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THE IRISH CHARACTERS IN THACKERAY'S FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

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In Thackeray's fiction, the Irish characters compose a group with a number of common traits. Each of them has several of these qualities; the most common are belligerence, boastfulness about family and country, claims to descent from Irish kings, brogue speech, tendency to distort facts, fondness for drink, and self-delusion.

A comparison of his fictional characters with Thackeray's observations in his *Irish Sketch Book* reveals that the author deliberately exaggerates the eccentricities of Irishmen for his fictional purposes. The *Sketch Book* is a fairly unbiased account of the country and its citizens and is often complimentary to the Irish.

Thackeray's portrayal of Irish characters in his novels and stories derives in part from a literary stereotype for which such nineteenth-century Irish writers as Charles Lever are largely responsible. Thackeray's experiences with Irish acquaintances also contributed to his delineation of his characters. Most significant are his association in his professional life with Irish writers, and in his personal life with his wife's relatives, the Shawe family.

Most of Thackeray's Irishmen, and some of the women, are comic characters, following the literary tradition of the stage Irishman. They range from extravagant and fanciful
characters in his shorter works, such as Mrs. Perkins's Ball, a Christmas book, to almost equally extravagant but realistic Irishmen in the novels. Pendennis has the largest assortment of these comic characters, among whom is the vivid Captain Costigan. This novel describes the Irish journalists in London and sketches William Maginn, under whom Thackeray served his apprenticeship as a writer for periodicals, as Captain Shandon.

A special variation on the Irish type is found in Thackeray's mothers-in-law based on his wife's mother, Mrs. Matthew Shawe. Her unstable disposition and the eventual open hostility between Thackeray and Mrs. Shawe are traced in his letters, which serve as a guide to the development of the type in his fiction. External details disguise Mrs. Shawe somewhat in the novels, but her personality emerges, with the traits that the author came to associate with the Irish.

Thackeray uses essentially the characteristics of his comic Irishmen for a villain, Barry Lyndon. The same self-delusion that he elsewhere turns to comic effect, Thackeray here employs to show a man with distorted ethical standards.

Thus, with a similar set of qualities, Thackeray creates a varied group of Irish characters. He achieves the variation by such techniques of presentation as exaggeration or a change in the viewpoint from which characters are seen.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. LITERARY AND BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND . . . . 1

2. COMIC IRISH CHARACTERS . . . . . . . . . . 19

3. THE MOTHER-IN-LAW . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 48

4. THE IRISHMAN AS VILLAIN: BARRY LYNDON . . 79

5. CONCLUSION . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 90

FOOTNOTES . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 93

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 107
CHAPTER ONE
LITERARY AND BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

This thesis examines some of the ways in which Thackeray uses Irish characters in his fiction. Attention will be given to the interconnection between Thackeray the man and Thackeray the literary craftsman, as it appears in his fiction. Because the relationship between his attitudes and his portrayals is important, it will be necessary to recognize Thackeray's opinion of the Irish as he expresses it in his non-fiction writing—his critical articles, letters, and The Irish Sketch Book. The sources of Thackeray's characters will be considered, as well as his methods of adapting them for his fiction.

In Thackeray's work Irish characters abound, both in his fiction and in his commentaries on actual scenes and people. It is sometimes difficult to separate the two; even more than most writers, Thackeray inclines to the autobiographical in his fiction. In some of it he draws on experience as a source of workable material; in other cases, his writing is an outlet for his emotional response to his experience. His handling of the Irish characters in particular illustrates these two utilizations of his life in his work. In his approach to the characters it is usually evident which of the purposes is foremost. It becomes obvious in his management of some of the material, outstandingly that drawn from his family relationships, that
emotional engagement is a stronger force upon him than the need to contrive a character to fill out his pages. Others of the characters plainly do not strongly involve his emotions, and are constructed from his memories of one or several persons—or partially invented from his prejudices—because they fit in with his plans for a novel or story. Thus some characters are shaped primarily by the author's literary requirements; the handling of others is at least in part predetermined by Thackeray's personal relationship with the original of the character.

Thackeray was only twenty when he made the acquaintance of one group of Irishmen who served as models for his later fiction. In London he abandoned the law after a short period of reading for it and went into the newspaper business, buying The National Standard, an obscure weekly. Even before this purchase he knew some Irish journalists, one of whom, Francis Mahony (“Father Prout”), claimed the distinction of having introduced Thackeray to William Maginn.¹ The latter seems to have been connected with Thackeray’s ownership of the short-lived periodical, and the two were clearly associated when Thackeray began writing for Fraser's Magazine, whose staff included such Irish journalists as Percival Banks, Crofton Croker, and Francis Murphy.²

Here Thackeray rapidly grew acquainted with the profession of letters on its seamiest side. London had a large contingent of clever and penniless men, chiefly Scottish and Irish, who had come there
dreaming of fame and fortune through the pen and had remained to scrape a precarious living by journalism, while they drank hard and exhausted their credit and became bitterly cynical of all that was prosperous and platitudinous. London newspapers were at a low ebb in those days, limited in circulation, burdened by the exorbitant stamp tax, scurrilous in dispute. New ones were spawning and old ones decaying, in a ruthless struggle for the overcrowded market. The hard-bitten scribblers, free of any sense of personal responsibility, reveled in the opportunity to show their brilliance in personal invective. Though their earnings were pitiful, they felt a keen aesthetic pleasure in the satires and slanders that they could toss off with half-tipsy fluency. 3

In Pendennis Thackeray recreates the world of Irish journalists in London, drawing on his years of apprenticeship for the activities and personalities of the Irish writers in the novel.

The second important Irish influence on Thackeray began in 1835, when he met Isabelle Shawe, daughter of a County Cork family; the following year he married her. 4 She and her family, especially her mother, are models for many a character, whether or not identified as Irish, in Thackeray's fiction. Certainly his unfortunate treatment at the hands of the Shawes (see Chapter III) helped give him the opinion of the Irish which has brought the charge of prejudice against him.

One of the numerous critics who accuse Thackeray of anti-Irish prejudice is J. Y. T. Greig, who acknowledges his fairness in The Irish Sketch Book but finds his fictional Irish characters overly unflattering representatives of their countrymen:
• his varying attitudes to the Irish—sometimes hostile, sometimes sentimentally affectionate or patronizing, but in the main contemptuous—depended in great measure on which of his various memories happened to be active at the time of writing. Hostility derives, it would seem, partly from Irish journalists that he worked with in London, notably Maginn, but far more from "Hibernian relatives," the Shawe group; whereas affection, which was much less frequent, has the origin that he suggested—the Irish girl that he had married. As, with the passage of time, affectionate memories of Isabella Shawe tended to fade, and even to give place to an ill-defined feeling that his wife had been hardly worthy of him . . . the kindliness that he had shown to her fellow countrymen in the years 1842-3 gave place to other feelings: he became more prone to think of all Irishmen as Magins, and of all Irishwomen as Mrs. Shawes.

Contributory to Thackeray's portraits was the English attitude toward Ireland and the Irish. The country was in desperate poverty in the mid-nineteenth century; devastating famines drove many of the inhabitants to England and abroad. Most of them were uneducated and unskilled; these displaced rural workers were not welcomed by the English cities into which they flooded. They lived in the worst of slums, in incredible filth and swept by disease. Discontent was strong among them, and rebellion broke out periodically in Ireland against the ruling country. Hostility had existed between the two countries for centuries, and was not alleviated by the state of Ireland in Thackeray's time. With the Irish on the lowest rung in the English social structure, it is understandable that English fiction would not portray Irish characters as heroes. Thackeray's characterizations are conventional as well as personal.

Thackeray cannot justly be accused of blindness to the needs and sufferings of Ireland or of complacency about
England's role in the condition of Ireland. His review of an Irish history demonstrates his sympathy for that nation:

It is a frightful document against ourselves—one of the most melancholy stories in the whole world of insolence, rapine, brutal, endless persecution on the part of the English master; of manly resistance, or savage revenge and cunning, or plaintive submission, all equally hopeless and unavailing to the miserable victim. . . . [In the time of Essex] The King's Highness parcels out the country without scruple, as the Pope's Holiness had done before; and sends over a religion, with orders to the Irish to accept it, and burns, and hangs, and massacres all obstinate recusants who decline it. Not that we are any worse than our neighbours of Europe in this respect. . . . Surely no Englishman can read the Irish story without shame and sorrow for that frightful tyranny and injustice, that bootless cruelty; that brutal and insolent selfishness which mark, almost up to the last twenty years, the whole period of our domination.

The Irish were extremely sensitive to dispraise, and their angry reactions and general belligerence often served to reinforce Thackeray's opinion. He came to expect hostility and almost to be ruefully gratified to find it. On his second lecture tour in the United States, he writes his daughters, "The papers here are very civil except one—a Hifish paper which I am told whips me severely—but I don't read it and don't mind it or any abuse from poor dear old Ireland." But later he writes, "... am invariably blackguarded by one paper in every town, perhaps two, with a curious brutal malignity and ignorance that makes me more sad than angry. They are always all Irish who do it. Bon Dieu, why will they lie so? . . . Only a malignant blundering Paddywhack could write in this way . . ."  

In 1842 Thackeray toured Ireland. The outcome of his travels was The Irish Sketch Book, the fullest collection of
Thackeray’s judgments on Ireland and the Irish. As was his practice everywhere, Thackeray on his tour of Ireland was interested by the people, rather than by political issues, and his account is a series of sketches of people and places. One critic was enough impressed by Thackeray’s remarks on the country and its problems to comment, "Indeed, a person not unacquainted with the subject once recommended to all who would understand the Irish question three books—Spenser’s *State of Ireland*, Wolfe Tone’s *Autobiography*, and The Irish *Sketch Book*. Thackeray did not pretend to understand the enormously complicated problem of Ireland. His choice of viewpoint enabled him to use his talents wisely. "In the decade before Thackeray’s visit many shrewd travellers had attempted the country, only to retire baffled by its complexities. Thackeray’s tentative and unsystematic approach gave him the real advantage of presenting what he had seen as nothing more than one individual’s observations."

The Irishman who emerges from the pages of The Irish *Sketch Book* does not much resemble the Mulligan or the Shandon of Thackeray’s fiction. For the good qualities and the hospitality Thackeray found in Ireland, he gives full credit. In some of the comparisons with England, Ireland receives the more favorable judgment. However, the Irish were incensed that Thackeray had described the shortcomings as well as the virtues that he saw there. Their reception of his book, if typical of Irish temperament, would seem to corroborate his portrayals of the Irish in his fiction as absurdly sensitive and quarrelsome, although in the
Sketch Book he displays very little of this opinion.

As Thackeray had sagely remarked to Lever, Irishmen's feet are all corns; and at a time of intense bitterness the almost contemptuous irony of his report enraged both parties. He ridiculed the frenetic oratory of the Repealers, but he was not much more respectful to the complacency of the ascendancy party. He saw much that was good in the ministrations of the Roman Catholic Church, but sneered at the pomp and pretentious titles of its hierarchy, while the narrow dogmatism of the Protestants also came under fire. . . . All his favorable allusions to the glibness and cheerfulness of the masses, to the efficiency of certain charitable organizations, were obliterated by the verdict that it was "another insult to Ireland."12

Thackeray does not hesitate, it is true, to point out the respects in which England surpassed Ireland. He is equally unhesitating in praising Ireland where praise is due. In the opening chapter of The Irish Sketch Book, he remarks that the crumbling pleasure houses outside Dublin show "more shabbiness than a Londoner will see in the course of his home peregrinations for a year."13 He shows the other side of the picture in noting the handsome estates on the way, and no Irishman could take exception to the description of the attractive entrance to Dublin. Thackeray everywhere relates the sights of Ireland to those of England; most of his readers were English, so that his standards of comparison are also those that would have the greatest illustrative significance for his readers.

Thackeray is quick to notice improvements over the old system in Ireland, and public spirit on the part of the landlords is not overlooked. Surveying the neat cottages of some farm workers, he approves of both the workers and
of the landowner: the cottages "were all so neat that
I could not help fancying they were pet cottages erected
under the landlord's own superintendence, and ornamented
to his order. But he declared that it was not so; that
the only benefit his labourers got from him was constant
work, and a house rent-free; and that the neatness of the
gardens and dwellings was of their own doing."14

Undeniably, Thackeray's conclusions about the Irish
close was the character with which he accompanies his narrative of the
sights are often unflattering. As his carriage stops at
his lodginghouse,
we had an opportunity of at once making
acquaintance with some of the dirtiest rascally
faces that all Ireland presents. . . . People
issued from their shops, heads appeared at windows.
I have seen the Queen pass in state in London, and
not bring together a crowd near so great as that
which assembled in the busiest street of the
second city of the kingdom, just to look at a
green coach and four bay-horses. Have they nothing
else to do?--or is it that they will do nothing
but stare, swagger, and be idle in the streets?15

Limerick reminds him of the worst part of London, leading
him to reflect unfavorably on Irish habits of cleanliness.
Even the oddities of buildings and signs indicate something
about the mental processes of the people who erected them:

After you get out of the Main Street the handsome
part of the town is at an end, and you suddenly
find yourself in such a labyrinth of busy swarming
poverty and squalid commerce as never was seen--
no, not in Saint Giles's, where Jew and Irishman
side by side exhibit their genius for dirt. . . .
High and low, in this country, they begin things
on too large a scale. They begin churches too big
and can't finish them; mills and houses too big,
and are ruined before they are done; letters on
signboards too big, and are up in a corner before
the inscription is finished. There is something
quite strange, really, in this general consistency.16
Yet his observations on Irish hospitality are gracious, and in the hosts he presents to the reader there is no trace of the caricatured fictional Irishman. "If an Irish gentleman does not give you a more hearty welcome than an Englishman, at least he has a more hearty manner of welcoming you; . . . it is clear that for a stranger the Irish ways are the pleasantest, for here he is at once made happy and at home; or at ease rather."17 Again the English suffer in the comparison when the sight of his host's informal and friendly reception of his neighbors moves Thackeray to exclaim, "How different was all this to the ways of a severe English house."18

His highest compliments go to the women of Ireland. His accounts of them are not at all like his invented Irish-women, who are at least faintly ridiculous, whether good-natured or shrewish.

[The ladies] I have seen appear to the full as well educated and refined, and far more frank and cordial, than the generality of the fair creatures on the other side of the Channel. 19

The charming gaiety and frankness of the Irish ladies have been noted and admired by every foreigner who has had the good fortune to mingle in their society; and I hope it is not detracting from the merit of the upper classes to say that the lower are not a whit less pleasing. I never saw in any country such a general grace of manner and ladyhood. In the midst of their gaiety, too, it must be remembered that they are the chastest of women, and that no country in Europe can boast of such a general purity.20

Even the most belligerent of Irish readers could not have complained that Thackeray insulted the women of Ireland here. A large gathering of Irish citizens receives a tribute from Thackeray, who says of the audience at the races,
"There was a brightness and intelligence about this immense Irish crowd, which I don't remember to have seen in an English one." On this occasion he once more was favorably impressed by the women:

... I am bound to say that on rich or poor shoulders I never saw so many handsome faces in my life. In the carriages, among the ladies of Kerry, every second woman was handsome; and there is something peculiarly tender and pleasing in the looks of the young female peasantry that is perhaps even better than beauty.

Those who censured Thackeray for ignoring the beauty of the Irish countryside had not good reason for doing so; in all his writing he specialized rather in human interest than in landscape description, but still he pays tribute to the beauty of the land in the Sketch Book. In his chapter on Killarney, Thackeray admits himself unable to convey the effect of the scenery:

Evergreens and other trees, in their brightest livery; blue sky; roaring water; here black, and yonder foaming of a dazzling white; rocks shining in the dark places, or frowning black against the light, all the leaves and branches keeping up a perpetual waving and dancing round about the cascade; what is the use of putting down all this? A man might describe the cataract of the Serpentine in exactly the same terms, and the reader be no wiser.

The sort of observation which drew down the wrath of the Irish on Thackeray was his disclaiming for England some of Ireland's faults; on a barren farm which could have been cultivated in an Ireland badly in need of food, he passes judgment: "You might travel five hundred miles through England and not see such a spectacle." Still more they
resented his disclosure of some of the less savory aspects of Irish life and character, as in this expression of his distaste which, it must be admitted, is spoken in a tone of moral superiority:

All round the town miserable streets of cabins are stretched. You see people lolling at each door, women staring and combing their hair, men with their little pipes, children whose rags hang on by a miracle, idling in a gutter. Are we to set all this down to absenteeism, and pity poor injured Ireland? Is the landlord's absence the reason why the house is filthy and Biddy lolls in the porch all day! . . . People need not be dirty if they are ever so idle; if they are ever so poor, pigs and men need not live together. . . . The smoke might as well come out of the chimney as out of the door. Why should not Tim do that, instead of walking a hundred-and-sixty miles to a race?25

Such a censure, however, cannot be dismissed as the carping of an anti-Irish John Bull, for Thackeray is generous in his recognition of the more admirable side of the Irish character:

[Ireland] has produced more than its fair proportion of men of genius, valour, and wit. . . .

I have met more gentlemen here than in any place I ever saw: gentlemen of high and low ranks, that is to say: men shrewd and delicate of perception, observant of society, entering into the feelings of others, and anxious to set them at ease or to gratify them of course exaggerating their professions of kindness, and in so far insincere; but the very exaggeration seems to be a proof of a kindly nature, and I wish in England we were a little more complimentary.26

Discussing the schools, which are conducted for the most part by the Catholic priests, he states that "no people are more eager for learning, more apt to receive it, or more grateful for kindness than the Irish."27
Altogether, the picture of the Irish that Thackeray presents in the Sketch Book is a balanced one, seldom warped by prejudice, and frequently laudatory. If Thackeray's idea of the Irish character were to be deduced from this book and from his critical articles, it would be a very different one from that of all his fiction. For his humorous writing and his fiction, Thackeray chooses to exaggerate the follies and to play down the matter-of-fact and the admirable aspects of human nature in many of his characters. This is the case with all his types; it is human nature he holds up to laughter, not only Irish nature. His actual observations appear in some of his characterizations; others are mere caricatures of the weaknesses he has selected to play upon. This tendency to establish a type and to present variations upon it applies to other groups than the Irish in Thackeray's work.

Of the world he knew Thackeray has presented a panorama, a *comédie humaine* in Balzac's sense, enlivened by a number of "specialties" whom he treated broadly, with the pencil of the cartoonist. These specialties include Anglo-Indians, Irishmen, Jews, Frenchmen, artists, social adventurers, servants, and parasites. In depicting these, as well as characters with whom he dealt more seriously, he worked constantly from models.

There is further proof that, while Thackeray enjoyed caricaturing the Irish, he did not single them out for persecution. The *Book of Snobs* (1846-1847) glances at vanities and pretensions in people of all national and political backgrounds. The Irish are there, but so is
everyone else. Thackeray takes aim at their agitators in his chapter "On Radical Snobs." Young Ireland shrieking piteously with nobody hurting him, or waving his battle-axed hand on his battlemented wall, and bellowing his war-cry of BugAboo is considerably closer to the Irishman of Thackeray's stories than to the courteous and hospitable citizens of the Sketch Book. The chapter devoted to Irish Snobs, however, bestows its severest censure on the English offenders: "There is no Snob in existence, perhaps, that has such an indomitable belief in himself: that sneers you down all the rest of the world besides, and has such an insufferable, admirable, stupid contempt for all people but his own—nay, for all sets but his own." Aware as he was of this English leaning toward John-Bullism, Thackeray was unlikely to fall into a blind assumption of English superiority. He shows his recognition of his fondness for ridiculing Irish eccentricities by including himself among the humbuggers: "O Ireland! O my country! (for I make little doubt that I am descended from Brian Boroo too) ..." The Irish Snob chapter contains the germ of several Irish characters Thackeray elaborates in his fiction. He takes the Irish to task for "servility and mean admiration, and trumpery imitations of their neighbours." Here are Mrs. Barry of Barry Lyndon and Mrs. Gam of "Dennis Haggerty's Wife" in essence:

When Mrs. Mulholligan, the grocer's lady, retires to Kingstown, she has "Mulholliganville"
painted over the gate of her villa; and receives you at a door that won't shut, or gasses at you out of a window that is glazed with an old petticoat. 33

Most of Thackeray's fictional Irishmen express this same penchant for claiming to be more aristocratic than they are: "I myself have met as many descendants from Irish kings as would form a brigade."34

Thackeray concentrates in his fiction on the cartoonist's creations, not on the real gentlemen he encountered in Ireland, because for his purposes as a writer the former were by far the more useful. From his own experience he could select the quirks of the Irishmen he had known and play on them for the effect he desired; a serious and flattering portrayal of the Irish would hardly have been material for comedy. His choice of characterization, in the case of his comic Irishmen particularly, also rests upon a sizable literary foundation.

The stage Irishman of the eighteenth century developed through roles like O'Flaherty in Cumberland's The West Indian (1771) and Sir Lucius O'Trigger in Sheridan's The Rivals (1775). It was the Irish novelists of the nineteenth century who were largely responsible for making conventional the stage-Irishman tradition, establishing the types from which some of Thackeray's Irish characteristics are drawn. This stereotype of literature, their handling of the Irish character, contributed as much to Thackeray's treatment of the subject as did his actual contact with the
Irish. (Some special types, notably the mother-in-law, come almost directly from his life, although they too are not without literary antecedents.)

Among the earlier novelists to specialize in the exaggeratedly comic Irish character is Lady Morgan. "Her droll types, blarneying peasants and sheer buffoons, helped with Lover's and Lever's to establish the stage Irishman, half fool, half mountebank, a myth not utterly destroyed till a century later." The Banim brothers, Gerald Griffin, and W. H. Maxwell are some of the minor Irish novelists who helped perpetuate this presentation, with their emphasis on the Irishman as a fantastic sort of creature. William Carleton, primarily a serious writer, "had his share in the evolution of the stage Irishman, through his congenital love of capering and clowning."36

Thackeray's mentor and model, William Maginn, is another writer in this tradition, as well as the original of at least one of Thackeray's Irishmen. As the editor of Fraser's Magazine, Maginn influenced the young writer, then a contributor to his magazine. It was his critical writing with which Thackeray was directly in contact—so closely, in fact, that some of their work is indistinguishable.

Few writers have, indeed, been so completely an outgrowth of their literary environment as was Thackeray—and few have so completely transcended that environment. At the commencement of his work for Fraser's he sedulously imitated William Maginn; at the end he had fashioned himself to the creation of Vanity Fair. It is interesting to note that in this
development nothing was at any time relinquished; the satirist kept to the last unsparing and jealous vigil over the oncoming sentimentalist.

It is impossible to find in the early volumes articles characteristic of his workmanship. Indeed, if there is anything characteristic about his writing in this period it is his apparently intentional effort at self-concealment, his eagerness to step boldly forth in the jaunty disguise of William Maginn. So painstaking was his imitation that in work where the two men are known to have collaborated, it is impossible on the score of style to decide where the shift of hands occurs. From the point of view of subject matter much of Maginn's writing could not be attributed to his youthful assistant, but there is no passage of Thackeray's early work which could not be attributed to Maginn.37

This quotation refers primarily, of course, to the satiric tone in review-writing which Thackeray adopted from Maginn, but the closeness of their relationship as writers would make it almost certain that Thackeray was familiar with Maginn's Irish stories "mocking at the recognized foibles of the stage Irish."38

One of the most popular of the writers in this tradition was Charles James Lever, "pledged to the task of entertaining readers obsessed with the notion that the Irishman was a comic animal."39 Thackeray visited Lever in Ireland and dedicated The Irish Sketch Book to him. Not only did he know Lever, but he was well acquainted with Lever's work, and used it in his "Prize Novelists" series for Punch.

"Phil Fogarty, a Tale of the Fighting Cneth-Cneth, by Harry Rollicker," ... is the broadest conceivable burlesque of the boisterous high jinks that mark the military novels which Lever wrote over the pen-name of "Harry Lorrequer." Lever's customary mixture of sentiment and brutality is expertly hit off, and a diabolically clever parody of his efforts in verse is supplied.40
Thackeray was quite aware of the dissimilarity between the real and the stage or literary Irishman. In following Maginn, Lever, and the other Irish writers, he recognized the fictitious nature of the characters which were contributing to his own comic Irishmen. One of his critical articles for *Fraser's* "A Box of Novels" (1844), comments on the work of Carleton and Griffin, and reviews novels by Lever and Lover. The article contains this pronouncement on the stage Irishman, and incidentally gives a clue to his own reasons for following the stereotype:

But we in England have adopted our idea of the Irishman, and, like the pig-imitator's audience in the fable . . . we will have the sham Irishman in preference to the real one, and will laugh at the poor wag, whatever his mood may be. . . . What a number of false accounts, for instance, did poor Power give to English playgoers, about Ireland! He led Cockneys to suppose that all that Irish gaiety was natural and constant; that Paddy was in a perpetual whirl of high spirits and whisky; for ever screeching and whooping mad song and wild jokes; a being entirely devoid of artifice and calculation; it is only after an Englishman has seen the country that he learns how false these jokes are; how sad these high spirits, and how cunning and fitful that exuberant joviality, which we have been made to fancy are the Irishman's everyday state of mind.41

It is thus apparent that Thackeray's fictional Irish characters are partly the products of a literary convention, modified by his skill as a writer, his ideas as a humorist, and his own conception of the Irish character. To these factors we must add what he took from his experiences, both in his professional association with Irish writers and in his personal association with his Irish in-laws, the Shawes.
A brief list of the traits of his fictional Irish, each of whom has some of the qualities listed, would include: belligerence; fanaticism about Ireland; claims to descent from kings; self-delusion; pretentiousness about background and family possessions; lack of scruples; and speech written in brogue. These qualities will be considered in more detail in the following chapters, which will discuss some of Thackeray's Irish characters individually.
CHAPTER TWO
COMIC IRISH CHARACTERS

I

Most of the Irish characters in Thackeray's fiction are used for comic effect, with the comedy ranging from farcical clowning to skilled satire. The stage Irishman is somewhere in the background of all these comic characters; the early ones are particularly close to the literary tradition of the Irishman as buffoon. Others more nearly resemble someone who served as their model than they do the collection of stereotyped traits, but all possess some of the qualities which Thackeray ascribes to the Irish. The pages on which they appear contain many references to family estates back in Ireland, distinguished relatives, kingly ancestors. The characters are usually garrulous, often touchy on the subject of their honor (and that of their country), seldom troubled by a scrupulous conscience, and ordinarily extremely fond of drink.

Thackeray's Irish characters are not mere objects of ridicule, however; his later ones especially are made more human than the literary types they follow, and may be as kind and generous as any of Thackeray's characters. Nevertheless, their first utility to him is as sources of comedy. The Irish were already an established topic for humor with English readers, and Thackeray felt satisfied that he knew them well enough to develop the subject still
farther. Since he was in this way repeating old jokes, Thackeray was not called upon to use his imagination very much, but his Irishmen show touches of originality, and the best of them are distinct individuals.

An aspect of Thackeray's Irish characters which deserves attention is the brogue with which most of them speak; it is put in the mouths of most of his essentially Irish characters. This too had been used by Thackeray's predecessors in writing of the Irish, the ones most frequently employing the device being the Irish novelists themselves. To Thackeray this practice presented no difficulty; on the contrary, it allowed one of his favorite eccentricities of writing. He was extraordinarily fond of mimicking peculiarities of speech—even his letters are full of them; writing in odd accents seems to have been more comfortable for him than addressing his friends straightforwardly.

In The Yellowplush Papers Thackeray tried his hand at a sort of Cockney accent, which he used to an extent more distracting than amusing. However, his novels and stories containing passages of Irish brogue have them inserted into a background of correct English rather than composing the body of the writing as Yellowplush's dialect does; they therefore avoid the pitfall of a too long maintained distortion of language. Thackeray resisted the temptation to brogue with few of his Irish characters. Indeed, it is a suitable part of a realistic presentation, for to an
English listener the brogue would be the most noticeable and memorable quality of an Irishman's speech. There is always the danger, however, that because the brogue is automatically assumed to be amusing, a writer will neglect the content of the speeches and concentrate on the dialect. Even the authenticity of Thackeray's rendition of brogue has been questioned; but its authenticity is not, of course, of primary importance in the author's presentation of a character. The brogue has shortcomings and is a rather obvious way of trying for comic effect, but when Thackeray uses it appropriately, as in his utilization of it to contribute to the tone of an episode, it adds to the characterization and is an integral part of the humor.

The brogue and other traits of the Irish comically presented are used by Thackeray in a variety of ways; his development of each character is different. In Pendennis there is an excellent example of the diversity of characterization Thackeray achieves within the Irish pattern: each of the three major Irish characters, Captain Costigan, his daughter Emily, and Captain Shandon, is made an individual. Mrs. O'Dowd of Vanity Fair is a quite different sort of Irishwoman from Emily Costigan. The Mulligan of Mrs. Perkins's Ball, Major Goliah Gahagan, and even the hero of Thackeray's burlesque of Lever, Phil Fogarty, are distinct from one another. There is not, in Thackeray's work, one standard Irish character revived and renamed for each new book. Each one is a new person,
although linked to the other Irish characters by a number of traits in common.

II

The Mulligan, the central comic figure of Mrs. Perkins's Ball, is perhaps the closest of Thackeray's original Irish characters to the blundering stage Irishman. He is, in fact, an exaggeration of that already exaggerated literary stereotype. None of the characters of Mrs. Perkins's Ball is intended to be taken seriously; this is one of Thackeray's Christmas books, told under his nom de plume of Michael Angelo Titmarsh (published for Christmas 1846). Professor Ray comments:

To enjoy the full flavour of Thackeray's Christmas books, they should be read in their pretty original format: the type large and heavily leaded, Thackeray's quaint illustrations coloured by hand, and the whole bound in glazed white boards. So presented, they can be taken for what Thackeray intended them to be, agreeable trifles devised to pass an hour pleasantly.  

The Mulligan's role in this Christmas book is that of the clown; the chief source of humor is the contrast between his view of himself and the way he really is. Thackeray, as Titmarsh, exposes the pretensions of all the guests at the ball, but none is as wildly self-deceived as the Mulligan. Thackeray is aiming at neither realism nor subtle irony in this piece; here the joke is always obvious.

In the Mulligan, Thackeray embodies many of the more eccentric qualities of the Irishmen of fiction, playing up
each for all the humor it will yield him. The Mulligan is to the full the mannerless, unaware, attention-getting Irishman, out of place in even the very modest society of Mrs. Perkins's level. The way he forces himself upon Titmarsh as a guest for the party is typical of his attitude and prefigures his conduct at the ball.

Although Thackeray is not attempting subtlety in his delineation of this character, he lets the Mulligan reveal himself rather than giving that task to the narrator. Such a presentation calls for rendition in brogue of his conversation. The content of his speeches would demonstrate his Irishness even in standard English. Thus Titmarsh's mock-innocent question about the location of Ballymulligan is answered by the Mulligan's displeasure at "Saxon curiousitee," establishing at once that he is one of the legion who have a partially or wholly imaginary ancestral home in Ireland, stress their Irish citizenship, and are inclined to be belligerent.

Every consequent action builds up the first impression. Titmarsh's clergyman uncle incurs threats of being pitched out the window when he addresses Mr. Mulligan: "Would you deprive me, sir, of the title which was bawrun be me princelee ancestors in a hundred thousand battles?" He manages a reference to Ballymulligan Castle in his introductory remarks to his hostess. Startling Miss Perkins at the piano, the Mulligan asks for the "Oirish Melodies." On the dance-floor he becomes a figure of slapstick comedy.
Sweeping his terrified partner into a jig, he emits "a war-cry which caused every Saxon heart to shudder and quail." Thackeray is deliberately carrying the myth of the Irish clown to its extreme of absurdity, a treatment he does not attempt to repeat with his subsequent Irishmen.

Mock-heroics are appropriate to this approach, and Thackeray makes use of them. The Mulligan drunkenly insults the master of the house and is ordered to leave. "At this, with a scream like that of a Hyrcanian tiger, Mulligan of the hundred battles sprang forward at his prey." The play on warlike Irish patriotism continues to the end of the piece. Escorted out by Titmarsh, the Mulligan wants to avenge "the wrongs of Erin in battle line; he wished also to share the grave of Sarsfield and Hugh O'Neill; but he was sure that Miss Perkins, as well as Miss Little, was desperately in love with him; and I left him on a doorstep in tears."

_Mrs. Perkins's Ball_, an unpretentious little sketch, succeeds in its author's intention of being lightly amusing. The Mulligan shows what Thackeray can do with the same Irish qualities which he gives to more realistic characters in his novels. The traits that here border on the fantastic are believable in such a character as Captain Costigan. Even the apparently highly unrealistic Mulligan has been taken for a copy of an actual person:

The personality of the Mulligan is said to have been, if not exactly claimed by, identified with
several existing human beings--and resented by some of them. The favourite has, I believe, been that famous and eccentric but very popular fire-eater and patriot The O'Gorman Mahon ...

The Mulligan and the Christmas book in which he appears are minor in Thackeray's work, but they made their impression. Fifteen years after the book's publication, an invitation to Thackeray to lecture at Belfast promised: "At least I will put it out of Mulligan's power to make your appearance a pecuniary loss... The Mulligans don't flourish and abound here."  

III

Two of Thackeray's Irish pieces are related, not by having the same characters, but by a shared literary background: common to both is the fact that they burlesque the novels of Charles Lever. Contrary to what might be expected, it is the later story which is the direct parody. The earlier, The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan, which was published in The New Monthly Magazine in 1838-1839, contains much of Thackeray's invention and much from other sources than Lever; "Phil Fogarty" of the Punch's Prize Novelists series (1847) is an open burlesque of such Lever novels as Tom Burke of Ours.

Major Gahagan is only loosely related to Lever; in fact, most Thackeray scholars do not remark on any connection between the work of the two authors except for "Phil Fogarty." One of the few critics who notes the relationship mentions that "another Lever parody is the longish Tremendous
Adventures of Major Gahagan. Napoleon, as usual, is introduced (he is on St. Helena) to compliment the hero. Professor Ray interprets it instead as the fruit of Thackeray's hours of hearing Major Carmichael-Smyth and other veterans of Indian campaigns reminisce. "And to readers whose acquaintance with Indian language and geography and with old-time Anglo-Indian usages is limited, Thackeray's burlesque sometimes assumes the aspect of a private joke." Thackeray's early childhood in India, his birthplace, must have contributed something to the information he provides in Major Gahagan.

The hero and narrator, Goliah Gahagan, is as exaggerated in his way as the Mulligan. A commentator calls the story "as brilliant an exhibition of Irish humour as of Thackeray's ability to out-Munchausen Munchausen." Thackeray was evidently pleased with his creation, for Gahagan is one of his numerous noms de plume, becoming his spokesman several years later for "Sultan Stork, translated from the Persian by Major G. O'G. Gahagan, H.E.I.C.S." The fantastic adventures related by Gahagan allow their author to place one absurdity after another, all with the air of reporting facts. The active imaginations of Thackeray's other Irishmen pale beside this one, and the claims of valor made by the others are modest in comparison. Gahagan's exploits are not told in brogue, which would have been unsuitable for the first-person narrative. Gahagan acknowledges that it is his natural way of speaking,
which he possessed on his arrival in India, but implies that it has been modified during his absence from Ireland. Agitation causes him to revert to "the phraseology peculiar to my own country," so that when he impersonates an Indian warrior in the enemy camp he lets slip, "fighting is like... and dthrink to Ga—to Bobbachy, I manel." 14

As for announcements of noble descent, he calls himself "a beggarly Irish ensign," although he is prepared to claim every kind of distinction for his accomplishments. "I have been at more pitched battles, led more forlorn hopes, had more success among the fair sex, drunk harder, read more, been a handsomer man than any officer now serving Her Majesty." 15

He has a fellow feeling for other Irishmen, and military life in this account seems to be full of them. His companions in arms are such men as Sergeant-Major Higgory and O'Gawler of the King's Dragoons. An Irish journalist even turns up in the middle of Spain—Mr. Toone O'Connor Emmett Fitzgerald Sheeny of Trinity College, Dublin—and Gahagan comes upon him pleading for his life "in an agonised brogue." 16

The most outstanding Irish characteristic of Gahagan is the basis for the story's humor: an indifference to the limitations of fact. The hero can coolly recount a battle day on which he headed nineteen cavalry charges, took seventeen field-pieces, and had eleven elephants shot under him. This refusal to let reality limit him extends to his
self-estimates; his list of the forces staffing his
garrison of 1125 includes seventy-four ladies, fifty-one
men, and Major-General O'G. Gahagan; "I count myself good
for a thousand, for so I was regularly rated in the army."17
He downs the enemy leader by firing a cannon loaded with
a bottle of olives. The adventures could have gone on
indefinitely. They did not impose on their author the
necessity for realistic character presentation, nor did
they require careful plotting. His writing skill was employed
only in maintaining the breezy style of Gahagan's narrative.
There is no elaboration of character, and the middle of the
story could just as well be at the beginning. Thackeray's
ability is demonstrated by no more than the naturalness of
his expression and the aptness of his humor.

"Phil Fogarty" illustrates his skill in a different
way, for it shows how well he could analyze the style of
another author and reproduce it. (See Chapter One, p. 16.)
*Punch's Prize Novelists*, of which it is a part, is a series
parodying seven popular authors of the time, including
Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli (and Thackeray himself as
Yellowplush) as well as Lever.18 It catches Lever's tone
very well, seizing on the weaknesses of his writing and
emphasizing them.19 It also indicates to what extent
Thackeray's Irishmen are related to those of other writers.
Some of the traits are the same, but Thackeray's characters
are truer to human nature, if themselves exaggerated.
Fogarty has the braggadocio and belligerence of Thackeray's own Irish, with their insistence on the honor of their family: "a Fogarty never surrenders," and of Ireland: "an Irishman was never a traitor." He has his brandy on the battlefield; his home is Castle Fogarty. The brogue speeches are provided by Fogarty's subordinate Lanty Clancy. Thackeray manages a confident statement of incredible actions, and ends his brief tale with the hero's flight (on an Irish horse) "with an army of a hundred and seventy-three thousand eight hundred men at my heels . . ."20

Both Major Gahagan and "Phil Fogarty" take an approach which does not permit the use of Thackeray's chief ability as a writer, for his excellence is in his depiction of the interaction of personalities in society. These two pieces have their action on the battlefield and are concerned with far-fetched adventures. The quality which they demonstrate is Thackeray's cleverness. His real skill and power become apparent when the battle is that of one personality against another and the field of action is a London tavern or a banker's dining room. The heroes of these adventure stories are like his other Irish characters, however, in that the same failings are bestowed on them, and for the same purpose, basically: to make the reader laugh. The humor here is of a different type from that of the novels; the background and the style are different; but the use of the Irishman as a source of humor carries through from Gahagan to Pendennis.
IV

In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray varies his comic Irish presentation by making the character a woman, Mrs. O'Dowd. Her husband, Major O'Dowd, is so much overshadowed by her that he is a very minor character in the novel. Mrs. O'Dowd substitutes for the usual comic Irishman and is the possessor of most of the qualities which are designed to make him amusing. She has her admirable attributes too, and is not a mere one-sided figure like the Mulligan and Gahagan, although her grotesque appearance in her yellow turban trimmed with a bird of paradise, her brogue, and her claims to family distinction mark her a sister to them.

Peggy O'Dowd first sweeps onto the scene to introduce herself to Amelia Osborne: "Madam, I'm delighted to see ye; and to present to you me husband, Meejor O'Dowd." She quickly adds that she was a Malony of Glenmalony—"the Malonys, whom she believed to be the most famous family in the world." She displays a rather overwhelming confidence and vitality, completely unaware, as is the rule with Thackeray's Irish characters, of how her audience sees her.

Mrs. O'Dowd has toured the world as an army wife, yet to her, Ireland outdoes all other countries in every respect, and the Malony estate is the most splendid in Ireland, handsomer by far than the Hotel de Ville of Brussels. Thackeray puts her comparisons in her own words so that brogue colors her exclamations. "Our greeps weighs six pounds every bunch of 'em, and upon me honor and conscience
I think our magnolias is as big as taykettles." The songs of her country are superior to the French opera, and she is certain that she has the finest jewels in the opera house when she wears her Cairngorms. Her husband's family is not quite up to the level of her own, but in her opinion it is "an ancient family that any nobleman might be proud to marry into." Thackeray makes Peggy O'Dowd an extravagant talker, foolish in her way and laughable, but she is also a sympathetic character. As a wife she is loyal and sensible, and when she packs her husband's belongings before he goes off to Waterloo, "who is there will deny that this worthy lady's preparations betokened affection as much as the fits of tears and hysterics by which more sensitive females exhibited their love?" Her real affection for him makes her sleepless with anxiety for his safety. In her role of loyal wife she contrasts with Becky Sharp, who takes her husband's departure with great composure. Mrs. O'Dowd is no mere caricature. Her author fashions her to win respect for her compassionate treatment of Amelia. It is noteworthy that in the anxious hours before the cannon begin firing, the brogue is considerably less noticeable in her speech. Incongruous humor had to be avoided at a serious point in the story, so Thackeray reproduces very little of her speech directly in the passages dealing with this period of time.

In the episode of the wait in Brussels while the battle is under way at Waterloo, Mrs. O'Dowd develops into a heroic
rather than a comic figure. She refuses to abandon the wounded soldier she is nursing, and denounces Jos Sedley for a coward when he flees the city. Her refusal cheers her companions—"A pretty figure I'd be, wouldn't I, stuck behind that chap on a pillion?" The humor is now her own; she is no longer the object of it, and the reader laughs with her at Sedley.

She reappears later in the novel in India, resuming her earlier role as the comic character. She is now joined by her sister-in-law Glorvina (very probably named for the Irish princess of Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl*), her second in command. Now Lady O'Dowd, she returns to eccentric behavior. Performing a jig at Government House, she dances down several stalwart men. Thackeray sums up her character at this point, and the sympathetic aspects predominate:

"kind in act and thought; impetuous in temper; eager to command; a tyrant over her Michael; a dragon amongst all the ladies of the regiment; a mother to all the young men." Irish belligerence is displayed in her constant quarrels with Glorvina; these are the feminine counterpart of the eagerness for dueling prominent in Thackeray's male Irish characters. Irish boasting comes out in her proclamations of the aristocracy of the Malony family. "In adversity she was the best of comforters, in good fortune the most troublesome of friends."

Although similar on many points to Thackeray's Irishmen, Mrs. O'Dowd gets from Thackeray the respectful treatment due a lady. Her costume may be as startling as Gahagan's and
her jig as flamboyant as the Mulligan's, but she is a rounded character as they are not. One explanation for the difference in presentation is the difference between *Vanity Fair* and *Mrs. Perkings Hall*. The Christmas book is not serious in tone or intention, but the novel is, and its characters must be credible human beings rather than caricatures or actors in a burlesque. In *Mrs. O'Dowd*, Thackeray modifies the personality traits of his earlier Irish comic characters to make a believable woman whose peculiarities are no more than could be met among one's acquaintances. At the same time, her eccentricities are drawn from his group of Irish traits and represent the fictional, conventional side of her portrait.

V

The most memorable of Thackeray's Irish characters is Captain Costigan, who makes his first appearance in *Pendennis* and his second in *The Newcomes*. He has all the vanities and weaknesses of Thackeray's other Irishmen, but is a convincing and expertly drawn character. That he is true to life Thackeray gives testimony in *The Roundabout Papers*:

In the novel of "Pendennis," written ten years ago, there is an account of a certain Costigan, whom I had invented (as I suppose authors invent their personages out of scraps, heel-taps, odds and ends of characters). I was smoking in a tavern parlour one night—and this Costigan came into the room alive—the very man—the most remarkable resemblance of the printed sketches of the man, of the rude drawings in which I had depicted him. He had the same little coat, the same battered hat, cocked on
one eye, the same twinkle in that eye. "Sir," said I, "may I offer you a glass of brandy-and-water?" "Bedad, ye may," says he, "and I'll sing ye a song tu." Of course he spoke with an Irish brogue. Of course he had been in the army. . . . Who has not felt that little shock which arises when a person, a place, some words in a book (there is always a collocation) present themselves to you, and you know that you have before met the same person, words, scene, and so forth?27

This man who later came to life follows the established actions of Thackeray's Irish comic characters, with their background of literary convention, and every trait of his can be found in one or more of them.

Before the reader sees Costigan, Pendennis' letter to his uncle relates that Costigan's ancestors were Irish kings. It is an illustration of the boy's naivété that he believes this, and he soon grows less credulous. Costigan's ancestors are taken seriously by no one but their descendant, who never quite relinquishes the illusion that he displays an aristocratic demeanor. In London, he takes the family of the porter at his lodgings to Vauxhall, but is confident of a difference in their rank. "A man descended, like Costigan, from a long line of Hibernian kings, chieftains, and other magnates and sheriffs of the county, had of course too much dignity and self-respect to walk arrum-in-arrum (as the Captain phrased it) with a lady who occasionally swept his room out, and cooked his mutton-chops."28

His allusions to his proud family, the Costigans of Costiganstown, are in accord with the formula. There is, as might be expected, a Castle Costigan. The unpleasantness
of reality almost breaks in upon the Captain as he admits that the family estate has sadly declined; but it has regained its former glory, if indeed the castle has ever existed in anything besides his imagination, when he informs a coachman that the Pendennis home is nothing to Castle Costigan.

It is not solely his own family which has the benefit of Costigan's inventions. He easily persuades himself that young Pendennis has a fine estate and envisions Pen's becoming his son-in-law, rising in position to be "a Member of Parliament for his native town of Clavering, when he is of age to take that responsible station." Major Pendennis manages to bring him to earth long enough to shatter his fantasies about Pen's park and mansion, but he quickly recovers from his knowledge that the widow Pendennis has a modest country home and nothing more. Not long after his enlightenment he meets Pen at Vauxhall and exclaims to the porter's wife, "I've known 'um since childhood, Mrs. Bolton; he's the proprietor of Fairoaks Castle, and many's the cooper of claret I've dthrunck there with the first nobilitoe of his native countee." He does not hesitate to make this declaration in Pen's presence, for he can genuinely overlook that he has never entered the gates of Fairoaks.

Even his real rank in the army is doubtful; it seems that he served mainly as an entertainer, singing at officers' tables. Some call him General--none seriously--but Captain
is the title he prefers. He is full of anecdotes about
his military life, and delighted to have an audience for
his name-dropping: "... when my kind friend, His Royal
Highness the Duke of Kent, was in Gibraltar."\(^3\)

Costigan's self-delusion and expected Irish manipulation
of facts are not to be held against him. "The Captain was
not only unaccustomed to tell the truth,—he was unable
even to think it—and fact and fiction reeled together in
his muzzy, whiskified brain."\(^3\) Thackeray sums up his
character near the beginning of *Pendennis*: "he was at once
brave and maudlin, humorous and an idiot; always good-natured,
and sometimes almost trustworthy. Up to the last day of his
life, he would drink with any man, and back any man's bill:
and his end was in a spunging-house, where the sheriff's
officer, who took him, was fond of him."\(^3\) Thackeray would
have done better to let the reader form these conclusions
for himself, for they are sufficiently obvious.

The Captain's appearance matches his manner. He wears
"a shabby military cape with a mangy collar, and a hat
cocked very much over one eye." His apparel is always
shabby, and always rakish. Heedless of his condition, he
recounts stories of the military days "when I bore Her
Majesty's commission in the Fighting Hundred and Third,"\(^3\)
and the reader sees that Costigan believes himself still
the dashing figure of his youth.\(^3\)

To illuminate Costigan's way of life, Thackeray gives
an account of his compatriots which also applies to the
Mulligan and to some of the Irish journalists of Pendennis:

I take it, no foreigner understands the life of an Irish gentleman without money, the way in which he manages to keep afloat—the wind-raising conspiracies in which he engages with heroes as unfortunate as himself—the means by which he contrives, during most days of the week, to get his portion of whisky-and-water: all these are mysteries to us inconceivable; but suffice it to say, that through all the storms of life Jack had floated somehow, and the lamp of his nose had never gone out.

Costigan's charm lies in his readiness to believe his inventions; meaning no harm by his fabrications, he derives pleasure from his escape into them, and his drab existence is relieved by his pretense of prosperity. When he, "with Irish hospitality," offers refreshments to Major Pendennis, he declares that his daughter keeps the cellar keys, while she is at that moment sending out to a tavern for wine. When he cannot ignore his financial condition, he feels that his respectability maintains him, overlooking his usual state of inebriation and the fact that his daughter supports him. "Jack Costigan, though poor, is a gentleman" might well be his motto.

The idea of honor is very important to all Thackeray's Irishmen, who are prepared to fight for it on any occasion. Costigan's duels and challenges play a large part in his stories of his valorous past. When Pen is jostled on the Vauxhall dance floor, the Captain volunteers to carry his challenge to the insulter; when Pen declines his offer, he counters with remarks about honor. True to his vision of himself as a stout chevalier, he rushes to the rescue at the
sound of female shrieks and demands an accounting in a
hopelessly unchivalric brogue—"What's that noise?"—
upon which the door is shut "on Cos's venerable red nose."

None of Thackeray's Irishmen shrinks from liquor (the
brief notices of Pen's laundress, Mrs. Flanagan, show her
drinking herself into insensibility), but Costigan outdoes
them all in his enthusiasm for it. Indulgence is always
followed by an increase in his already astonishing loquacity
and in his emotionalism. When Thackeray writes a comic
scene of Costigan drunk and voluble in the Back Kitchen,
he is combining two somewhat worn themes for humor—the
drunkard and the Irishman—but he succeeds in creating an
authentic atmosphere for them. Costigan singing and
exclaiming in his brogue is perfectly in harmony with the
London tavern, a smoky room full of Irish writers, university
students, soldiers, and even members of Parliament. Costigan's
drunkenness figures again in the opening chapter of The
Newcomes when he angers Colonel Newcome by his "outrageous"
song in the Cave of Harmony.

Costigan's daughter Emily, otherwise the actress Miss
Fotheringay, is a beautiful, amiable, and stupid young woman
who little resembles her volatile father. She is Irish but
the brogue is one of the few characteristics linking her
with Thackerayan Irish characters. Her role is that of the
initial love interest in Pendennis. The comedy rises from
Pen's romanticized view of her rather than from any pretensions
on her part; while he is quoting Byron to her, she is meditating on how to prepare the mutton for dinner. In her practicality and lack of imagination, she is a departure from the standard Irish concept in Thackeray, so that one must conclude that she is Irish only because her being Costigan's daughter is a convenient way to include her in the plot. Her marriage to rich old Lord Mirabel is useful as a device to present Costigan in a new situation. He has at last a name to drop truthfully, and when allowed to visit Lady Mirabel's dinner party he is as pathetic as he is amusing; he does his best to fit in with the titled guests by using the longest words and the most elaborate speeches he can muster, so that even the servants can hardly restrain their laughter. It is only a short while until he is enough at ease there to give way and disgrace himself. His drunkenness at the Mirabel table causes him to be forbidden there, although his practical daughter is also dutiful and sees that he is not left destitute.

The Captain's memory of theatrical tours with his daughter allows him a gratifying demonstration of heroism to end his part in Pendennis. He saves the runaway convict Altamont from the still less sympathetic character pursuing him by breaking a gutter to his window, having warned the pursuer that a man had fallen already. Highly pleased with his accomplishment, he relates that he thought of the "easy stratagem by remembering his darling Emilie, when she acted the part of Cora in the Pike—and by the bridge in Pezawro, bedad."
Costigan has all the familiar ways of Thackeray’s Irish characters—the claims to royal descent, the insistence on his own and his family’s honor, the fondness for drink, and the inability to see himself as he is—but he is more real than most of them. The author suits him to his milieu; he fits into the wide and varied world of London inhabitants. He is also completely consistent with himself. His character once established, every word he speaks is what such a man would say, so that it is not surprising for Thackeray to have found him to be true after all.

VI

One special group of Irishmen in Thackeray’s fiction owes its existence to his years as an apprentice writer. Before the success of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray wrote under various pseudonyms and on a variety of subjects; during this period he came to know well the habits of the journalists working in London, many of them Irish. (See Lionel Stevenson’s comments, quoted in Chapter One, pp. 2-3.) His family and upbringing had been unlike theirs, and he saw them with a critical eye.

The appearance of Thackeray in Maclise’s portrait of the Round Table company of Fraserians in 1835 was visible evidence of the social group to which Thackeray perforce belonged. His acceptance as a Fraserian, later as a “Punch man,” fixed his early career firmly in the world of London journalism, a less respectable world, in those days, than the Thackerays were in the habit of entering. There one quality marked him off from his “low” friends: “His outer breeding, which,” in Carlyle’s words, was “fixed enough and perfect according to the modern English style.” Thackeray’s education, abortive as it had been, was a social distinction in this circle; few of his fellow Fraserians were Oxford or Cambridge men...
Although Thackeray had then to work for his living on the same terms as the Irish and other writers who staffed London newspapers and magazines, he felt apart from them; his early prosperity and the aristocratic bearing of the mother who so strongly influenced him were not to be ignored.

Thackeray's awareness of the idiosyncrasies and shortcomings of his fellow writers led him to use them as comic material; in Pendennis he reproduces the tone of their lives, and even more dangerous, patterns his characters on individuals he knew. This utilization of his journalistic education brought some trouble upon him when the novel was published.

One section of Pendennis gave offence to old friends; and that was the section recounting Pen's adventures as a London Journalist. It was evident that the Thackeray who had once depended for a living on the Constitutional, Fraser's, the Examiner, and the Morning Chronicle had now given himself airs. The tone in which he wrote about his old occupation and companions was offensive. Arthur Pendennis (an obvious self-portrait) was a supercilious puppy, and Shandon, Bacon, Bungay, Wenham, Wagg, Archer, and others of the scribbling or publishing community, were all very easily identified with real people. Thackeray had not handled the men of Fleet Street and Paternoster Row with gloves on, and since he had only just escaped from this milieu, and was now being courted by Belgravia, many of his older friends might be pardoned for accusing him of snobbery and bad taste.

The attacks came down on him from all sides, led by his former associates. Professor Ray identifies the novel's characters:

"The publishers Bentley and Colburn are there as Bacon and Bungay; as in Vanity Fair Wagg and Wenham represent Theodore Hook and John Wilson Croker; Tom Hill is drawn as Archer; and William John O'Connell and Jack Sheehan also make their bows."
Although Thackeray's picture of journalistic practices brought abuse on him, he is only representing the situation as it was, perhaps slanting it a bit for effect, and even his hostile critic Professor Greig admits:

Journalism in the 1830s was a rough-and-tumble business, still doubtfully becoming to a gentleman (which Thackeray assumed himself to be). Not a few of its practitioners were, at best, pretty shabby Bohemians, and, at worst, thoroughly dishonest; for it was not until later that the Victorian Code deodorized the traditions of eighteenth-century Grub Street. Thackeray knew his men when, in Pendennis, he portrayed London journalists as he had seen them in the thirties. There were honest men among them, certainly, but a good many pretty sorry rogues as well.45

During the years of Thackeray's introduction to professional writing, he was in reduced circumstances himself, but was unaccustomed to the hand-to-mouth existence of the Irish journalists. He examined them from the viewpoint of an outsider; their world was indeed a foreign country to him, and not an impressive one. In 1832 Thackeray records in his diary that Dr. Maginn showed him the mysteries of the newspaper trade at the Standard office;46 he found his first acquaintances in that occupation lacking in admirable qualities, and notes that he "dined with Dr. Maginn at Kean's head—a dull party of low literary men."47 The contempt implied by this remark is stronger than anything Thackeray's colleagues censured in Pendennis; perhaps as he came to know the group better he acquired more tolerance, for he as the speaker in his novel displays a good-natured attitude toward most of the inhabitants of
literary Bohemia, and the ensuing passages of his diary show that he had many more dinners with Maginn and his group. The Irish writers in *Pendennis* provide amusement; Thackeray laughs at them, but is sympathetic more often than scornful.

One of the practices which Thackeray describes in *Pendennis* is that of writing on either or both sides of a political question, for the writers frequently had to be more concerned with using their talents to win their bread than with supporting a principle. The first Irish journalist Pendennis meets illustrates this operation. He is Doolan, who first interested Pen in a career as a writer with his mention of a novelist who gets "three hundred pounds a volume." When Pen sees him in London, he is affably dining with Hoolan, staff member of a rival newspaper. Description of their mutual friendliness prompts the authorial remark, "Many of our journals are officered by Irish gentlemen, and their gallant brigade does the penning among us, as their ancestors used to transact the fighting in Europe; and engage under many a flag, to be good friends when the battle is over." Their conversation reveals that their superiors who hurl epithets at each other in their columns are on amicable terms in private life, and readily exchange sides when the pay makes a change of allegiance worthwhile.

The leading talent among Thackeray's Irish writers is his Captain Shandon, generally accepted as a representation of William Maginn.
... the capital likeness is that of Maginn as Captain Shandon. Given Maginn's actual character, Thackeray's portrait seems accurate enough. If his weakness, his improvidence, and his fondness for the bottle are displayed, so are his honesty and warmth, his wit and learning. Thackeray's picture of Shandon in the Fleet Prison composing his prospectus for the Pall Mall Gazette—a journal which is "written by gentlemen for gentlemen" and whose "conductors speak to the classes in which they live and were born"—arouses an amused sympathy rather than scorn. But Maginn's friends, who had little understanding of the relationship obtaining between him and Thackeray in the 1830s, were not slow to accuse Thackeray of treacherous ingratitude in their bitter resentment of this portrait.49

Maginn is an important figure in Thackeray's career, more so for his effect on Thackeray's craft as a writer than for his role as Shandon's original. He was a brilliant man, well-educated, whose admirable qualities could not save him from his weaknesses.50 He entered Dublin University at the age of eleven (sixteen was the usual minimum) and received his B.A. and later his LL.B. and LL.D. from that school. He had an extensive knowledge of languages and of the classics; Thackeray, inspired by him, made a short-lived resolution to read Homer daily.51 He wrote for Blackwood's Magazine, then came to London, where he soon held the position of "acknowledged overlord of this journalistic Bohemia."52 His excessive drinking and his imprudence left both his health and his finances in poor condition, and after release from the Fleet Prison he died of tuberculosis.53

Such was the man who served Thackeray as his model for Shandon. This character is different from Thackeray's ordinary comic Irishmen of no great wit; Shandon is obviously intelligent and talented, although Thackeray does not spare his failings. His generosity is noted, but "He would sign
his name at the back of any man's bill, and never pay any 
debt of his own. He would write on any side, and attack 
himself or another man with equal indifference. He was 
one of the wittiest, the most amiable, and the most incorri-
gible of Irishmen. Some of the alteration which Thackeray 
makes in Maginn's history bring him closer to the humorous 
Irish characters; Shandon is, for example, a former member 
of the Irish militia, and the more fanciful Irish characters 
have usually had their military experience. Thackeray's 
Shandon is a man of great ability, but sadly flawed. His 
weakness for drink is of course noted; on receipt of a five-
pound note, he leaves his wife and child in his prison cell, 
returning only when the money has been spent on drink and 
cards.

The Captain resembles his fictional compatriots in his 
basic shortcoming, the one that is the undoing of every 
Thackerayan Irishman: his inability to see himself as he 
is, and to acknowledge unpleasant reality. Shandon speaks 
of the famous people of the day "as if it was his habit to 
live amongst them," an action marking him fundamentally 
a brother to Costigan.

Jack Finucane, Captain Shandon's devoted friend, 
visits him in prison and does what he can to help Shandon's 
troubled family. Thackeray's narrator remarks:

I never knew an embarrassed Irish gentleman yet, 
but he had an aide-de-camp of his own nation, 
likewise in circumstances of pecuniary discomfort.
That aide-de-camp has subordinates of his own, who again may have other insolvent dependants—all through his life our Captain marched at the head of a ragged staff, who shared in the rough fortunes of their chieftain.

Finucane further illustrates aspects of the life of Irish writers in London; he is a correspondent for the Ballinafad Sentinel at the same time that he gathers bits of news for the Pall Mall Gazette. "It was a grand, nay, a touching sight, for a philosopher to see Jack Finucane, Esquire, with a plate of meat from the cook-shop, and a glass of porter from the public house for his meal, recounting the feasts of the great, as if he had been present at them."57

If Thackeray's presentation of Finucane ridicules him, it is also affectionate. When Finucane writes articles for the Gazette, his favorite subject is Ireland and its glories—"Allusions to the greatness of Ireland, and the genius and virtue of the inhabitants of that injured country, flowed magnificently from Finucane's pen"58—but he is writing to fill Pen's place during his illness, and even offers to spend his weekends caring for the young writer; his generosity is not reserved for his fellow Irishmen.

Thackeray's treatment in Pendennis of the Irish journalists reflects his feeling that he was not like them; it was angrily received because he consistently picks out the irresponsible and laughable qualities of these men, yet something of kindly feeling and admiration emerges too.
They have his established Irish traits: fiery devotion to Ireland, disregard of actuality, a weakness for drink; but even though they have in them the marks of the stock comic Irishman of literature, they are very much alive. Thackeray gives them, against the backdrop of their haunts—the Fleet, the taverns, the publishers' offices—a vitality that persuades the reader of their existence. In his presentation of them, Thackeray is to be judged not as a reporter, but as a novelist; and as a novelist, he succeeds with them.
CHAPTER THREE
THE MOTHER-IN-LAW

I

In presenting the Irish in his fiction, Thackeray uses almost identical characteristics for the various individuals of his novels and stories. Yet, in spite of this common fund of traits in his fictional Irish citizens, he achieves a distinctively individual personality for most of them. Too, he employs the characters for several quite different effects, ranging from the comic, in which his attitude may be tolerant or scornful, to the melodramatic and the semi-tragic. Of all his Irish characters, the most menacing and the least engaging are the mothers-in-law. They share with the generality of his Irish characters the unadmirable qualities of boastfulness, claims to descent from ancient Irish kings or families of distinction, magnification of the small and ramshackle estate of their family, bad manners, belligerence, ignorance, and obliviousness to the feelings of others. Worst of all, they invade the home and make it a place of misery for the unhappy son-in-law.

Since the Irishman in Thackeray's fiction is usually meant for comic effect, and since Thackeray could seldom resist imitating dialect speech, he almost invariably speaks in brogue, but for the mother-in-law Thackeray seldom uses this device. She is usually more despicable than amusing,
and putting her speeches in brogue would detract attention from their viciousness. She has some special traits of her own, among them the retailing of long dull stories. Frequently a military wife or widow, whose deceased or overshadowed husband has served in India, she recounts tiresome anecdotes of regimental life which interest few on the first hearing and none on repetition. Still another of her traits is her blindness to her own selfishness; she uses her daughters for social and financial advancement, yet persists in thinking that she is acting only for their happiness. She takes great pride in her self-sacrificing nature, with loud and oft-repeated allusions to her martyrdom.

Thackeray's presentation of the mother-in-law gains force from his personal involvement with his wife's mother, Mrs. Matthew Shawe. Indeed, Mrs. Shawe is the mother-in-law in Thackeray's mind and in his writing. Although the actual time he spent in her company was brief, until the end of his life he was overwhelmed with violently hostile feelings on thinking of her. Even his most selfish and termagant fictional portraits of the type are apparently not much of an exaggeration of Mrs. Shawe's behavior, or at least of his interpretation of it. Thackeray's experience with his Irish mother-in-law yields the pattern for the villainous mothers-in-law of his stories.

Each of Thackeray's fictional representations of Mrs. Shawe has a personality consistent with his portrayals of the Irish. It is as the mother-in-law that she is translated
from his life to his fiction, but his antipathy to her colors his opinion of all the Irish. "That woman at Cork" established Thackeray's conception of the mother-in-law; of this fact he was certainly aware. In a less obvious way she also confirmed and enlarged his previously existing tendency to an unfavorable conception of the Irish. The traits he distrusted and disliked in Mrs. Shawe he came to extend to Irishmen in general. When he mentions his discovery of the falsehood of a story told him by an Irish clergyman, it is not surprising that he connects this misrepresentation with Mrs. Shawe's distortions of fact. The story is, he says, "a little truth that is with 90/100 parts of lies—like Mrs. Shawes [sic] about somebody you know—but they are all so in this country; all exaggerating in abuse of each other."¹

Inability to tell the truth is, in fact, one of the most striking weaknesses of the Irishmen Thackeray creates. Even before his trials with Mrs. Shawe, Thackeray had this idea of the Irish; it is part of the literary stereotype which contributes to his treatment of the comic characters. The trait is more prominent in Thackeray's Irishmen than in the characters of the literary background, however, and the outstanding example of such conduct in his experience is Mrs. Shawe. She did nothing to contradict the verdict of the literary tradition; her actions instead helped prove to him that this was indeed the way of the Irish, for the painful
memories of his stay in Cork were not to be forgotten, and would almost certainly be recalled when Ireland and the Irish were the subject of his thoughts. "But the woman is mad that is the fact or so monstrously unreasonable that it is in vain to talk reason to her, she never speaks but to brag and to lie, and doesn’t know truth from falsehood." More and more Thackeray was becoming convinced that the Irish were outside the code that he accepted. She is at least partly responsible for the hostility which led him to say, "Never was a truer saying than that those people [the Irish] are foreigners—They have neither English notions, manners, nor morals."

It is worthwhile to examine in some detail Mrs. Shawe's part in Thackeray's life, for his attitude toward her directed his creation of the mother-in-law in his fiction. By tracing the development of his final feeling toward Mrs. Shawe through his letters from the beginning of their acquaintance, we are enabled to follow the process of character revelation which Thackeray duplicates in his fiction. His letters might have served as the sketch pad for his finished portraits.

In 1835 Thackeray met young and almost penniless Isabella Shawe, at a time when his own financial position was unpromising, for he had run through most of his inheritance. Her mother, whose deceased husband had been in service in India, was a native of County Cork, where her
family had been fairly prosperous. Mrs. Shawe would not in any case have been pleased with the idea of her daughter's marrying a young man with such limited prospects of success as Thackeray, and she was besides strongly inclined to be dominating and possessive. Trouble with her had already begun during the engagement, Thackeray's correspondence with Isabella indicates. She was offended when Thackeray admonished his fiancée to prepare to leave her mother and to start life with him; as early as July 1836 he admits to Isabella on the subject of her mother that "I think that when we are not too intimate or familiar we shall be much better friends." The future mother-in-law almost succeeded in preventing the marriage, but the couple was reconciled, and in August 1836 married with Mrs. Shawe's consent, necessary because Isabella was still a minor.

Even after this short acquaintance, Thackeray was falling into what would later be his habitual way of speaking of Mrs. Shawe and of describing her fictional counterparts. Shortly after his marriage he writes to his mother, Mrs. Henry Carmichael-Smyth (to whom he was overly attached, making the situation still more difficult):

"My Mother-in-law who was present talked as big as St. Paul's; she is a singular old deevil, and has become quite civil of late. I don't know why I dislike her so much." He was still making an effort to remain on friendly terms with her, and writes his wife in the second year of their
marriage, after spending an evening with her mother, that she, "far from being uncomfortable was as gracious as possible."8

He was, nevertheless, quite aware of the effect that Mrs. Shawe exercised upon her children, as appears when Thackeray speaks to Isabella of her sister Jane: "perhaps your Mother's excessive attention to her only makes her more unhappy."9 Unfortunately both mothers were present in the Thackeray household at the birth of the first child, and the difficulties created by friction between them were such that only after the event did Thackeray announce to Mrs. Shawe the birth of the second daughter. She could hardly miss his meaning when he writes her that they had managed very well without the aid of their relatives; "the last time there were too many cooks to our broth, all excellent ones: but I make a vow that for the next 15 confinements there shall not be more than one."10 Poor Isabella, caught in the conflict between Mrs. Shawe and Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth (toward whom she did not reciprocate Thackeray's hostility to her mother), had to apologize for her mother's behavior:

Certainly she has strange ideas of things, for if all the world were too proud to ask slight favors or accept them, what a nice world it would be and it is merely rather a proof of an ungenerous spirit to like to lay others under obligations to you but to consider it too great a tax for oneself ... 11

Mrs. Shawe had managed to convince her daughter, as do most
of Thackeray's fictional tyrants, of her own self-sacrificing ways. As a matter of fact, she ignored one of her serious obligations in the payment of Isabella's allowance, of which after a few installments not a penny more was received by the Thackerays, even when she knew they were in financial need. Many years later, Thackeray writes a young friend who had just married on small means:

I made such a marriage myself. My means being 8 guineas a week, secured on a newspaper wh. failed 6 months after. My wife's [sic] income £50 a year promised by her mother, and paid for 2 quarters, since wh. (1837) I have received exactly £10 on account.

He states in 1840 to his mother that he will apply for money to Mrs. Shawe at Isabella's coming confinement: "She has no business to be ordering fallals & leave her daughter without her allowance." Here we see in life a trait that some of Thackeray's most mean-spirited mothers-in-law exhibit, and one of the reasons for the contempt he succeeds in communicating to the reader.

The behavior of Thackeray's Irish termagants to servants and other subordinates relates to Mrs. Shawe; while Isabella's brother Arthur was visiting the Thackerays, he told stories of his mother in which it appeared that "the old lady is stark mad and so seems to be the best of the family. They are all hated in the county to a wonderful degree, vulgar, stingy, extravagant, bad landlords, bad neighbours, and the juice knows what." He asks his mother to send his grandmother for Isabella's confinement; "otherwise, I must ask Mrs. Shawe and if I ask Mrs. Shawe
storms, whirlwinds, cataracts, tornadoes will be the result."15

By this time Thackeray's feelings about his mother-in-law required the most violent terms to describe her to his satisfaction. She is Jane's "nightmare of her mother." Still, for the sake of his wife's health, he brought his family to Ireland, hoping that the company of Mrs. Shawe and Jane would benefit the by now despondent Isabella, who attempted suicide on the voyage. From there he writes his mother that "Jane & her mother have done my poor patient a great deal of good."16 In his next letter he tells Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth that "Mrs. Shawe, as usual, brags bustles bothers prates incessantly of her great merits & sacrifices, but is good in the main—one must not judge too hardly a woman who is really & truly demented." The same letter contains a hint of what eventually became a scene in The Newcomes: "We have just had a scene--fancy that--in the midst of all this trouble she can't keep her monstrous tongue quiet."17 The situation at Cork rapidly deteriorated, and Thackeray finally writes his mother in desperation at Mrs. Shawe's efforts to fix the blame for Isabella's illness upon him. She insulted and threatened, yet persuaded herself, although she refused to take Isabella into her house "because of her nerves," that "she is performing her duty [in the most perfect and] admirable way!"18 Thanking his mother for a kind letter, he says, "I have been half
tempted to fling it in Mrs. Shawe's face and say there Madam you who prate about your daughter, & think how you have received her yourself." This denunciation which Thackeray could not very well carry out in actuality he re-enacted in his fiction with the women based on Mrs. Shawe, venting repeatedly the feelings aroused by the memory of his dealings with her.

Early in 1842 Thackeray was obliged to address Mrs. Shawe through an intermediary, so strained had their relations become; in this letter to a Mrs. Spencer he shows himself anxious to repudiate the charges of misconduct and neglect which Mrs. Shawe had aired among her relatives.

"... I hope to be able to prove that I at least have not failed in my duty to the poor girl." The entire Shawe family had turned against him by this time, it appears, for Thackeray remarks that the behavior of one of the Shawe cousins showed that Mrs. Shawe had been calumniating her daughter's husband. His bitter comment that "I warrant if any body leaves me ten thousand a year they would find me virtuous enough" fits the situation frequently presented in his fiction, in which the socially pretentious mother finds all sorts of good qualities in a suitor if only his fortune is adequate. The relationship between Thackeray and Mrs. Shawe did not improve, and even the appearance of cordiality was never to be resumed. To his mother in 1848 Thackeray writes, "as for Mrs. Shawe I have told Jane that
we are two. I can't mend that broken pot. It is done and over: and I can't [sic] ask my children to love or respect that woman."22

From the above account in Thackeray's own words of his one personal experience with the ways of a mother-in-law, it is clear how he arrived at the type he cannot resist castigating in his fiction. His most vivid portraits of the mother-in-law are Mrs. Shawe with alterations of nonessential detail, but with her basic nature preserved. Her Irishness the author seems to have associated with her disposition, for his catalogues of the tendencies of his fictional shrews embody the traits he grants to most of his Irish characters. So little did he choose to invent in his presentation of this type and so strongly did he identify himself with his fictional sons-in-law that he never altered her position from wife's mother to husband's mother. He disguised her slightly by making her sometimes a wife instead of a widow, or by changing her nationality, but these changes did not affect her personality. Even the nominally English or Scottish mothers-in-law of his fiction are in essence Thackeray's typical compound of Irish and mother-in-law qualities, and are therefore included in this study of Irish characters. Mrs. Mackenzie, for example, is labeled a Scotswoman, but the one behavior pattern in Thackeray's fiction to which she conforms is that of the Irish. Attention to the real woman behind the characters
is important; to recognize Thackeray's feelings about Mrs. Shawe is to understand his treatment of his fictional characters, what effect he hopes to achieve with them, and why he is, it may be said, obliged to show them as he does.

Awareness of the interweaving of autobiography and invention in Thackeray's fictional mothers-in-law is necessary for understanding the basic difference between these portrayals and his other Irish characters. True, his feelings about the Irish in general contained some prejudice and his emotions were undoubtedly involved in his characterizations of them, but he is more of a professional writer and less of a personality in his approach to Irish men (and some of the women) in general. His treatment of them is the result of his desire to bring in a comic element more than it is the outpouring of hatred and a frustrated desire for revenge; the Irish had not treated Thackeray badly (except for a few incidents of belligerence and the newspaper attacks), and he had very cordial acquaintance with a number of the citizens of Ireland. His presentation of them betrays an inclination to use them as an easy way to obtain comic effect, a stereotyped method derived from literary practice. He therefore could take a cooler approach to the ordinary Irishman than he could to his representatives of Mrs. Shawe; in picturing her, the story almost writes itself, in the sense that Thackeray's literary judgment is superseded by his personal grievances.
Surprisingly, in the case of his mothers-in-law his emotional involvement strengthens his art as his more tender emotional outbursts do not. His fierceness against the female tyrant evokes a like fierceness on the part of the reader, contrasting with the modern reaction to Thackeray's sentimental passages—the rhapsodies on motherhood, for example—which tend to strike the present-day reader as at least faintly ridiculous and to lessen his receptiveness to the author's efforts. The explanation for this situation probably lies in the techniques used by Thackeray under the stimulation of anger; his fictional handling of a model toward whom he is hostile is unlike his treatment of one upon whom he is emotionally dependent.

So much of Thackeray's personal feelings enter into his work that his novels agree with his letters in their expression of certain subjects; e.g., his tendency to regard motherhood as a sacred role and to speak of it as a sacred subject appears in his letters and in his novels, as does his sentimental attitude toward children. The subject of Mrs. Shawe in his letters, as we have seen, provokes him to express his anger. In the novels this same attitude prevails when the mother-in-law enters the scene, although Thackeray is at times able to separate his fictional character from Mrs. Shawe enough to employ a tone of irony rather than of rage. The mother-in-law is never viewed with the sort of detachment that Thackeray
preserves toward such unsympathetic characters as Talbot Twysden in Philip; the passion of anger is present, but it makes him eloquent rather than helpless.

II

In order to make clear the reasons for Thackeray's success in conveying to his reader his anger and indignation in treating of the mother-in-law, it is helpful to study several of the characters and the method by which Thackeray presents them. Although they are all more or less Mrs. Shawe, the author individualizes them enough so that they are memorable as Mrs. Mackenzie or Mrs. Baynes, not just as the same character with a new name. In each there is a somewhat different combination of qualities added to Thackeray's idea of Mrs. Shawe.

Some of the personality differences between one Thackeray mother-in-law and another are connected with the character of the daughter, into whose portrait, it is not necessary to say, Isabella enters. She is not the only real-life component of the married daughter, however; other women who influenced Thackeray's life, and his own ideas of Isabella as he would have wished her to be or as she might have become, contributed to the daughters and accordingly dictated the actions of the mothers. The daughter, as Thackeray sees her, is not noticeably Irish in temperament or speech. To Thackeray, Irishness indicated a host of ungraceful qualities, and would have been quite out of
order for his heroines as participants in the love themes of the novels. (Miss Gam, "Dennis Haggarty's Wife," is clearly Irish, but she is not in the role of heroine; rather, she is on the side of her mother.) They may rebel against the tyrannical mother, as does Charlotte Baynes in Philip, or remain weakly under her domination, like Rosey Mackenzie in The Newcomes. In either case, the woman against whom the author's anger is directed is the more vigorous character of the mother-daughter pair, and makes a stronger impression on the reader. Lacking the disposition which, however unpleasant, gives color to the Irish mother-in-law type, the daughter is often comparatively insignificant.

A story comprising part of Men's Wives, "Dennis Haggarty's Wife," is a kind of summary of the Irish mother-in-law's role presented in the novels. It is of interest as a sketch of what Thackeray was to develop and modify in his novels for a much more skillful presentation; here he shows the character in an exaggerated, completely unsympathetic form, unalleviated by any humanizing touches.

Mrs. Gam, the villain of the piece, is introduced immediately in her true character. There is not the opportunity here for gradual revelation or subtlety of handling, but Mrs. Gam affords a clearcut example of Thackeray's conception of the type. The story begins bluntly, "There was an odious Irishwoman who with her daughter used to frequent the 'Royal Hotel' at Leamington . . ." Mrs. Major
Gam is a military widow who, we are immediately told, boasts of her family and its home, Molloyville, both of which are old and distinguished, according to Mrs. Gam. Before young men she is always the picture of affectionate motherhood with Miss Gam, nor does she hesitate to enumerate the sacrifices she has made for her daughter. She is anxious to marry the daughter, and to marry her well, for "she looked with the contempt which no small number of Irish people feel upon all persons who get their bread by labour or commerce."26

As is Thackeray's wont, he tells the story through a narrator, an acquaintance of Dennis Haggarty, the assistant army surgeon who is unfortunate enough to marry Miss Gam (although initially rejected by the mother for his lack of fortune and social rank). Thackeray maintains an ironic tone in some of his narration of Mrs. Gam's machinations, but his real anger bursts out in his description of her as "the old leering, bragging widow," in the style of Mrs. Shawe. Thackeray's later and more fully developed characters in this vein are more skillfully presented, for he reveals them gradually, often through their own speech. For Mrs. Gam, Thackeray instead uses epithets, as he does in his letters to his mother when he speaks of Mrs. Shawe. He has not yet reached the stage as a writer that permits him to detach himself from his characters enough to show them most effectively.
The former Miss Gam is unlike Thackeray's other daughters in being fully as "Irish" as her mother: pretentious in her poverty, ungrateful to her far too kind husband. She has even named their broken-down cottage "New Molloyville." Her treatment of her husband continues and abets her mother's conduct toward him. An example of Thackeray's interest in speech which reveals both his awareness and his connection of speech with character is his remark (speaking as the narrator, Fitz-Boodle) on the present Mrs. Haggarty: "She spoke to Haggarty in broad Irish: she addressed me in that most odious of all languages—Irish-English, endeavouring to the utmost to disguise her brogue, and to speak with the true dawdling distingué English air." Like her mother, she harps on the theme of her sacrifices and pretends that her own family and former station were far above what her husband has brought to her. Her mother has "of course, never paid" her allowance, and her husband has to spend his time caring for her, for her idleness is much greater than her loss of sight would necessitate.

The story ends with Mrs. Gam's descending upon the Haggarty household, taking away her daughter and grandchildren and leaving the poor husband desolate. Thackeray's moralizing is quite open in the final paragraph, but it applies as well to what he feels about his own situation as to his fictional Gams and Haggartys: "Haggarty's wife is considered by her friends as a martyr to a savage husband, and her mother
is the angel that has come to rescue her. . . . they have not a single pang of conscience for their villainy towards him, and consider their heartlessness as a proof and consequence of their spotless piety and virtue."28

Not exactly autobiographical in plot, but a close parallel of Mrs. Shawe's viciousness as Thackeray saw it, is the account of Mrs. Mackenzie, Clive Newcome's mother-in-law in The Newcomes. There is no doubt that she is Mrs. Shawe, undiluted by even the trace of goodness that Thackeray gives Mrs. Baynes, her later counterpart. We have his own words as authority on the inspiration for Mrs. Mackenzie:

"While reading one of the worst tirades of the 'Campaigner' he interrupted himself to say, 'That's my she-devil of a mother-in-law, you know, whom I have the good-luck to possess still.' "29 By most critics' estimates, Mrs. Mackenzie is the culmination of the wickedness displayed by Thackeray's mothers-in-law: "Mrs. Mackenzie, the old Campaigner, a harrowing, vindictive, relentless shrew of a woman, Thackeray's most successful portrait of the kind."30

Another comments, "One always remembers, too, his gallery of almost unbearably real harridans of whom the Campaigner in The Newcomes is the apotheosis—cruel, selfish, mean, bitter, encased in an impregnable armor of self-righteousness, yet scattering pain and dismay wherever they go."31 Mrs. Shawe is thinly disguised in the Campaigner as Scottish, but her character is that which Thackeray habitually portrays as
Irish. That he did not attempt to portray any conception of essentially Scottish characters is attested by his remarking "that whereas he could never invent a Scotsman—James Binnie in *The Newcomes* being 'a mere facsimile' of a man he knew—he 'could describe an Irishman perfectly.' "32 Mrs. Mackenzie too is a facsimile of a woman he knew--Mrs. Shawe, whose personality was linked with Thackeray's idea of the Irish.

Mrs. Mackenzie does not appear in *The Newcomes* until the story is well under way; the preceding chapters are devoted to the relationship between Clive Newcome and his father. Mrs. Mackenzie is allowed a flattering entrance: "a very brisk, plump, pretty little widow"33 is one of the topics of a letter from the novel's narrator, Pendennis, to Clive Newcome. Thackeray gives her an engaging manner to begin with, so that the reader is prepared to accept her as a sympathetic character, but his unmasking of her is not long delayed. The disarming description continues only until the romantic story of her youthful marriage is told.

Having established the appearance, Thackeray rapidly proceeds to the reality. The first hint of the actual state of affairs is unobtrusively put in by the housekeeper's testimony of overheard scolding and broken furniture. The evidence builds up with the governess' revelations about Mrs. Mackenzie's bullying her spiritless and somewhat mindless
daughter Rosey; it is rounded out by the picture of assumed motherly affection in public, "the scolding over and the tears dried." 34

Mrs. Mackenzie makes the customary affirmations of selfless mother-love--"I live for my darling girls now. All I want is to see them comfortable in life." Pendennis' ironic remark on the displays of devotion indicates how Mrs. Mackenzie is now to be regarded by the reader: "If osculation is a mark of love, surely Mrs. Mack is the best of mothers." Thackeray tends to comment on the mother's aggressiveness in martial terms. When two more talented singers divert attention from her Rosey's display, "Mrs. Mackenzie, who has been biting her lips and drumming the time on a side-table, forgets at last the pain of being vanquished in admiration of the conquerors." 35

Thackeray makes Mrs. Mackenzie a more formidable figure than his straightforwardly unpleasant mothers-in-law when he traces her efforts to be charming to those whose approval she wants, but he also achieves satiric comedy in his accounts of her deceptive good humor:

As for Mrs. Mackenzie--the very largest curve that shall not be a caricature, and actually disfigure the widow's countenance--a smile so wide and steady, so exceedingly rident, indeed, as almost to be ridiculous--may be drawn upon the buxom face, if the artist chooses to attempt it as it appeared during the whole of this summer evening--before dinner came (when people ordinarily look very grave), when she was introduced to the company;

the catalogue of her enthusiastic responses to the most
uninteresting and banal of remarks continues with her smile "when the new boy from the country upset some sauce upon her shoulder." This resume of her anxiety to please while a guest at Sir Brian Newcome's leads into a commentary on how the aristocratic calling cards always end at the top of her card tray; provincial dignitaries had been the subjects of the frequently-heard anecdotes she, like all Thackeray's military wives, is too fond of telling, but her new acquaintances have now replaced them.

Mrs. Mackenzie acquires her nickname when the novel is already more than halfway toward completion; her major part is yet to come. It is just after she has tried the patience of her future son-in-law, as Mrs. Shawe did Thackeray's, with a reiteration of her favorite anecdote, that she is termed "an ogling, leering, scheming, artful old campaigner" by Pendennis' friend Warrington. Here Thackeray's anger is too strong to be expressed by subtlety or irony. Only after the marriage does the Campaigner come into her own and give vent to her temper as a true mother-in-law, however, so that she is a very forceful figure in the final part of the novel.

Thackeray frequently refers to Mrs. Mackenzie's hostile behavior in military terms. When this belligerent mother-in-law invades the Newcome household at the birth of the first child, she presents the appearance of an entire army. "What the Emperor Napoleon had said respecting our
Russian enemies, might be applied to this lady, Grattezia, and she appeared a Tartar." Thackeray uses the mock-heroic vein to advantage as he recounts "the series of final actions which . . . were continued in the drawing-room, resumed with terrible vigour on the enemy's part in the dining-room, and ended, to the triumph of the whole establishment, at the outside of the hall door," closing with the departure "when the routed Tartar force had fled back to its native north." Then comes the daughter's confession that this is her mother's habitual demeanor, and the full deception of appearances is evident.

The Campaigner's return precedes by a short time the failure of the Newcome family investments, and the final phase of the mother-in-law's domination begins, with her cruelty redoubled. Thackeray shows the family bent under her invective, her daughter urged into hysteria by the mother's denunciations of Clive Newcome and his father so that she is a complete loss as a wife. The author's presentation of Mrs. Mackenzie's monologues carries the convincing tone of authenticity, encouraging the interpretation that Thackeray is again utilizing his conflicts with Mrs. Shawe in Ireland to show his most despicable character at her worst. His rendition of her shrill outbursts has the conviction of his indignation, but even more important, he is here particularly skillful at reproducing a virago's speech, using short, repeated phrases and the stress of
words suggesting self-righteousness. "... it is nothing but my duty and my religion—and the protection which I owe to this blessed unprotected—yes, unprotected, and robbed, and cheated, darling child—which have made me stay a single day in this house." This sort of speech conveys an angry woman's tone so well that it could serve as a stage speech with no need for stage directions, and Thackeray finds it unnecessary to include any adjectives to indicate Mrs. Mackenzie's bearing.

Thackeray turns from letting Mrs. Mackenzie's speeches and actions convey his meaning, and puts his opinions into words. In these instances his rancor toward Mrs. Shaw forces its way out, but in letting his personal grievances run away with his expression as a writer he somewhat weakens the effectiveness of his passages. To put the angry speeches in theCampaigner's mouth is to let her condemn herself before the reader, an exercise of the imagination not permitted when Thackeray calls her "a vulgar, coarse-minded woman," "a coarse female tyrant, stupid, obstinate, utterly unable to comprehend the son's kindly genius." His intention is clear enough, but his success is far greater when he refrains from obvious commentary.

When Thackeray shows Rosey's helplessness under her mother's domination he is, of course, thinking of Isabella and her mother, although his wife, before her illness, showed more spirit than Rosey. Rosey is a colorless and
ineffectual figure in the novel, with little sympathetic appeal and without the distinction of positive ill-nature, merely providing a foil for the sharpness of the mother-in-law: "The overpowering mother had taken utter possession of this poor little thing. . . . She sat under Mrs. Mackenzie as a bird before a boa-constrictor, doomed—fluttering, fascinated; scared and fawning as a whipt spaniel before a keeper."^41

In the person of Pendennis, Thackeray speaks out his feelings toward his mother-in-law near the conclusion of The Newcomes, when Roscy's last illness is precipitated by her mother's tantrums—a circumstance strongly reminiscent of Mrs. Shawe's rages during Isabella's suicidal period. These words would have given still more satisfaction to Thackeray if he could have spoken them to his old enemy: "I am come to bid you farewell on the part of those whom your temper has driven into infernal torture. I am come to pay you every halfpenny of the sum which my friends do not owe you, but which they restore." His capability as a writer permits him the detachment sufficient to add the Campaigner's avarice as a finishing touch to her exit from the novel, ending her portrait with a telling gesture: "A widow—a poor, lonely, insulted widow! cries the Campaigner, with trembling hands, taking possession of the notes."^42

Because in Philip the hero's courtship is patterned
on Thackeray's, Mrs. Baynes is, of all Thackeray's fictional mothers-in-law, the most clearly identified by plot with Mrs. Shawe, yet curiously enough, his presentation of her evokes occasional sympathy. Mrs. Baynes is a much more detailed, subtle, and human portrait than the roughly sketched Mrs. Gam, and not such an unmitigated villainess as Mrs. Mackenzie.

As Mrs. Baynes first appears on the scene, she is unattractive and foolish. Like Mrs. Mackenzie, Mrs. Baynes does not appear at the beginning of the story, which concerns Dr. Firmin and his son Philip. From the time of her entrance Thackeray stresses her unpleasing appearance; in this way she is unlike Mrs. Mackenzie, who is attractive and can be charming when she finds it convenient. Thackeray gradually brings out the aspects of Mrs. Baynes' character that are at first ludicrous and are later seen to bring unhappiness on her husband and daughter. Her initial speech contains the mispronunciations of French which Thackeray puts in her mouth through the rest of the novel. He thus indulges his penchant for dialect speech and uses his talent for reproducing it tellingly, but in Mrs. Baynes it is also a clue to her personality, for her conviction that her way is the right way and must be heard shows up in her commands in bad French.

In her introduction she seems harmless enough, feared only by her husband. Her position in domestic affairs is
defined in military terms as the "commander-in-chief," and her assumption of the role of military leader in the family is emphasized, contrasting ironically with the cowardice before her of her otherwise brave husband. Military terminology recurs in references to her. She is General Baynes' "commanding officer," and the extent of her command comes into the imagery of a passage upon her manipulations of the family budget: "driven away by one calculation after another, she returned again and again to the charge, until she overcame the stubborn arithmetical difficulties, and the pounds, shillings, and pence lay prostrate before her." As the family gets into the coach for Paris, "Mrs. General Baynes commanded the column."

Mrs. Baynes' readiness to attack her husband is evident even in the way Thackeray has her reveal the family's financial plight to the children--"Your father has ruined us"--but the author still maintains the sympathetic elements of the character, as when he mentions "this worthy mother and wife," a complimentary reference with very little ironic significance. Mrs. Baynes' concern for her children's future elicits characterization of her as "the poor mother." Only gradually does Thackeray bring forward his identification of her with Mrs. Shawe, so that doubt is cast upon the genuineness of her wish for her daughter's happiness.

Thackeray achieves a comic effect with her pretensions and ignorance; her letters to her sister are small
masterpieces of self-revelation, as in her remark on surmounting language difficulties in France: "I find my Hindostanee of great help: which I use it when we are at a loss for a word, and it answers extremely well." She is not a mere foolish harmless character, however; after her introduction, every additional piece of information builds up the case against her. She is, we are told, addicted to destructive gossip about the wives of General Baynes' fellow officers. She is foremost among the "dreadful liabilities impending over the husband of Miss Charlotte Baynes," in the words of the novel's narrator, again Pendennis. Through Pendennis, Thackeray can show an active dislike of her, as well as involvement with her, so that Pendennis soon remarks that she conceals "the dagger with which she would have stabbed us: but we knew it was there clenched in her skinny hand in her meagre pocket." Thackeray's attitude toward this character is epitomized in Pendennis' remark, "a little hate-bearing woman, envious, malicious, but loving her cubs, and nursing them, and clutching them in her lean arms with a jealous strain." The allowance for her maternal affection accounts for the few kind words Thackeray lets fall, but he insures that the reader is aware of the form that Mrs. Baynes' affection takes—more jealous than loving, she puts her sovereignty over her family before their happiness. Her aspirations for Charlotte's social success are really for her own, to be
vicariously achieved, although she is quick to disclaim any wishes for herself: "Nor do I care about these vanities, my dear, but to bring my sweet Charlotte into the world, is it not a mother's duty?"[47]

Mrs. Baynes is not specified to be Irish in Philip, although her nature unmistakably proclaims her the Irish mother-in-law as Thackeray conceives of her. Rather than referring to the family estate back in Ireland as the avowedly Irish characters do, she rests her claims to superior family upon her husband's rank: "Recollect, your father is a general officer, C. B., and may be K. C. B., soon, and your mother is a general officer's lady." She does not speak in brogue; indeed, the only overt indication that she might be Irish is the Gaelic names of her sons—Moira, Ochterlony, and Macgrigor. Nevertheless, it is no error to place her among the Irish mothers-in-law, for of all such characters in Thackeray's fiction she is the most closely modeled on his experiences with his own Mrs. Shawe, whose Irishness and whose position as his mother-in-law were closely connected in his evaluation of her. Not only does Philip's life correspond in many details, such as his work as a writer, his past prosperity and present comparative poverty, and his gentlemanly background, with Thackeray's, but biographers of Thackeray have found the chapters of Philip dealing with the attempts of Mrs. Baynes to end her daughter's engagement to Philip a source of information on
what must have occurred during Thackeray's engagement to Isabella Shawe. A weakness for anyone with social position or a title is certainly not confined to the Irish in his fiction, but Thackeray's Irish characters are unfailingly addicted to admiration for the titled, and in this flaw Mrs. Baynes shares. Her friend Sarah Bunch says, "About any person with a title, that woman will make a fool of herself to the end of the chapter," and Mrs. Baynes acts out this commentary when she is taken in by the aristocratic pretensions of an adventuress at the Baynes' Paris boarding house.

Mrs. Baynes is worth study as an example of Thackeray's Irish characters although she is not identified as one of them by name, since she has the traits which to Thackeray were outstandingly common weaknesses in the Irish, a prejudice he formed from his unhappy experiences with the mother-in-law who not only blackened the whole category of mothers-in-law for Thackeray, but who impressed upon him an idea of the Irish as particularly obnoxious. Consciously or unconsciously, he patterned Mrs. Gam, Mrs. Baynes, Mrs. Mackenzie, and even the English mothers-in-law like Mrs. Gashleigh of A Little Dinner at Timmins's on her and endowed each of them with what he could not help regarding as an Irish temperament. By using a fictional narrator, Pendennis in the case of Philip, Thackeray could say what he could not have said in person. When he gives Pendennis the speech, "Thus, you
understand, if Mrs. General Baynes thought some people were 'stuck-up people,' some people can—and hereby do by these presents—pay off Mrs. Baynes, by furnishing the public with a candid opinion of that lady’s morals, manners, and character,” he is describing his own way of paying off Mrs. Shawe.

Thackeray shows Mrs. Baynes’ most objectionable side in her cruelty to her daughter after her success in separating Charlotte from Philip, using the imagery of torture for her procedure. The hero tells Pendennis, "You should have seen that fiend and her livid smile, as she was drilling her gimlets into my heart... . Were I to live a thousand years, I could not forgive her.” Thackeray has her bear the responsibility for Charlotte’s illness and for a time of misery for all the family, yet he finally separates the character of his novel sufficiently from the real woman who inspired her so that he can treat her with a compassion he could not feel for Mrs. Shawe, in the scenes following her defeat and disgrace when her husband and her sister put her in her place. When the boarding-house proprietor orders her away from Charlotte, "that sad, humiliated, deserted mother goes out from her daughter’s presence, hanging her head. She put on the poor old bonnet, and had a walk that evening on the Champs Elysees with her little ones... ." The reader feels that Mrs. Baynes has descended from a raging villainess to a pathetic figure when
her husband arranges for Charlotte's departure: "Hanging down her withered head, with a tear mayhap trickling down her cheek, I can fancy the old woman silently departing to do the bidding of her lord. . . . If I contemplate that wretched old Niobe much longer, I shall begin to pity her." Thackeray makes clear, however, that he does not mean to reverse the motivating principles of his character; her goal of marrying her daughter into a socially successful and wealthy family remains, and it is her failure to achieve it that she regrets. Even so, she is thus made a not completely black character; insofar as Thackeray departs from his conception of Mrs. Shawe and intermixes Mrs. Baynes' selfish nature with a little of the sympathetic, he enhances her humanity and makes her more effective, because more believable. In so doing he is acting as a novelist rather than as a wronged son-in-law. Her source in his personal involvement adds conviction to his writing, but if carried too far it would make caricatures of his characters; in the case of Mrs. Baynes and Mrs. Mackenzie this is not his intention.

It should be noted that Mrs. Shawe is not the sole origin of Thackeray's ideas on the mother-in-law, or more generally, the dominating woman, for the mother-in-law is something of a stock figure. Mrs. Shawe is, however, the reason for the emotional force behind his portraits, since he did not merely build his characters on a real-life model, but felt his life profoundly affected by his model. He
could not write of her without breaking into indignation stemming from his personal involvement.

It has been shown how the mother-in-law idea develops in Thackeray's writing from the emotional comments in his letters on Mrs. Shawe, through the carelessly defined Mrs. Gam, to such forcefully delineated characters as Mrs. Mackenzie and Mrs. Baynes. His success depends on how much he can turn away from direct expression of his anger and focus attention on the person who caused it, with her human failings exaggerated but not falsified.

The three examples of the mother-in-law which have been discussed here have numerous similarities. The qualities which Thackeray often gives to his Irish characters and which he connected with his Irish mother-in-law he gives to these fictional mothers-in-law as well: they proclaim the superiority of their families and are belligerent, self-satisfied, self-deluded, and unscrupulous. The three also share with Mrs. Shawe the special characteristics of the mother-in-law which are not relevant to the male characters: they are all wives or widows of military men, possessors of shrewish tongues, and enemies of their sons-in-law. If this last attribute had not been true of Mrs. Shawe, her fictional counterparts almost certainly would never have come into existence.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE IRISHMAN AS VILLAIN: BARRY LYNDON

Among Thackeray's assorted Irishmen, Barry Lyndon has a unique role: he stands apart from the others in being not a comic character, but a thorough villain. Although he is intended for quite a different effect from that of the comic characters, he shares many of their traits, and these similarities emphasize the difference of his nature from theirs. The major characteristic found in both Barry Lyndon and in such a harmless buffoon as the Mulligan makes one amusing and the other horrible: both are, first of all, self-deceived. The Mulligan imagines himself impressive, attractive, and dashing, and is only ridiculous; Barry Lyndon has this same image of himself, and is instead repellent, partly because he has enough of these desirable qualities to give him an advantage over his victims, but even more dangerous is his ability to regard himself as the innocent victim of others when his own narrative reveals his culpability. A complete lack of repentance stems from his conviction that he has done nothing to repent.

Thackeray handles Barry Lyndon's unwitting self-revelation by having him narrate the story, whereas the comic Irish are seen through the eyes of a narrator who shares his viewpoint with the reader. Condemnation of the villain is far more effective as it comes through his own unmasking than it could have been through judgments spoken by a
separate narrator. Thackeray's model in tone for the novel was Fielding's Jonathan Wild. "Since 1836 he had been meditating on the 'greatness' of Fielding's antihero, and the complex and sophisticated irony with which worldly and humanly reasonable standards are contrasted in this book helped him to arrive at his mode of treatment in Barry Lyndon." Fielding had been a model for Thackeray since his Cambridge days, in fact. Neither did Thackeray lack experience in the use of the narrator who uncomprehendingly gives himself away, for he had practiced it in The Yellow-plush Papers (1837). "Yellowplush's unconscious self-revelation through his way of telling his story is the first instance in Thackeray's work of a technique that he was afterwards to elaborate greatly."2

The tone that Thackeray chose to adopt is from Fielding, but the plot and its central character come from life. In 1841 Thackeray visited one of his Cambridge friends, John Bowes, and heard the story of Bowes' ancestress, the Countess of Strathmore, who had married an Irish adventurer named Andrew Robinson Stoney and had been cruelly abused by him. Thackeray wrote James Fraser about his intention:

I have in my trip to the country, found materials (rather a character) for a story, that I'm sure must be amusing. I want to write & illustrate it, and as you see how Harry Lorrequer succeeds both in the Dublin Magazine & out of it, why should not my story of BARRY-LYNN (or by what name so ever it may be called) answer in as well as out of Regina. . . . My subject I am sure is a good one, and I have made a vow to chasten and otherwise popularize my style.3
Stoney-Bowes' story needed no exaggeration to furnish the plot for the novel. The fact that the man was Irish gave Thackeray the opportunity to incorporate in him some of his customary Irish characteristics with a new turn and to use material from his Irish trip for background details.

What could be more appropriate than to present Barry as part of the "vilain petite noblesse" which he had seen in that country, as a young man "gross, arrogant, frivolous and ignorant," absorbed in a purely animal life, and knowing no book but the Racing Calendar?4

Also in the background is a purported autobiography of a highwayman, James Freeny, which Thackeray read during his Irish tour. In The Irish Sketch Book, Thackeray quotes Freeny's story in some detail, and in his interpolated comments writes in the ironic style that he was to use for Barry Lyndon's narrative.

And the best part of worthy Freeny's tale is the noble naïveté and simplicity of the hero as he recounts his own adventures, and the utter unconsciousness that he is narrating anything wonderful. It is the way of all great men, who recite their great actions modestly, and as if they were matters of course; as indeed to them they are.

The story, as here narrated, has that simplicity which is beyond the reach of all except the very highest art; and it is not high art certainly which Mr. Freeny can be said to possess, but a noble nature rather, which leads him thus grandly to describe scenes wherein he acted a great part.5

Barry Lyndon is conceived, it should be noted, as not wholly bad in the beginning; the idea here is not as far from Thackeray's amiable Irishmen as a Jonathan Wild would be.

"His career is a study of the disintegration that comes to a
man brought up under a false and obsolete code of honor. The early Barry is far from faultless, certainly, but he embodies a potentiality for goodness which is thwarted by the wrong standards to which he adheres, encouraged by his mother, who partakes in them.

The hero opens the story by proclaiming the importance of his family, true to the usual behavior of Thackeray's Irish characters, claiming that any European gentleman will have heard of his house, "Barry of Barryogue," than which none is more famous.

... though, as a man of the world, I have learned to despise heartily the claims of some pretenders to high birth who have no more genealogy than the lacquey who cleans my boots ... yet truth compels me to assert that my family was the noblest of the island, and, perhaps, of the universal world.7

Barry Lyndon's style of speaking carries the feeling that he is a man of tremendous self-esteem and pretensions to greatness; a tendency to rhetoric naturally fits his personality.

Barry Lyndon's speech is not written in brogue, Irish as he is. The first-person narrative rules out the possibility of brogue; too, Thackeray could not have had him speak like the Irishmen whose brogue is for comic effect, when he is not comic. A hint that his speech is not altogether free of it appears in his poem to his cousin, "The Rose of Flore" (this youthful effort of the hero is sprinkled with phrases like "projuice a treasure" and "rhyme and raisin")8; that his mother's speech has this inflection is indicated
only by a word here and there; e.g., she calls his wife a "schamer." 9

Thackeray's customary portrayal of Irish pretensions to a high living standard applies to the cottage where the boy Barry and his mother live, Barryville; every room has a name worthy of a palace—"the yellow saloon," "the orange tawny apartment." The mother has instilled in her son so much pride and belief in the merit attendant upon the ownership of fine property that at fifteen he boasts about his servants and his splendid house even to people whom he knows to be aware that he has invented them.

The mother who started Barry Lyndon on his unscrupulous path is a curious variation on Thackeray's more virtuous mothers. She has the same devotion to her son as, for example, Helen Pendennis, but it takes the form of a monstrous ability to overlook his criminality and to share his moral flaws. The son as narrator is a witness against his mother even while persuaded of her superiority; Thackeray continues the process used in the hero's self-revelation to convey the mother's nature, simultaneously enlarging the extent of Barry Lyndon's ethical misdirection. The pair cooperates in an inversion of normal moral values. 10

Some of Thackeray's occasional lapses from consistency to Barry Lyndon's heartlessness are accounted for by the fact that Mrs. Barry is not totally unlike Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth. Thought of his mother often sets Thackeray off on
a sentimental passage in other novels, and this association of ideas occurs even when Thackeray is speaking through Barry Lyndon. On receiving a letter from his mother, Barry breaks into a tearful reminiscence about "the fresh happy sunshine of the old green fields in Ireland, and her love . . ."11; in so writing, Thackeray reverts to his own voice instead of Barry's.

The narrator seems to agree with the mother's estimate of herself while he is, in actuality, laying bare her delusions: "Often and often has she talked to me and the neighbours regarding her own humility and piety, pointing them out in such a way that I would defy the most obstinate to disbelieve her."12 So does the mother reinforce Barry's false conception of himself: " . . . she has always spoken of me in my true light, as a martyr to the rascality of others and a victim of my own generous and confiding temper."13 The inability of the comic Irish characters to see how they look to the rest of the world is here carried to an absolute ruling principle which condones any action.

Barry Lyndon admits that, once established as Lady Lyndon's husband and in temporary prosperity, he is not proud of his mother; he is aware of what his English friends would think of her with "her bragging and her brogue." In owning to this misgiving, he is bringing his viewpoint, for the moment, closer to the reader's, but he does not go so far as to doubt her benevolence. Thackeray makes it plain
that she would be accounted a vulgar Irishwoman (to Lady Lyndon she is "the hideous old Irish basketwoman"), but her son does not acknowledge this fact.

Although an Irish mother-in-law, and a formidable one, Mrs. Barry is not to be classed with those based on Mrs. Shawe. She is as "Irish" in character as they—ill-tempered, self-deluded, aggressive, and boastful—yet she is the husband's mother, and this relationship makes the difference. Thackeray never departs from his habit of casting Mrs. Shawe's literary counterpart as the wife's mother. As the husband's mother (and because the husband is narrator) Mrs. Barry is not an object of emotional denunciations such as Thackeray directs against the copies of his own mother-in-law. The sufferer this time is Lady Lyndon, but her hatred of Barry Lyndon's mother causes him no distress. He complacently observes, "That Lady Lyndon should detest her was quite natural. She is not the first of woman or mankind either that has hated a mother-in-law." Mrs. Barry is not in the same category with Mrs. Mackenzie and Mrs. Gam, persecutors of innocent husbands, and Thackeray clearly does not regard Lady Lyndon as a representative of himself as he does Clive Newcome. She is as self-deluded as her husband in a less harmful way, and is not an object of sympathy in the novel.

The importance which Barry Lyndon puts on appearances, a thoroughly Irish trait in Thackeray's presentation, applies to his statements about his mother; even in his
self-revelation he seldom betrays the unpleasant side of their relationship. He wants the world to see him as an affectionate son, and in her a devoted mother, so that his remarks show his approval of her while they demonstrate her dishonesty and cruelty. Rarely does Thackeray have him voice an openly unfavorable criticism, and these few are usually softened by compliments: "Mrs. Barry, indeed, though her temper was violent and her ways singular, was an invaluable person to me in my house." She is "that good soul" and "the worthy old lady" toward the novel's end, once past the age when he can call her "so accomplished a beauty that all the women in the country took pattern by her." The last paragraph supposed to be from his pen keeps up the reiteration of motherly devotion. "She is very old, and is sitting by my side at this moment in the prison, working." The full irony of his position concerning her is clear in the brief closing account which reveals that the Fleet Prison attendants talked of the pair's daily quarrels. The reader then must recognize that the picture of filial harmony which has been built up from the beginning of the novel is one more example of Barry Lyndon's dishonesty.

On the subject of Ireland, Barry is considerably less eloquent than in his role of his mother's loyal son, unlike most of Thackeray's Irish figures who are always eager to make orations on Ireland's honor. He is quick to claim English manners, and his pride as a boy is to be called
"English Redmond." This attitude, too, is an Irish trait to Thackeray, as sketched in *The Book of Snobs*:

"And who has not met the Irishman who apes the Englishman, and who forgets his country and tries to forget his accent, or to smother the taste of it, as it were?" Barry's anxiety to dissociate himself from Irish ways leads him to show his country's weak points and even his family's true condition: "But perhaps, as the reader knows, we are not particular in Ireland on the score of neatness as people are in this precise country; . . . were not all the windows broken and stuffed with rags even at Castle Brady, my uncle's superb mansion?" However, he returns to the expected Irish boasting about his country when he tells a Prussian captain that Clonmel's splendor outshines any Continental city. It is in his addresses to the reader that he is frank about Ireland's poverty, exposing the wretchedness of the villages through which he passes on his return to his boyhood home.

The Irishman Barry is shown giving unfavorable reports even on his country's manners and ethics in his eagerness to demonstrate his worldly experience. The young men of Dublin have no scruples against playing the famous Thackerayan game of living on nothing a year, "whereas an Englishman with fifty guineas is not able to do much more than starve, and toil like a slave in a profession." Nevertheless, they are as easy to deceive as they are willing to be deceptive.

There was a simplicity about this Irish gentry which amused and made me wonder. If they tell more fibs than their downright neighbours across
the water, on the other hand they believe more; and I made myself in a single week such a reputation in Dublin as would take a man ten years and a mint of money to acquire in London. If Barry is truthful about the Irish, it is to magnify his achievements and his sophistication.

In spite of his admissions of Irish weaknesses, Barry Lyndon has one of Thackeray's favorite traits, the enthusiasm for claiming descent from Irish kings, to a greater extent than even the comic Irish characters. He never learns that outsiders will not be impressed by this assertion, and reasserts it in each new situation. To the Prussian captain capturing him as a soldier he gives his name, adding "a descendant of the Irish kings!" Although the captain retorts that every man in the Irish brigade apparently had the same lineage, Barry repeats his story to Herr Potzdorff not long after, and is not discouraged by overhearing his employer's uncle say scornfully, "All the beggarly Irish who ever enlisted tell the same story." He wins a chariot by gambling, and paints on it his arms surmounted with an Irish crown; in the Duchy of X he abets his plans for marriage to an heiress with a "genealogy of the family up to King Brian Boru, or Barry"; when his son is born he names him Bryan "in compliment to my royal ancestry." Although he mentions the sums he had to spend in bribes to get a pedigree from the English and Irish heralds, he is half convinced by his own stories.
Barry Lyndon exhibits Thackeray's control over the effect of his material, for in it he employs the traits that make for comedy elsewhere, and here makes them the attributes of a villain. The same boastfulness, the same unwillingness to recognize the unromantic facts go into an amiable if rascally Captain Costigan (Pendennis) or a ludicrous but harmless Mulligan (Mrs. Perkins's Ball). In Barry Lyndon they are coupled with a resourcefulness which makes them dangerous and with a developing pride in the attainment of morally unsound objectives, so that although Barry is closely akin to the descendants of the stage Irishman, he is antihero instead of clown.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Working with a fairly fixed set of personality traits, Thackeray produces a remarkably varied group of Irish characters. All exhibit nearly the same tastes and tendencies, so that a "standard" Thackerayan Irishman emerges, yet the individual examples of the standard character are distinct from one another. Because of this basic similarity modified by individualized presentation, Thackeray's Irish characters are useful as a means of studying the author's methods of fitting his actors to their literary environment.

The intention and scope of the work in which a character appears account for much of the differentiation which exists, for example, between two such characters as the Mulligan and Captain Costigan, both of whom are boastful and unprosperous Irishmen in London. Both exist to fill a comic role, but the two do not leave the same total impression. By emphasizing the exaggeration in his treatment of the Mulligan, Thackeray creates a character who is not to be taken seriously; realism is not the author's intention, nor is the Christmas book in which the Mulligan figures meant to be a significant commentary on human behavior. Captain Costigan is, on the other hand, part of a novel which shows the interrelation of people within society; he is developed
in such a way that his nature, nearly as fantastic as the Mulligan's, is acceptable as that of someone who could exist in fact. He is one of the contributors to Pendennis' growing-up process. The Mulligan does not change anyone's ideas, but Captain Costigan shares in the formation of Pen's conception of the world.

The viewpoint from which the characters are seen is part of Thackeray's method of individualizing them. The Mulligan is seen entirely from the outside; the reader gets the same view of him that a guest at Mrs. Perkins's ball would have. With Costigan, the outside view is the chief one, for he is primarily intended to amuse, but Thackeray provides some insight into his actions, some attempt to explain the reasons for them. Still a different viewpoint is taken with Barry Lyndon. Since in this case Thackeray makes the character present himself, his motivations are as evident as his actions. He is a witness against himself as he reveals his morally crippled nature. The point of view from which the mothers-in-law are seen yields another variation on the combination of traits found in Thackeray's Irish characters. His idea of the role derives from his experience as a son-in-law; consequently, he shows the mother-in-law as she appears to the son-in-law of his fiction. She is the enemy, so that sympathetic analysis of her behavior is not called for.

If fidelity to real situations and lack of bias are the criteria by which Thackeray's picture of the Irish is
judged, he can be accused of prejudice. His depiction of the lives of the London journalists is realistic, and undoubtedly the qualities he ascribes to his Irishmen could be found in many Irishmen of his day, but the consistency with which he selects these aspects to emphasize makes for a one-sided presentation.

He is not, however, to be judged as a historian; it was neither his intention nor his interest to discuss historical issues. His perception of the motives of everyday human behavior is noteworthy, and so is his skill in revealing it. When he is judged as an inventor, a writer of fiction, it is irrelevant whether he carries the weaknesses of a group beyond what they were in fact. What does matter is the credibility of his creation. His comic Irishmen may validly be criticized by literary standards, since in using them he is using a hackneyed subject for humor, following the stereotype established by English and Irish writers before him. This objection once admitted, however, his adept management of the material must be credited. He does what his predecessors had done, but not exactly in their way; because of his handling of them, Thackeray's Irish characters are uniquely alive and memorable.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER ONE


16. Works, XII, 165-166.
17. Works, XII, 34-35.
18. Works, XII, 48.
19. Works, XII, 36.
20. Works, XII, 73.
21. Works, XII, 144.
22. Works, XII, 143.
23. Works, XII, 149-150.
24. Works, XII, 50.
25. Works, XII, 152.
26. Works, XII, 130, 131.
27. Works, XII, 67.
28. Thackeray's exaggeration of the ridiculous aspects of his Irish and other comic characters is part of his tendency toward a kind of humor which Professor Ray links with Edward William Clarke's Library of Useless Knowledge.

This pamphlet, for it is hardly more, reinforced the penchant towards fantastic nonsense that had helped to bring FitzGerald and Thackeray together at Cambridge. The identifying mark of this peculiar and illusive brand of humor is perhaps its air of specious plausibility. So grave and circumstantial are the terms in which an absurd proposition is advanced that, for one wild instant before common sense reasserts itself, the statement seems almost credible. . . . No doubt we can also refer to the tradition of humor that Clarke represents Thackeray's delight in coining odd words like "protemporaneous" and "dueisome" and the almost talismanic significance that he attached to such comic names as "Boogleywallah" and "Bungay." (Ray, Uses of Adversity, pp. 224-225.)

His caricatures in words somewhat resemble his drawings; in the field of art, unlike that of writing, he was never able to achieve serious results. "'Don't exaggerate the faces, pray,' FitzGerald urged him, 'but get them near to Nature.' Thackeray was unable to follow this excellent
advice, and it is only his comic drawings that rise above insipidity." (Ray, Uses of Adversity, p. 172.) In his Christmas books (see Chapter Two) Thackeray combined his two talents, providing both text and illustrations and giving proof of his aptitude for caricature in both.

His appreciation and notice of caricature in pictorial representations of the Irish enters into an essay he wrote on George Cruikshank (first published in the Westminster Review, June 1840). He is enthusiastic about Cruikshank's drawings and mentions one showing a group of "Paddies... Could Mr. O'Connell himself desire anything more national than the scene of a drunken row, or could Father Mathew have a better text to preach upon? There is not a broken nose in the room that is not thoroughly Irish." (Works, V, 232.)


30. Works, II, 103.
33. Works, II, 105.
34. Works, II, 106.
37. Thrall, Rebellious Fraser's, pp. 64-65.
41. Works, V ("A Box of Novels"), 348-349.
CHAPTER TWO

1. This habit is related to Thackeray's preference for concealing himself behind a nom de plume or a persona. Lambert Ennis comments:

"In his sensibility may lie the basis of another strong Thackerayan trait—the preoccupation with masks. The man of sensibility is obsessed by feelings of inadequacy, and his most trivial act may be traced to the need of covering some one of those inadequacies. Hence his ways of conducting himself are usually masks or shells. . . . Thackeray's constant poses, such as that of the jester or buffoon, are masks or shells. (Thackeray: the Sentimental Cynic [Evanston, Ill., 1950], p. 2.)"


"... it would be needless to criticize their peculiar dialect, were it not that Thackeray has made for himself a reputation by his writing of Irish. In this he has been so entirely successful that for many English readers he has established a new language which may not improperly be called Hybernico-Thackerayan. If comedy is to be got from peculiarities of dialect, as no doubt it is, one form will do as well as another, so long as those who read it know no better. So it has been with Thackeray's Irish, for in truth he was not familiar with the modes of pronunciation which make up Irish brogue. Therefore, though he is always droll, he is not true to nature. Many an Irishman coming to London, not unnaturally tries to imitate the talk of Londoners. . . . It was these mistakes which Thackeray took for the natural Irish tone. . . . In one of the lines I have quoted there occurs the word "troat." Such a sound never came naturally from the mouth of an Irishman. He puts in an h instead of omitting it, and says "dhrink." He comes to London, and finding out that he is wrong with his "dhrink," he leaves out all the h's he can, and thus comes to "troat." It is this which Thackeray has heard. But contrary to Trollope's statement, Thackeray often adds an "n" in the speech of his Irishmen. Costigan was in the "Hundherd and Third"; Mulligan speaks of a "tallow-chandlithering cockney."

4. Works, IV, 7, 13, and 43.


The Mulligan may also be counted among Thackeray’s many masks; excusing himself for not appearing at a party, he writes that he wishes to say “how it was the Mulligan didn’t come to your ball.” (Letters, II, 293, Letter No. 392, 1 June 1847, to William Harrison Ainsworth.)


A favorite device of Lever’s is having his heroes of low rank become friends of the great.


15. Works, III, 290.


17. Works, III, 351.

18. Walter Jerrold, editor of Thackeray’s Works, enumerates the novelists in Works, VI, xii.

19. The parody is unmistakable, and was of course recognized by Lever, who wrote Thackeray to protest, “and when the reply proved unsatisfactory, he straightway introduced a heavy-handed caricature of Thackeray into the novel which he was then writing. It has been noted by critics, however, that both James and Lever reformed the conspicuous traits of their style that Thackeray had lampooned.” (Stevenson, Showman, p. 167.)

20. Works, VI, 248.
22. Works, XXV, 63.
24. Works, XXV, 85.
26. Works, XXV, 293.
27. Works, XXII, 280.
29. Works, XVII, 155.
31. Works, XVII, 71.
32. Works, XVII, 69.
33. Works, XVII, 70.
34. Works, XVII, 68.

35. Thackeray could well have had Lever's heroes in mind for this phrase of Costigan's; his idea of himself resembles them, but Thackeray shows up the idealization with the reality.

36. Works, XVII, 70.
37. Works, XVIII, 57-61.


41. Thackeray told Lady Castlereagh, "I will be proud to show your ladyship a mother that I have, & to ask whether among all the Duchesses and Empresses of this life there are many much finer ladies." (Letters, II, 459, Letter No. 527, 28 Nov. 1848.)

42. Greig, Reconsideration, p. 128.
This was the beginning of the "Dignity of Literature" controversy which was to plague him for some time, involving him in dispute with his friend and enemy John Forster and others prominent in the literary world.

Ray, Age of Wisdom, p. 114.

Greig, Reconsideration, p. 35.

Letters, I, 197.

Letters, I, 197--May 4, 1832.

Works, XVIII, 64.

Ray, Age of Wisdom, p. 114.

Concurring in the identification of Shandon as Maginn are Baker, English Novel, VII, 367; Ennis, Sentimental Cynic, p. 60, who says that Thackeray "drew Captain Shandon in Pendennis partially, at least, in the likeness of Maginn"; Stevenson, Showman, p. 206: "Maginn and Jack Sheehan and the raffish gang of Fraserians plainly suggested Captain Shandon and Jack Finucane and Mr. Bludyer"; and Greig, Reconsideration, p. 306: "the William Maginns ... would write simultaneously for both political parties if the pay was good enough."

The dissenter is Miriam Thrall, Rebellious Fraser's, pp. 208-211, who calls the identification "preposterous" because Shandon writes for a pro-Catholic paper and Maginn opposed Catholic emancipation; she disputes the assertion that Maginn wrote on both sides of a question, calling this idea a misinterpretation of his burlesque writing. Professor Ray retorts: "despite Dr. Thrall's arguments to the contrary, Maginn was certainly the original of Captain Shandon in Pendennis. The likeness may not be exact--Thackeray's portraits from life are never mere photographs--but it is none the less unmistakable."

(Letters, I, 192, note 29.)

His attitude toward pretensions to aristocracy compares interestingly with Thackeray's Irishmen and their habits. According to Dr. Thrall, "He looked with fine scorn upon compatriots who sought to bolster up their Irish birth with lineage. Almost any Irishman, he would say, could spring from a king if he felt the need."

(Rebellious Fraser's, p. 165.)

Thackeray's diary reads: June 10, 1832--

... he read Homer to me & made me admire it, wh. I had never done before moreover he made [me] make a vow to read some Homer every day wh. I
don't know whether I shall keep. His remarks on it were extraordinarily intelligent & beautiful mingled with much learning a great deal of wit & no ordinary poetical feeling—Perhaps I allow him this latter because I found his sentiments agree with my own or rather mine with his. (Letters, I, 207.)

Dr. Thrall says that Maginn knew Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Assyrian, Russian, Turkish, Gaelic, Swedish, Portuguese, German, Italian, French, and several more languages. Of these, he knew the classical languages and French well, the others perhaps only slightly. (Rebellious Fraser's, pp. 167-168.)

52. Stevenson, Showman, p. 45.

53. Biographical information from Thrall, Rebellious Fraser's, pp. 165-206.

54. Works, XVIII, 87.

55. Works, XVIII, 94.

56. Works, XVIII, 96.

57. Works, XVIII, 129.

CHAPTER THREE


4. Ray, Uses of Adversity, pp. 174-186. Professor Ray in his preface to the Letters and Private Papers comments:

With such a mother, it is not surprising that only two of the Shawe children were entirely normal. Henry was a dipsomaniac, Jane pitifully neurotic, and Isabella . . . lost her mind not long after the birth of her third daughter in the summer of 1840. (1, cixiv.)
18. Letters, I, 479, Letter No. 185, 21-23 September 1840. Professor Ray has filled in gaps in this page of the letter; bracketed section contains his conjectural restoration.
23. Professor Greig remarks on "the personal and accidental way in which Thackeray arrived at many of his opinions, attitudes, and ideas fixed." Greig attributes his hostility to the Irish primarily to "the Shawe group," and states that with the passage of time Thackeray "became more prone to think of all Irishmen as Maginns and of all Irishwomen as Mrs. Shawes."
(Thackeray: a Reconsideration, pp. 82-83.)
24. The most important examples of the latter type are Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth and Jane Octavia Brookfield.

25. I have provided more information about the place of the mothers-in-law in the plot and about their relationships with the other characters than in the case of the comic Irish characters. The reason for this difference in approach is that Thackeray's accounts of the mother-in-law, based on Mrs. Shawe, are closely connected with the pattern of his life; his characterization of Mrs. Shawe is the outcome of her effect on his life. However, the Irish acquaintances who contributed to his ideas for the comic characters had little personal effect on his history, and there is little correlation between their roles in his fiction and their roles in his biography.

27. Works, IX, 339.

Professor Ray notes that Thackeray's idea for this story "appears to have been suggested to him by Somerville's persistent wooing of Jane Shawe, though Jane, unlike Jemima Gam in that tale, did not marry her suitor. -- Mrs. Gam is Thackeray's earliest portrait of his mother-in-law."


33. Works, XIII, 316.
34. Works, XIII, 324.

35. Quotations in this paragraph from Works, XIII, 329, 331, and 336.
40. Works, XV, 300.
41. Works, XV, 309.
42. Works, XV, 384-385.
43. Works, XX, 405.
44. Works, XX, 386.
45. Works, XX, 403.
46. Works, XX, 403-404.
47. Works, XXI, 16.
48. Ray, Uses of Adversity, p. 186:

In July Mrs. Shawe took advantage of these circumstances to make a second and more determined effort to break off her daughter's engagement. From Thackeray's letters and Chapters 23 to 28 of Philip, whose hero, so he told George Smith, follows "pretty much the career of WMT in the first year of his ruin and absurdly imprudent marriage," it would appear that she was decidedly unscrupulous in her tactics.

... in his absence she abused him roundly to her daughter.

49. Works, XXI, 14.
50. Works, XXI, 9.
51. Works, XXI, 98.
52. Works, XXI, 157-158.
54. Ennis, Sentimental Cynic, pp. 73-75:

At times the demon of hatred would rise in his soul, and he would exorcise it by adding another
figure to the terrible row of mothers-in-law that stalks through his books like the dumb show in Macbeth. . . . The rising feminist movement had put men more than ever on their guard against aggressive women like Mrs. Shawe and the Campaigner. The writing profession played its part in the male counterattack by saturating its fiction with dominating women.

Douglas Jerrold's Mrs. Caudle, Dickens's Mrs. MacStinger, George Eliot's Aunt Glegg, and Trollope's Mrs. Proudle are all variations of the type.

CHAPTER FOUR


At least one critic interprets this reference to Lever's novel as a declaration of intention to "emulate, somewhat ironically, Charles Lever's swashbuckling braggart hero, Harry Lorrequer." (Ennis, Sentimental Cynic, p. 107.) However, Barry Lyndon copies neither in tone nor in central idea the adventure stories of Lever.

5. Works, XII, 180 and 185.

Freeny enters Barry Lyndon briefly when the young Barry is accompanied by a "well-armed gentleman" on the Dublin road, and discovers soon afterwards that he is "the famous Captain Freeny."


9. In spite of his fondness for putting speech into some sort of dialect, Thackeray generally succeeds in maintaining for Lyndon a style suitable to an eighteenth-century gentleman.
10. Ennis connects their relationship with Thackeray's biography, speaking of "the mother-and-son dualisms based on that between Thackeray and Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth. This appears with little disguise in the interaction of Pen and his mother in Pendennis; it shows itself with more disguise in the tension... Between Redmond Barry and his mother in Barry Lyndon." (Sentimental Cynic, p. 139.)

Thackeray himself is in the personality of many of his characters, and even in Barry Lyndon he felt involved because, says Ennis, he thought that with another kind of mother he might have been another Barry. (Sentimental Cynic, p. 107.) Mrs. Barry, as unlike Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth as she is in most respects, is akin to her in others, notably in her devotion to her son and in her turning to Evangelical religion. Mrs. Barry's Reverend Joshua Jowls, who is angry when she sends money to her son, reflects Thackeray's antipathy to the fanaticism and intolerance of the religious ideas to which his mother was drawn.


17. Works, II, 106.
19. Works, I, 68.

21. Barry is a villain, but so self-deceived that he is not aware of hypocrisy in his protestations, nor is he a villain of tragic stature with evil replacing good in his values. "Instead, he is a kind of moral idiot, who constantly gives himself away because of his entire insensitivity to what is ordinarily regarded as right and wrong." (Ray, The Buried Life [Cambridge, Mass., 1952], p. 28.)
1. "If all other record of the century were wiped out, the future historian could reconstruct the century in outline by reading Dickens, George Eliot, Ruskin, Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold. But from Thackeray, he would learn little about the political, economic, scientific, philosophical, and religious life of the century, though he would learn much about the social life, and much about Thackeray himself."

(Stockton Axson, "Thackeray the Satirist," Rice Institute Pamphlet, III [1916], 26.)


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