Mackenzie. In her greed, her heartlessness, her willful spiritual violation of others, she embodies all those qualities and values against which the Colonel has stood. Through Mrs. Mack their power and destructiveness, revealed in various individuals and subplots in The Newcomes, are now brought to bear directly on the Colonel himself. As her cruelty becomes inhuman, however, she gains resemblance to the sinister parents, the evil deities, and the malignant grinning females of irony's limits, where it begins to merge with myth. In short, although she remains a well-defined individual character, Mrs. Mack also becomes analogous in many respects to a demonic figure. Correspondingly, Colonel Newcome's character gains additional implications as he endures her torture. Persecuted without valid cause, his nobility and stature grow as he suffers until he is an almost totally innocent victim. Retaining his individuality, he also becomes symbolically suggestive of any innocent but dignified victim of undeserved suffering.

The modal developments of the tragic subplot therefore have significant thematic implications for this subordinate fiction and thus for the novel's dominant
comic structure. Mrs. Mackenzie represents many of society's norms and standards, but as her mythic qualities grow stronger, these move into the background. The Campaigner resembles the personal form in which extreme irony finds the source of all evil. The various factors contributing to her character diminish in significance as the fact that she is fundamentally evil and demonic is stressed. And as the sense of impending doom surrounds Colonel Newcome, the importance of those specific things causing it decreases. Emphasis on certain thematic elements is somewhat lessened, and what remains of primary significance is the destruction of goodness—-the Colonel—-by the world's evil—-Mrs. Mack. On the level of simple plot, this is basically what takes place in the tragic fiction. Within the larger comic mythos, however, this action has further meaning.

The Christian view of tragedy has been indicated previously—-it regards tragedy "as a prelude to comedy"—-the divine comedy of redemption and resurrection. Colonel Newcome's tragedy is clearly identified with this concept in various ways, especially as he is seen in relation to the characters of Laura and a newly awakened Ethel. His fall therefore leads to the removal of his self-deception and obsession, and his suffering enables him to regain his former innocence and purity, qualities now definitely associated with spiritual well-being. Broken in mind and body, the Colonel's soul is purged: "Now, as in those early days, his heart was pure; no anger remained in it; no guile tainted it; only peace and good-will dwelt in it" (II, 409). He comes full circle, literally as well as figuratively, dying, child-like in his faith, at the school
he had attended as a boy. His deathbed scene has all the solemnity and serenity of a religious service, and because of powerful Christian implications throughout the tragic subplot, the Colonel's death becomes in fact a victory within defeat. As such, it contributes to the resolution of the narrative's ternary comic movement and gives further dimensions to the nature of the final ideal society and its psychological equivalent.

Colonel's Newcome's fall leads to a conventional conclusion to the dominant mythos of the novel by bringing him to what is essentially Laura Pendennis's idealized position. The Colonel regains his former unobsessed state of mind early in the tragic fiction, but through his suffering he attains a more spiritually oriented and therefore better perspective. The Colonel's ideal psychological condition can also be seen as the resolution of a similar but different, less definite ternary comic form from that seen informing the narrative. His childlike qualities, associated with Christianity, suggest the recapturing of an initial comic phase which was childhood. This condition was therefore disrupted by adult experience, and the establishment of the third comic phase is a return to childhood. This form is suggested rather than worked out within the novel, but its implications are that once a realistic, self-aware viewpoint is attained, Christian faith can help to remove the worldly taints left on one by experience and so recapture some of the innocence of youth.

Thus the third phase of the comic form is reached on a psychological level, as the Colonel's obsessions are eliminated and his previously self-aware
mental condition is not only restored but strengthened. This in turn makes possible
the re-establishment and improvement of a relatively ideal society. Because of
his faith, Colonel Newcome's death enables him to be spiritually resurrected
and thereby enter a perfect heavenly community. What happens to the Colonel
in fact demonstrates what Laura has continually preached. A society again
forms around him, founded on those values which Laura has taught and practiced,
and which he himself now embodies. This order is feasible within the narrative
as a whole, for it cannot impose itself on the dominant society or promise earthly
happiness. It does assert that some measure of contentment and joy is possible in
the human situation. And its spiritual foundation provides strength to confront
misfortune and hardship on earth even as it promises perfect happiness in the life
after death. Therefore the movement of the total comic mythos is completed as
plausibly as possible within the world of the novel. The requirements of comic
convention could not have been wholly fulfilled without sacrificing realism and
consistency of tone. On a spiritual plane, however, the potential for an ideal
comic conclusion remains.

The implications of the subordinate tragic fiction hold further meanings
for the resolution of the larger mythic structure. They tend to refute Thackeray's
own belief that he had committed artistic blunders not only in bringing together
Clive and Ethel at all, but in the manner he accomplished this union. He felt
Rosey's elimination was so sudden and contrived that it violated the integrity and
realism of his novelistic world. Within the action of the tragic subplot, however,
her death is hardly out of place. It is true her death frees Clive for Ethel, but viewed in context this aspect is unimportant. Rosey dies because the terrible suffering she undergoes as an ironic scapegoat passes the limits of human endurance. Within the operative tragic fiction in which it occurs, Rosey's death is not merely realistic but required. At this point the significance of Clive's release lies not in its opening the way for marriage to Ethel, but in its reuniting him with his son and freeing them from the Campaigner's persecution.

Granting that Rosey's removal is artistically sound, the comic structure which is to be resolved with Clive and Ethel's marriage is finally established. Nothing more stands in the way of their union. The actual marriage is added in a postscript, but the event is almost inevitable at the time of the Colonel's death. Clive's values, despite his faults, are close to those endorsed by the novel, and he has gained stature through his suffering. He is now freed from it, not so awkwardly as Thackeray felt. Ethel has become self-aware and has suffered too in her long estrangement from Clive and the Colonel, drawing strength from her rejection of society and her acceptance of the norms of Laura and the novel. And both are brought closer together, with the others present as well as each other, by their participation in the Colonel's death. Colonel Newcome, in his dying, overcomes death itself as well as the forces which kill him. In so doing he powerfully validates the Christian values and moral standards which Laura embodies. Those nearest the Colonel--Clive, Ethel, Madame de Florac--have learned through suffering to trust in spiritual rather than worldly
things and so are able to share in the final moment of Colonel Newcome's triumph over the world. The love between Clive and Ethel remains, and at this point the way is truly open for their marriage, in regard to the realistic tone and integrity of the novel as well as to its structural elements. Thus Colonel Newcome's moving death scene culminates the narrative's action not only in terms of theme and character development, but, for all practical purposes, in respect to the underlying plot structure of its dominant comic mythos.

Knowledge of The Newcome's underlying structure, then, provides insight into some of the critical problems of the book. As seen earlier, a breakdown in this structure immediately following the Colonel's departure for India is largely responsible for a corresponding weakening of unity. Laura Pendennis's function as an ideal comic heroine is weakened and the narrative's artistic integrity flawed by the fact that neither her character nor her fictional role has sufficient structural foundation. She simply appears in the novel; she does not evolve from it. Conversely, investigation of mythic structure indicates a firm artistic basis for Rosey's death, the eventual union of Clive and Ethel, and for the resolution of the novel's overall comic action. It also reveals how subordinate fictional elements function within that dominant mythos to achieve Thackeray's purposes. The recurrence of various but similar and interrelated structural forms, most notably those of tragedy and comedy, helps to create unity. Throughout the novel, mythic structure informs theme under Thackeray's entelechy. Comic elements enable him to elaborately delineate character and theme, as he
"anatomizes" the "respectable" society. The ironically displaced comic subplots involving Ethel and Kew, and Barnes, Clara, and Belsize, are essential to the thematic concern with the problem of the individual confronting an oppressive society. Colonel Newcome's displaced Prospero role in the Clive-Rosey action focuses on the theme, implicit elsewhere, of the ironic discrepancy between intention and consequence. Subordinate to but integral parts of the larger mythic structure, such subplots and their meanings present a strongly realistic novelistic world, one accommodating the elements of happiness and joy, of suffering and tragedy, which are the realities of human existence. And all the implications of these subordinate fictions are drawn together and given additional dimensions by the comic mythos which infuses the narrative as a whole.

With Colonel Newcome as the central figure, the action progresses through all three phases of comedy's ternary form. The Colonel has and loses a relatively stable society and his psychological equilibrium. He and others, notably Clive and Ethel, eventually regain what is on both levels a more stable and harmonious order. Because of the definite emphasis on the meanings of Christianity, his death becomes a type of victory within defeat. The Colonel at the time of his passing validates the novel's assumed spiritual and humanitarian values, even as a society supported by these values forms around him. The resolution of the comic mythos which informs The Newcomes does not establish a blissful and ideal society on earth. It does assert that a measure of contentment may be found within an often harsh and tragic existence, and it affirms that a
perfect society is attainable after death. Those who follow Colonel Newcome's example on earth may follow him into an ideal heavenly community:

    And just as the last bell struck, a peculiar sweet smile shone over his face, and he lifted up his head a little, and quickly said 'Adsum!' and fell back. It was the word we used at school, when names were called; and lo, he, whose heart was as that of a little child, had answered to his name, and stood in the presence of The Master (II, 411).
CHAPTER FOUR
FOOTNOTES


4 Frye, p. 171.


14 Dodds, p. 203.


16 Thackeray, Letters of James Russell Lowell, I, p. 239.

17 Dodds, p. 205.


19 Frye, p. 215.

20 Frye, p. 238.

21 Frye, p. 215.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Fraser, Russell A. "Pernicious Casuistry: A Study of Character in Vanity Fair." NCF, XII (1957), 137-147.


Gulliver, Harold S. Thackeray's Literary Apprenticeship. Valdosta, Ga.: the author. 1933.


Mathison, John K. "German Sections of *Vanity Fair.*" *NCF,* (1963), 234-46.


Smith, S. N. "In Defence of Thackeray." NC, CXIV (1932), 103-113.

Solomon, Eric. "Thackeray on War." VN, No. 23 (Spring, 1963), 6-11.


"Time and Memory in Thackeray's Henry Esmond." RES, XII (1962), 147-156.


