

Ambivalence and Ambiguity in Thackeray's  
Attitude to His Woman Characters in  
Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Letters  
and the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
of Bilkent University  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts in  
English Language and Literature

By

Vicdan Babaloğlu

June 1994

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*Vicdan Babalođlu.....  
tarafından bařışlanmıřtır*

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**To My Father and Mother**

We certify that we have read this thesis and in our combined opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Prof. Dr. Sema Kormalı

(Advisor)



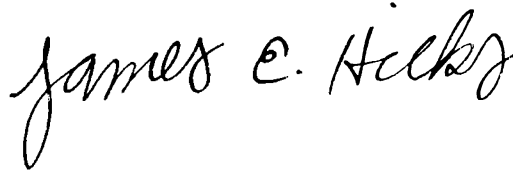
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## Abstract

### Ambivalence and Ambiguity in Thackeray's Attitude to His Woman Characters in Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond

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M.A. In English Literature  
Advisor: Prof. Dr. Sema Kormalı  
June, 1994

William Makepeace Thackeray is ambivalent in his depiction of woman characters, which is primarily the result of the discrepancy in the attitude to women of the Victorian society. Like many of the contemporary novelists, he at once supports and questions the position of women and the double standards of his male-dominated society. His attitude to the Victorian concept of ideal womanhood is equally ambiguous as that of the Victorian concept of the "fallen" woman.

Thackeray portrays his female characters as contrasted pairs, using the "bad" woman as a foil to the "good" one. Such portrayal is in keeping with the method of Victorian fiction; however, he questions the values of ideal womanhood in the conventional novel. The ambivalence of Thackeray's attitude to his female characters makes it difficult for the reader to determine whether he prefers the good, submissive, but the boring parasite in the Amelia type or the bad, rebellious, yet attractive Becky type. Contributing to this ambivalence

is Thackeray's irony as well as humor. Such ambivalence no doubt resulted from his contradictory attitude to his mother, wife, and the woman he loved.

The ambivalence and ambiguity in his attitude is to be found in all of his novels, but most obviously in Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond. These are the two novels most memorable for their contrasted female characters. The pairs of women examined are Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp of Vanity Fair and Rachel Castlewood and Beatrix Castlewood of Henry Esmond.

## Özet

### Vanity Fair ve Henry Esmond'da Thackeray'nin Kadın Karakterlerine Karşı Olan Belirsiz ve Çelişik Tavrı

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İngiliz Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans Tezi  
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Haziran, 1994

On dokuzuncu yüzyılın önemli İngiliz romancılarından olan William Makepeace Thackeray, kadın karakterlerini tasvir ederken çelişkili düşünceler ve davranışlar sergilemektedir. Bunların sebeplerinden biri, toplumda kadınlara uygulanan çifte standartlardır. Yazar, erkeklerin hakim olduğu bu toplumda kadınlara karşı uygulanan çifte standartları romanlarında hem sorgular hem de dolaylı olarak savunmasını yapar. Yazarın kullandığı alaycı tavır nedeniyle neyi savunup neyi yediğini anlamak zordur.

Thackeray romanlarında Viktorya döneminin "iyi" ve "kötü" olarak değerlendirdiği zıt kadın karakterleri yaratmış fakat döneminin kadınlar için benimsediği iyilik ve kötülük kavramlarını sorgulamıştır. Ancak bütün bu sorgulamasına rağmen seçiminin "iyi" kadın tipi olan pasif, uysal fakat sıkıcı kadın karakterlerinden yana mı, yoksa "kötü" kadın tipi olan canlı, asi fakat çekici kadın karakterlerinden yana mı olduğu belirsizdir. Bu belirsizlik, romancının karakterlerine karşı takındığı



tavrın belirsizliğinden olduđu kadar, zamanının geleneksel romanlarında görülen kadın tiplerine karşı çıkma isteğinden de kaynaklanmaktadır. Ayrıca annesine, karısına, ve sevdiği kadına karşı duyduğu çelişkili duyguların da bunda payı vardır.

Thackeray'nin belirsiz ve çelişkili tavrı, hemen hemen bütün romanlarında görülmesine karşın en belirgin olarak Vanity Fair ve Henry Esmond'da ortaya çıktığından, bu romanlarındaki "iyi" kadın tipleri olan Amelia ve Rachel ve "kötü" kadın tipleri olan Becky ve Beatrix inceleme konusu olmuştur.

## Acknowledgments

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## I. Introduction

One of the greatest novelists of Victorian England, William Makepeace Thackeray questioned, as well as supported, the social and moral values of his time. Although this is peculiar to nearly all the novelists of the early Victorian period, Thackeray is especially noted for his ambivalent attitude to the English society. On the one hand, he wrote in keeping with the conventional novel of the period; on the other hand, he either ridiculed or parodied it. This noncommittal tone is best exemplified in his portrayal of characters, especially the heroines.

Beginning with Vanity Fair (1848), his first and best novel, he created a contrasted pair of women characters in Amelia Sedley, the good heroine who is representative of ideal Victorian womanhood, and Becky Sharp, the wicked heroine who challenges Victorian ideals. This opposed womanhood is to be seen in nearly all his subsequent novels, but the vivid characterization of Becky remains unmatched in the later novels, with the possible exception The History of Henry Esmond (1852), generally accepted to be his next greatest novel. The contrasted pair of woman characters in the later novel are Rachel and Beatrix, who are the counterparts of Amelia and Becky respectively. Both sets of women are at once ridiculed and praised, making it difficult for the

reader to decide which type of women the author actually prefers.

It is the purpose of this study to examine Thackeray's equivocal attitude to his heroines in Vanity Fair and Henry Esmond and to analyse the reasons for such ambivalence. The reasons can be classified into three groups: (1) the social climate and assumptions of the age. (2) Thackeray's own life experiences, and (3) his experimentation with the point of view of narration and the noncommittal tone of the narrator.

In Victorian England women were at once glorified--accepted to be far superior to men by nature--and found to be much inferior to men both physically and intellectually. Women were seen as sex and beauty objects so they were neither considered as real people nor as important as their male counterparts. This was the problem of women living in Victorian England. They were isolated from the world of business generally because they were found deficient in intellect. With the separation of women from the money making world, women started to develop a great aspiration for a state of gentility devoid of responsibility. Consequently, as men became the sole power in society, women became second class citizens, who are responsible for female accomplishments. The author reveals this contradictory attitude to women in his novels; yet he is also critical

of it, questioning its double standards and the position of women in this male dominant society. His female characters, Becky, Amelia, Rachel, and Beatrix are all the products of this environment.

In both Vanity Fair and Esmond, it is the female characters that are more lively and memorable. Thackeray virtually has no strong male characters in his novels, with the possible exception of Dobbin. If his attitude to woman characters is ambivalent, it is also so to his male characters, reflecting his equivocal stance on his moral and social values. Portraying characters in contrasted pairs was the novelistic convention of the time, and Thackeray's pitting the "good" womanhood of Amelia and Rachel against the "evil" womanhood of Becky and Beatrix is quite in keeping with the tradition. Although his depiction of the moral and immoral women is generally in harmony with Victorian concepts, his judgement of morality is quite ambiguous. The reasons for the ambiguity can be attributed to the social mobility and changing moral standards, as well as Thackeray's uncertain concept of desirable womanhood. The novelist's measure of goodness in women is basically conformity to social norms, whereas nonconformity is the criterion of evil. By these standards, Amelia and Rachel are good women in their feminine submissiveness and devoted motherhood, and Becky and Beatrix are evil women in their

rebelliousness and wilfulness and in challenging wifely and motherly duties. Yet Becky, the siren figure, is more attractive than the insipid Amelia; similarly Henry, Thackeray's counterpart, cannot really forget the seductive charm of Beatrix. They are, in a way, the fallen woman types of the conventional novel, but defy moral and social relegation. Both Becky and Beatrix reveal strong female characters, who manipulate men and women alike to attain their goals. They are the would-be social outcasts, who force themselves on society through their courage and resilience. They are thus portrayed as the more attractive woman characters, in spite of Thackeray's equivocal attitude, in finding them enticing but in criticizing them for their obvious defiance of Victorian sexual norms. What they are criticized for most severely is their refusal to accept the subdued role of wife and mother, the position that would restrict their sexual and social freedom. Being a Victorian man, Thackeray dreaded the fact that sexual freedom would bring power to women and upset the social balance.

If Becky and Beatrix are censured, so are the ideal woman types of Amelia and Rachel. Although they represent a good many of the traits of ideal Victorian womanhood, they are, especially Amelia, often shown to be dull and unexciting. Their most commendable quality is their acceptance of the submissive role of devoted wife and

affectionate mother. Ironically, Thackeray finds this kind of womanhood in Amelia parasitic and possessive in Rachel, both of which would soon cause boredom in Victorian man such as Thackeray. Whether these women readily accept their subdued position or resign to it for social acceptability is not explained by the author.

Hypocrisy is shown to be a female trait, and both the good and the evil characters reveal varying degrees of duplicity. Women in the Victorian society cannot afford to be frank and outspoken the author implies. The only exception is Beatrix, whose social position affords her some degree of outspokenness. Thackeray despises hypocrisy, but insinuates that nearly everybody in his opportunistic society is guilty of duplicity. As a social climber, Becky has to practice hypocrisy to reach her aims, and her practice is justified to a great extent. Although Beatrix is from high society, she reveals Becky's greed for money and rank, an ambition which is reflective of her acquisitive society. The aim of all these female characters is to find a proper husband to fulfil their expectations because their future depends on making the right kind of marriage. In the nineteenth century England, women in Becky's position, had only three choices: being a governess, getting married, or being a prostitute. She goes through all these three stages.



Although Victorian society was conservative, there was social mobility, so Becky could try every social position. In Beatrix's society, eighteenth-century England, this would have been impossible, because women like Becky would easily become outcasts. These kinds of double-standards resulted in having a society which had quite strict rules concerning men and women. In these periods, England was quite strong and ruled by women:

From the day of her accession she [Queen Victoria] never forgot that she was a Queen. She who praised modesty in women did not shrink from dealing annihilating snubs in a most unfeminine manner. And like no other, Queen Victoria knew how to maintain her authority in her country. . . . Once a widow she neither consulted her son and successor nor would she listen to his views on political matters.

(Florence Maly Schlatter 1940, 99)

By being ambivalent to women, Thackeray questions the authority figure as well as the rules of society.

Another reason of his ambivalence is his objection to the heroes and heroines of the conventional novel. Therefore, he changed the appearances of his female and male characters. Becky is "pale, sandy-haired" (49, ch. 2) and has blue eyes just like good heroines of the conventional novel. Amelia's nose is "rather short . . .

and her cheeks a great deal too round and red for a heroine" (43, ch. 1). His characters do not fit into the description of good and evil characters of the conventional novel. Beatrix and Rachel do not fit into it either. Beatrix is a "brown beauty . . . her eyes, her hair, and eyebrows . . . her complexion was as dazzling white as snow in sunshine; except her cheeks, which were a bright red, and her lips which were of a still deeper crimson" (217: bk. 2. ch. 7). Rachel has white skin and black curly hair. Evil characters have the appearances of the good characters of the conventional novel. In this way, he shows his dislike of the rules of conventional novel.

Charles Dickens was considered a great original by setting his own standards, and Sir Walter Scott was regarded as a great innovator by bringing the standards for Europe. Thackeray did not set out doing anything new, but by following Fielding or Smollett, the English humorists of the eighteenth century England, he entered into a new competition with the previous great writers (Walter Allen 1958, 174). Harold Bloom states that Thackeray writes in the tradition of Fielding "in judging his own characters as a magistrate might judge them, a magistrate who was also a parodist and vigilant exposé of social pretenses" (1987, 1). Like Scott did, Thackeray set his novels into a historical background to give

objectivity and to strengthen the credibility of his works. Using this method mostly in Esmond, he wanted to write a historical novel. Setting the story in a historical background was one of the techniques of Victorian fiction traditions.

Thackeray learned and liked Fielding's style, which was basically to use "the principle of contrast" (J.Y.T. Greig 1950, 105). This principle is another reason for the equivocal tone in his works. He used the contrasts to balance his style. If he uses Becky as

the single dominant fate, the effect would . . . have been manifestly weakened, since the frustration of Becky's life purposes would be felt by the reader as resulting from their immorality rather than as manifesting a universal situation. Similarly to use Amelia Sedley as the single figure would have been even more disadvantageous, since her limited and unworldly virtues in themselves scarcely lead to an engagement with Vanity Fair at all. By uniting their two stories as the dominant plot structure Thackeray achieved an asymmetry of moral conditions which neutralized morality as the causal factor differentiating happiness from unhappiness. (R. Rader 1989, 58-59)

The different qualities and experiences of these contrasted female characters result in having the equivocal attitude to women.

Thackeray's noncommittal attitude can largely be traced to the experiences of his early life as an only child and his life as a married man. Under the influence of his mother and wife, he depicted two main female characters in almost all his novels. Therefore, he was considered as an autobiographical writer. These two female characters can be clearly found in Vanity Fair and Esmond. Portraying two contrasted characters, whether male or female, is one of Victorian fiction traditions as in the novels of Dickens, Trollope, or Brontes. Thackeray values Victorian standard of respectability: for women, it is attachment to her children and her husband; for men, it is morality.

His equivocal attitude of love and hatred for his possessive and dominant mother and conflicting feelings of love, pity, and desperation he felt for his submissive but mentally disturbed wife were reasons for ambivalence in Thackeray's attitude to women. His wife's submissive personality inspired him very likely to create most of his passive female characters, whereas his mother's character gave him inspiration for the aggressive female characters, such as Becky and Beatrix.

In his childhood, having parted from his mother, who influenced him deeply, and in his youth having a possessive mother, who tried to control his life, made him uncomfortable. For this reason, he was attracted to simple and almost "humble-minded" women. When he fell in love with his wife Isabella, she was only seventeen and was a

nice, simple, girlish girl. She had a good, well-trained singing voice . . . but she was not otherwise remarkable for accomplishments and she was not clever, which was all to the good as far as Thackeray was concerned. She was unaffected and natural, qualities he always admired in women. (Catherine Peters 1987, 5)

He modelled Amelia and Rachel on Isabella. Rachel embodies the mother figure first and then the ideal wife for Henry. She has the qualities of a mother and a perfect wife. This simple-minded, passive female type who needs protection attracted Thackeray to Isabella in his early years of his life. As in the situation of Dobbin and Amelia or Rachel and Henry, when Dobbin and Henry realize the real nature of these women, they both are frustrated with the simplicity of them. On the one hand, Dobbin and Henry like, as the author does, submissive women: on the other hand, they admire strong and independent women. This is the dilemma of Thackeray as an

author. Moreover, his nose was broken in school during a fight, his insecurity with his appearance makes him admire beautiful women as Henry's obsession with Beatrix because of her beauty.

In Esmond, one of the reasons of the ambivalence is that the story is conveyed by the two different points of view: Henry as the hero and the third person narrator, and Henry as the old man and at the very end the first person narrator. He experiments in order to shift the points of view. In Esmond, Thackeray converts the rules of the conventional works. Beatrix is an allusion from Dante's The Divine Comedy. Dante's Beatrice symbolizes love, beauty and innocence. Thackeray's Beatrix cannot love anybody and is not innocent, so the author makes her old and ugly in the end of the novel.

Esmond is Thackeray's only nonserialized novel, and it is accepted as his greatest. It was considered the most successful historical novel after Scott's Waverley series. Gordon Ray states that

Esmond is remarkable both as a historical romance and as a novel of manners. . . . Esmond primarily as a chronicle of life in a narrow family circle, to centre our attention on Thackeray's analysis of the shifting relationships of Lord and Lady Castlewood, Harry and Beatrix. Whatever aspect of Esmond

we emphasize, we should recognize in the novel a perfect complement to Vanity Fair. (1958, 193-194)

Both novels are regarded as a sequence to one another because of the similarity between the characters, especially female characters.

In Vanity Fair there is the ambience of a carnival where people get rid of the pressures of society and be as they like to be. but Becky suits this to her own aims. Instead of showing her real self, she plays the pious woman who is the complete opposite of herself. She is like a siren that nobody knows what she is up to. There is also the influence of Restoration Comedy on the characters like Becky and Beatrix. Becky is a hypocrite and uses her sexuality as a weapon. Beatrix is, like Millamant in William Congreve's The Way of the World, a frank woman who expresses herself freely.

As stated above, in both Vanity Fair and Esmond, Thackeray has an ambivalent attitude to his female characters as well as his male characters, whereas in the first one, characters are like puppets which are used by Thackeray who is another character in the book. "Everything in Vanity Fair remains at a distance because between the scene and the reader there always stands, with an insistent solidity, Thackeray himself" (Arnold Kettle 1951, 147). Vanity Fair is a humorous novel,

because there is the apparent sarcasm which stems from the narrator. He praises and ridicules his characters which makes it difficult to interpret his attitude. The narrator is noncommittal to his characters. Although the story is narrated by the third person narrator, it sometimes shifts to the first person narrator, who is like an old and experienced man narrating the story. In Esmond the ambivalence arises from the attitude of Henry. He can neither know nor be sure about Rachel and Beatrix.

Both good and evil female characters are punished. In Vanity Fair, Dobbin realizes the real nature of good Amelia, the dull and weak woman. In Esmond, the good Rachel is aged and loses her beauty. Henry assumes the authority in the house. Both Rachel and Amelia are humiliated. Of the evil characters, Becky is reduced to prostitution; Beatrix is made a courtesan, which is a little better than being a prostitute. Amelia is criticized more harshly than Rachel, because Esmond is the book of the author's mature period. Rachel is portrayed as an ideal woman and is more intelligent than her predecessor. She lives only for her husband and her children. Then, she dedicates herself to Henry. Thackeray reflects his longing for a mother in Rachel, because she is portrayed as a mother figure. Consequently, it can be said that Thackeray's ambivalent attitude to his female characters is the result of the double standards of his



society, his reaction to the Victorian novel, as well as the perplexing experiences he had with women in his early life.

## II. Becky as Siren

Contrasting two female characters in Vanity Fair reflects Thackeray's dilemma as author and his reaction against the heroes and heroines of the conventional novel. His equivocal tone makes difficult for the reader to interpret of his events and characters. His opinions have a moral ground, which means there is little room for conventional heroes and heroines in Vanity Fair. In the conventional novel heroes or heroines dominate the circumstances, whereas in his art the characters are the slaves of circumstances (Sk. Sinha 1983, 236-237). Besides, his novel does not encourage the reader to make direct and exact comments on his two female characters, Becky and Amelia (Joan Williams 1969, 61). Becky is one of the most memorable characters of Thackeray as an active and lively character in contrast to the submissive and boring Amelia and is "refreshingly natural in contrast to the self-righteous and hypocritical characters like Mrs. Bute Crawley, Lady Southdown and Lady Blanche Gaunt" (1969, 61). In spite of her evil nature and the duplicity of her character, she is the most charming and entertaining of Thackeray's female characters.

Becky's vitality and assertiveness set off Amelia's innocence and submissiveness. There are numerous scenes

in the novel concerning the striking differences between these two female characters. When the two girls start life after school, Becky becomes a governess at the household of Sir Pitt, where she has to fall on her own resources to escape the danger awaiting her:

While Becky Sharp was on her own wing in the country, hopping on all sorts of twigs, and amid a multiplicity of traps, and pecking up her food quite harmless and successful. Amelia lay snug in her home at Russell Square; if she went into the world, it was under the guidance of the elders: nor did it seem that any evil could befall her or that opulent cheery comfortable home in which she was affectionately sheltered. (150-151, ch. 12)

Becky has to be "on her own wings" and to fend for herself, because she lacks the protection of parents and the security of social position.

On the other hand, Amelia is like a caged bird in the shelter of her comfortable house and the protection of her parents. She does not have to fear the type of dangers facing Becky, but leading such a sheltered life will render Amelia passive and submissive. From the very beginning, Becky struggles to survive in this materialistic society. In other words, she scuffles for "social acceptance against people no better and less able

than herself" (Williams 1969, 61-62). In doing this, she uses the art of hypocrisy to cheat people around her. Ironically enough, Becky is forced to be a hypocrite because of the standards of society. She deceives the people representing the true Victorian values, such as Sir Pitt. Although Amelia is a true Victorian woman in her observance of social expectations, Becky as a deceiver gets all the attention and becomes popular in society. Becky as a deceiver and Amelia as a submissive person are both the victims of society. In her wholeheartedly acceptance of and conformity to the rules of society, Amelia is called a "true believer" by Jadwin. Although Becky is a rebel and a nonconformist, she mocks society and their values to attain her aims; in this respect she can be regarded as a "mimetist" (Jadwin 1992, 665). These roles are imposed on them by the male dominated-society. In this way, women became unable to express their discontent. Hence, "female double-discourse became the lingua franca of Victorian women" (1992, 667). As a perfect mimetist, Becky manages to exist in this system successfully. She manipulates the frailties of a divergent system of interchange. "the debased and precarious symbolic order of language" (Jadwin 1992, 667). Becky succeeds in climbing to the top of society without seeming immoral, because her society accepts female duplicity as being natural.

She is actually a subvert who rebels against her society. Her first open rebellion is against Miss Jemima at the very beginning of the novel. As a young girl, Becky is divested of status at Chiswick Academy, a girl's school run by Miss Pinkerton. She expresses her indignation by throwing Johnson's dictionary at Miss Jemima's face, though it was "an interesting work which [Miss Pinkerton] invariably presented to her scholars on their departure from the Mall" (41, ch.1). Miss Pinkerton does not allow her sister Jemima to give this dictionary to Becky, because of Becky's lowly position. But Miss Jemima does not want to deprive Becky of this privilege, so she wants to give it to Becky without telling about it to her sister. However, Becky ungratefully shows her rancour to people like Jemima or Amelia, who genuinely want to help her. Becky shows her resentment of society generally by preying on weaker characters. But only early in the novel, she shows this openly by refusing to take the dictionary.

From then on, she will learn to be deceitful and to play her role carefully as a hypocrite:

Becky spends years perfecting her technique, learning to deploy double-discourse in two primary ways: as a trap and as a weapon. Her "trap" mode is a carefully choreographed confidence game designed to evoke and exploit

a dupe's predictable reaction. The trap is characteristically sub-linguistic standard, theatricalized gestures or poses calculated to generate a certain response. (Jadwin 1992, 666)

She will improve the art of hypocrisy through the years as seducer and adulteress. In her early life, she is forced to become a subvert because of her social class. Lacking a family inheritance, she has to make her own living. But her means of supporting herself is limited. Early in the novel, she confesses Amelia about the way she felt in the school:

"For two years I have only had insults and outrage from her [Miss Pinkerton]. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen. I have never had a friend or a kind word, except from you. I have been made to tend the little girls in the lower schoolroom, and to talk French to the Misses, until I grew sick of my mother-tongue. But that talking French to Miss Pinkerton was capital fun. . . She doesn't know a word of French . . . I believe it was that which made her part with me . . . so thank heaven for French. Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!" (47, ch.2)

Her praising France and Napoleon was an act of betrayal to England in those days. Therefore, the submissive Amelia warns her about it, but the subvert answers: "Revenge may be wicked, but it's natural . . . I'm no angel" (47, ch.2). She is definitely not, because she uses and deceives everyone to possess money and position.

Her low social class is the reason for the unlucky start at the beginning of her life. She gradually becomes rebellious, merciless, and artful. In this case, asks the narrator, can she be completely guilty? Moreover, the information regarding her early life makes the reader feel some sympathy for her:

Miss Sharp's father was an artist, and in that quality had given lessons of drawing at Miss Pinkerton's school. . . . When, he was drunk, he used to beat his wife and daughter; and the next morning, with a headache, he would rail at the world for its neglect of his genius. (48, ch.2)

In her childhood, she cannot get enough attention and love from her parents. Her father's life style influences Becky badly: "She sate commonly with her father, who was very proud of her wit, and heard the talk of many of his wild companions--often but ill suited for a girl to hear" (49, ch.2). In this way, she gets used to this kind of

talk and wild humor. Furthermore, her father encourages her acts by laughing at them.

In Victorian England, being an opera singer, her mother's social position is no better than her father. These jobs were not held in respect in those days:

Rebecca's mother had had some education somewhere, and her daughter spoke French with purity and a Parisian accent. . . . For her mother being dead, her father . . . wrote a manly and pathetic letter to Miss Pinkerton, recommending the orphan child to her protection, and so descended to the grave.

(48, ch. 2)

Although she does not belong to an aristocratic family, her appearance and intelligence help her to find a respectable place. Later in the novel, she manages to be accepted by high society so she can be considered a social climber:

Rebecca was seventeen when she came to Chiswick, and was bound over as an articulated pupil; her duties being to talk French, as we have seen; and her privileges to live cost free, and with a few guineas a year; to gather scraps of knowledge from the professors who attended the school. (49, ch. 2)



In Chiswick Academy, she finds life strict and boring. Yet she learns how to survive in this difficult environment:

The rigid formality of the place suffocated her: the prayers and the meals, the lessons and the walks, which were arranged with a conventional regularity, oppressed her almost beyond endurance . . . She had not been much of a dissembler until now her loneliness taught her to feign. (50, ch. 2)

Here, the narrator protects her because of the difficult life in which she has to live, and the reader feels sorry for her. Her circumstances force her to become resilient. She has more intelligence than the women around her, so she cannot get on well with them:

She had never mingled in the society of women . . . The pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress, the foolish good-humor of her sister, the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls, and the frigid correctness of the governesses equally annoyed her; and she had no soft maternal heart, this unlucky girl. (50-51, ch. 2)

The strict Victorian society and her circumstances make her a tough person.

Living in Victorian society, there were three choices that a woman of Becky's position could make: being a governess, getting married, and becoming a prostitute. Becky goes through all three stages. She first becomes a governess and later gets married; afterwards, she becomes the mistress of Lord Steyne, and eventually a prostitute. While Amelia submissively accepts her fortune, Becky always forces her chances by playing "the outsider who attempts by strength of her character and intelligence alone, without any advantages of wealth or birth, to climb the highest positions in society, only to find each success leaves her equally bored and discontented" (Peters 1987, 149). The boredom which she feels is largely the result of the limited possibilities available for her, as well as the lack of intellectual opportunities whereby she would give vent to her physical and intellectual energy. Knowing that in a male-dominated materialistic society, she can attain her aim through securing a rich husband or a lover, she tries her chances at the first opportunity by trying to ensnare Joseph Sedley, Amelia's brother:

Miss Sharp would never have committed herself so far as to advance opinions the untruth of which would have been so easily detected. But we must remember that she is but nineteen as yet, unused to the art of deceiving, poor

innocent creature! and making her own experience in her own person. The meaning of the above series of queries, as translated in the heart of this ingenious young woman, was simply this:--'If Mr. Joseph Sedley is rich and unmarried, why should I not marry him? I have only a fortnight, to be sure, but there is no harm in trying.' And she determined within herself to make this laudable attempt. (54-55, ch. 2)

Her attempts end in frustration. In the Sedley's house, Becky realizes that her low social status is a boundary between her and her ideals. "Alternately exploited and impeded by a culture that offers women only a submissive route to self-betterment" (Jadwin 1992, 666), she masters deceiving and confusing her dictators. After the unsuccessful undertaking with Amelia's brother Jos, Becky goes to the household of Sir Pitt Crawley to work as a governess.

She experiments the art of hypocrisy on her new patrons. Becky's intelligence and attractiveness impress Sir Pitt as much as the other people in the house. Her description of him in her letter to Amelia is extremely funny:

Sir Pitt is not what we silly girls. . . at Chiswick imagined a baronet must have been. .

. . Fancy an old, stumpy, short, vulgar, and very dirty man, in old clothes, and shabby old gaiters, who smokes a horrid pipe, and cooks his own horrid supper in a saucepan. He speaks with a country accent, and swore a great deal at the old charwoman. . . . (109-110, ch. 8)

It is not only Sir Pitt's physical traits that disqualify him from being a young girl's idea of a baronet but also his miserliness. He is a "philosopher with a taste for what is called low life" (117, ch. 8). He is ruthless to his wife who is an iron-monger's daughter and has subdued her to apathy: "when her husband was rude to her she was apathetic: whenever he struck her she cried. She had not character enough to take to drinking and moaned about" (119, ch.9). He likes drinking, swearing and his personal traits are summarized as being "cunning, mean, selfish, foolish, disreputable" (123, ch. 9). He is the good example of the corrupted people of his class, and this corruption of society is criticized by the implied author:

Vanity Fair--Vanity Fair! Here was a man, who could not spell, and did not care to read--who had the habits and the cunning of a boor . . . who never had a taste, or emotion, or enjoyment, but what was sordid and foul; and yet he had rank, and honours, and power . . .

Great ministers and states-man courted him; and in Vanity Fair he had a higher place than the most brilliant genius or spotless virtue.

(123, ch. 9)

People have position and money, although they do not have the intelligence to go with it.

Becky learns quickly how to use people in that she makes them see her as a perfectly virtuous woman. After the unsuccessful beginning in the Sedley's house, she is more experienced at Sir Pitt Crawley's:

She was almost mistress of the house when Mr. Crawley was absent . . . She was a quite different person from the haughty, shy, dissatisfied little girl whom we have known previously, and this change of temper proved great prudence, a sincere desire of amendment, or at any rate great moral courage. (128-29; ch. 10)

Thackeray seems to justify Becky. He modifies his statement soon afterwards: "a system of hypocrisy, which lasts through whole years, is one seldom satisfactorily practised by a person of one-and-twenty" (129, ch. 10). The primary cause of Becky's success is in her capacity to adopt pretence as truth for people who yield to her enchantment. Her new role at Sir Pitt Crawley's is a virtuous, intelligent, and modest young governess.

The apparently pious Mrs. Bute Crawley is a counterpart to Becky in her hypocrisy and greed for money. She is, however, far more dangerous than Becky in being treacherous. The reader can sympathize with Becky, because her condition forces her:

Lacking . . . natural advantages, Becky knows that the appearance of respectability and wealth must be sought for instead. And since Vanity Fair is as much pleased with the appearance as with the reality, until such time as the discrepancy is seen through and the hunt can begin. Becky has all her intuitive understanding of its values on her side. . . . The world's homage is bought at a price, and those who cannot pay cash must know how to charm, and flatter, and amuse. (A.E. Dyson 1978, 176)

Mrs. Bute is double-faced, because she wants to ruin Becky by using Rawdon: she does not want Becky to be Lady Crawley. "Rawdon saw there was a manifest intention on Mrs. Bute's part to captivate him with Rebecca" (174; ch. 14), thus he would be deprived of his aunt's inheritance. Thackeray displays the other hypocritical characters like Mrs. Bute Crawley to prove that Becky is not the only one. His cynical approach to his characters creates the ambivalence in his novel.

Although Mrs. Bute's effort is to ruin Becky's reputation, she also impresses Sir Pitt's half sister, Miss Crawley, Rawdon and Sir Pitt. Sir Pitt wants to marry Becky, because she is intelligent and values money just like him. Moreover, he likes her hypocrisy. Therefore, Thackeray shows that his attitude is ambivalent to men as well as to women. In spite of the fact that Becky is well aware of Sir Pitt's despicable qualities, she would be glad to have him as a husband for his money and position. In the scene of Sir Pitt's proposal, she genuinely cries for the first time in her life, because by marrying Rawdon secretly she has missed the greatest opportunity of her life. It is too late, because Becky is already married to his son Rawdon. As soon as his wife dies, Sir Pitt proposes to Becky:

"Say yes, Becky," . . . "I'm an old man. but a good'n. I'm good for twenty years. I'll make you happy, zee if I don't. You shall do what you like; and 'av it all your own way. I'll make you a zettlement" . . . Rebecca started back a picture of consternation. In the course of this story we have never seen her lose her presence of mind; but she did now, and wept some of the most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes. (186, ch. 14)

Becky not only loses the greatest chance in her life, but also the favor of Miss Crawley who finds Becky quite amusing and supports Sir Pitt's proposal. When she hears that this little governess has married her favorite relative Rawdon, she becomes furious. Becky falls from grace in her eyes, and she will never be the same again to her. By marrying Becky, Rawdon loses both Miss Crawley's confidence and financial support.

Becky's secret marriage to Rawdon proves to be a great mistake. Thackeray is at once sarcastic and sympathetic toward her in her bewilderment:

Rebecca gave way to some very sincere and touching regrets that a piece of marvellous good fortune should have been so near her, and she actually obliged to decline it . . . What good mother is there that would not commiserate a penniless spinster, who might have been my lady, and have shared four thousand a year? What in all Vanity Fair, who will not feel for a hardworking, ingenious, meritorious girl who gets such an honorable, advantageous, provoking offer. just at the very moment when it is out of her power to accept it? I'm sure our friend Becky's disappointment deserves and will command every sympathy.

(192-193, ch. 15)



Becky may be criticized for her duplicity, but the reader cannot help feeling sorry for her disappointment. Losing Miss Crawley as an ally means losing the financial support of this capricious woman in her marriage to penniless Rawdon.

Such a marriage will prove to be fatal to Rawdon as well, who is deceived about Rebecca's real character. At first, he is madly in love with her:

Her words were oracles to him, her smallest actions marked by an infallible grace and wisdom . . . Is this a rare one? and don't we see everyday in the world many an honest Hercules . . . and great whiskered Samsons prostrate in Delilah's lap? (196: ch. 16)

For a long time, Becky keeps Rawdon in her captivity, fascinating him with her beauty and intelligence. Losing Miss Crawley's support, they live on credit, because they do not have any money. Becky's plans to be forgiven by Miss Crawley do not work, because Mrs. Bute Crawley starts poisoning her against Rawdon and Becky. If Becky may be censured for her money-mindedness, the people in her environment are equally greedy. Thackeray relates Becky's different wicked actions "not only to women but to English society" (Gary Dyer 1991, 218). so his ambivalence partly stems from the corruption in society.

It is, however, Becky's never-ending ambition that prepares her unavoidable end. As a clever woman living in the Victorian period, she cannot be satisfied with the type of life offered by her society:

By nature a Bohemian, she is beguiled by the false glitter surrounding the conventional rank and fashion which are the vulgar and predominant ideas of vanity fair, to spend time and energy in trying to attain them. She succeeds, but she is not satisfied. (David Cecil 1934, 69)

When she is admitted to high society, she becomes excited and is filled with joy. But soon she is bored. After marrying Rawdon, she and her husband are rejected by the family. Sir Pitt dies, and they are invited to his funeral ceremony by young Sir Pitt and his wife Lady Jane. While they are staying with them, Becky manages to impress them and their friends by using her usual art:

She had seen the world and lived with great people, and raised herself far beyond her original humble station. . . . So Rebecca, during her stay at Queen's Crawley, made as many friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness as she could possibly bring under control. (496-497; ch. 41)

Yet she is not satisfied and has an unfavorable impression of the place and the people living there: "'Queen's Crawley was abominably stupid . . . Everybody had been dull, but had been kind in their way'" (497. ch. 41).

Becky's cruelty and lack of gratitude become more obvious in her relationship with Amelia, Rawdon and Miss Briggs. Becky is used by the wicked and stronger characters, and she uses the weaker ones. She manipulates Amelia, because she is envious of her social superiors. Amelia is her close friend and virtually harmless, but Becky cannot prevent herself from harming her, since her resentment is stronger than her love for Amelia. This enmity becomes more obvious in the Waterloo scenes when Becky seduces George:

After the reception of the previous day, Rebecca did not care to come near her dear Amelia. She clipped the bouquet which George had brought her . . . and read over the letter which he had sent to her. "Poor wretch,' . . . 'how I could crush her with this!--And it is for a thing like this that she must break her heart, foorsooth--for a man who is stupid--a coxcomb--and who does not care for her." (382, ch. 32)

Becky achieves revenge on both George and Amelia, because George earlier hindered her marriage to Jos Sedley. For this reason Becky belittles George by seducing then not running off with him.

In the portrayal of Becky, Thackeray embodies the falseness of the commercial society which makes people greedy and deceitful to each other:

Thackeray . . . relates Becky's various trespasses not only to women but to English society of the first half of the nineteenth century. The bazaar is hardly the only example of false purity in this novel, for in Thackeray's London corruption and contamination are almost the norm. (Dyer 1991, 218)

Becky arises out of this corruption by using its defects. The author does not seem to accuse her of being dishonest, but he shows her false nature. Another point the author makes is that he wants to leave everybody unsatisfied as in real life when the novel ends. Hence, he does not praise or judge the traits of these characters, but presents them as they are. He makes satirical and ambiguous comments on them so the reader is left in the dark of the vagueness.

Since the England of Vanity Fair is a merchant society and almost all the characters belong to the merchant class, Becky assumes the position of "trading"

as if she is in a bazaar. She attempts to display herself as best as she can. Most of the characters come from "the commercial classes, who acquire money only to distance themselves from its taint. Money drives this society" (Dyer 1991, 215). Becky uses her intelligence and attractiveness in the bazaar to make money. In this way, she plans to get into high society. In this commercial society, Becky's hypocrisy is forgivable, because she destroys these people by using their own tactics. While she is doing this, she manipulates some people, such as Rawdon, her son, Sir Pitt, Miss Briggs, Jos, Amelia, and Lord Steyne. Thackeray's depiction of Becky, as being half French, shows that this mixed blood woman causes evil incidents:

He must transfer his anti-heroine's alterity onto a country other than India while retaining a gentleman's distaste for the world of business. so he makes Becky half French; hence she is disquietingly hybrid. contaminated by the traditional enemy of the English. an enemy they associated with promiscuity, frivolity, and indiscipline. (Dyer 1991, 216-217)

She gets on well in this pretentious world of commerce, because she is hazardous and dishonest. She knows how to play with the people around her. Selling Rawdon's horses to Jos is a good example to this.

During the war, in the hotel in Brussels, some earls and ambassadors, who want to escape from the country, attempt to buy the horses desperately, but, because Becky is revengeful, she refuses to sell them to these aristocrats:

It became known in the hotel that Captain Crawley's horses had been left behind, and when the panic began, Lady Bareacres condescended to send her maid to the Captain's wife with her Ladyship's compliments, and a desire to know the price of Mrs. Crawley's horses. Mrs. Crawley returned a note with her compliments, and an intimation that it was not her custom to transact bargains with the lady's maids.

(375. ch. 32)

She will, however, reveal her greed for money in her decision to sell the horses to Joseph: "It was while enjoying the humiliation of her enemy" she sees Jos and thinks "'he shall buy my horses . . . and I'll ride the more'" (376, ch. 32). Becky takes the advantage of his weakness and makes a good bargain with him. The money he has to pay her is like a small fortune: "She would be absolutely independent of the world, and might look her weeds steadily in the face" (378, ch. 32). She plays the game, in the bazaar, according to its rules, which are deception and hypocrisy. She is no worse than any other

person in the world of commerce. Thackeray uses the bazaar image on purpose, because "business and the places of business, are the object of great ambivalence in the novel, since the most of the characters belong to the commercial classes" who make money to get rid of its stain (Dyer 1991, 215).

Becky is not only manipulative and intelligent, but also she is practical and has a business mind in that she can skilfully avoid Rawdon's creditors in France. After the war, she and her husband stay in Paris, "living well on nothing a year" by gambling and taking credit owing to her attractiveness and manipulation. Soon after her arrival in Paris, she "took a very smart and leading position in the society of that capital, and was welcomed at some of the most distinguished houses of the restored French nobility" (428, ch. 36). Becky is sensible enough to see that they cannot continue their way of life much longer; moreover, she gets bored of this idle life style; and she sees that "she must push Rawdon's fortune in their own country" (431, ch. 36). In the mean time, they get the news that Miss Crawley is dying. Rawdon has Becky believe that he will be present by his aunt's death bed, but goes to Brussels instead, for he owes more money in London than in Paris. Leaving everything to Sir Pitt and Lady Jane. Miss Crawley dies. In Paris, they cannot pay their maids, not even their hotel bill, but Becky's

skills in manipulation help them to get away without paying their debts.

Becky's hypocritical charm impresses people in London as well. These people do not realize that she is a hypocrite. They rent a house on Curzon Street belonging to an old friend of the Crawley family:

Raggles loved and adored the Crawley family as the author of all his prosperity in life. . . . The old man not only let his house to the Colonel but officiated as his butler whenever he had company; Mrs Raggles operating in the kitchen below, and sending up dinners . . . This was the way, then, Crawley got his house for nothing. (437-438, ch. 37)

In the house, nobody is paid "and so they were, not in money, but in produce and labour" (439, ch. 37). In this way, the Crawleys manage to invite respectable people for dinner and Becky sings for them. These gentlemen think "if the husband was rather stupid, the wife was charming and the pleasantest in the world" (439, ch. 37). As Becky's fortune rises in London, Amelia's goes down. She suffers in her father's house without any money, struggles to look after her dear son. "Rebecca's wit, cleverness, and flippancy made her speedily the vogue in London among a certain class" (439, ch. 37). Thackeray



makes Becky witty and entertaining as well as a wicked character, because he

finds the main sources of wit and amusement in the most close connection with some form of vice and wickedness . . . [he] has in his heart an eager hatred of baseness and hypocrisy. It bursts out unmistakably sometimes. It is hidden, no doubt, under all his air of persiflage; but it is part of his art to preserve a mask of neutrality: and an occasional protest has no weight against the tone of universal toleration.

(William Caldwell Roscoe 1985. 141-142)

This is the reason of his ambivalence in portraying the extreme female characters. Becky's sense of humor or her wickedness makes her popular, but she is not easily accepted among the women of this certain class, because she was once a governess.

Becky's calculations bring her and Rawdon close to Sir Pitt and his wife Lady Jane. Through using their name, Becky plans to be accepted by the women of high society. Rawdon and Becky write a letter to them saying that they will be happy to see them with their little son. By Lady Jane's good-hearted approaches to their intention, they get together again. Having the support of Sir Pitt and Lady Jane, they get opportunities to be

accepted into high society. She meets the famous Lord Steyne in Sir Pitt's house, and later in the novel she will have an affair with him, taking money from him to pay Miss Briggs, her housekeeper. Through these characters, Thackeray makes his social satire of England society.

Miss Briggs helps Becky by lending her money when Becky and Rawdon do not have any. "Briggs was a woman of no spirit at all, and the moment her enemy was discomfited she began to feel compassion in her favour" (389, ch. 33). Becky knows her well, from her previous life in Miss Crawley's house, and treats her accordingly. While she is having an affair with Lord Steyne, she takes money from him, saying that she will pay Miss Briggs, but uses it for herself, buying only a dress for Miss Briggs. When Lord Steyne learns the truth, he does not care, because he is with her only for entertainment. Also, Becky's behaviour makes him laugh and fills him with joy. Furthermore, he admires her artfulness and intelligence.

In the course of her relationship with Lord Steyne, Becky becomes more popular in high society: "After Becky's appearance at my Lord Steyne's private and select parties, the claims of that estimable woman as regards fashion were settled: and some of the very greatest and tallest doors in the metropolis were speedily opened to her (583, ch. 51). The people from high society start

showing great respect to her and her husband, because of her closeness to Lord Steyne. Thackeray is critical of the hypocrisy and falseness of these characters by exposing their changing attitude to Becky because of Lord Steyne. Most of them admire her beauty, intelligence, and sense of humor just as Lord Steyne does:

The many ladies amongst us who had beauty to display their charms, and the fewer number who had cleverness to exhibit their wit. My Lord Steyne was incited by Becky, who perhaps believed herself endowed with both the above qualifications. to give an entertainment at Gaunt House, which should include some of these little dramas. (593, ch. 51)

The picture Gallery of Gaunt House is organized as the charade theatre. In the play, Becky appears, first of all, as Clytemnestra, who is the wife of Agamemnon in Greek mythology, kills her husband with her lover:

Aegisthus steals in pale and on tiptoe. What is that ghastly face looking out balefully after him from behind the arras? He raises his dagger to strike the sleeper, who turns in his bed opens his broad chest as if for the blow. . . . Clytemnestra glides swiftly into the room like an apparition--her arms are bare and white--her tawny hair floats down her shoulders--her face

is deadly pale--and her eyes are lighted up  
with a smile so ghastly. (596, ch. 51)

In the play, as in real life, Rawdon plays the husband. Becky, like Clytemnestra, causes the death of Rawdon, because he decides to go to Coventry island after catching Becky with Lord Steyne. Then, he dies on the island.

In the second play she appears as Philoméle. This is again an allusion to Greek mythology, in which Philoméle is turned to a nightingale and suffers her life time. She becomes a fatal figure, because she kills Itys, the son of Procne and Tereus. Later in the novel, she is likened to a Siren. Thackeray purposefully likens Becky to these fatal female characters, because she causes the death of Rawdon and Jos. She seems to kill Jos to get his life insurance, but this cannot be proved.

Her performance impresses everybody in the Gaunt House, especially Lord Steyne:

There was a ball after the dramatic entertainments, and everybody pressed round Becky as the great point of attraction of the evening. The royal personage declared, with an oath, that she was perfection, and engaged her again and again in conversation. Little Becky's soul swelled with pride and delight at these honours; she saw fortune, fame, fashion before

her. Lord Steyne was her slave; followed her everywhere. (600, ch. 51)

As she becomes popular in this society, all the women around her begin to dislike her. Rawdon does not like this atmosphere, and he is troubled by Becky's selfishness. "He thought with a feeling very like pain how immeasurably she was his superior" (601, ch. 51). It is in these scenes that Thackeray is critical of Becky, especially for the fact that she does not care for her son and husband. Rawdon feels lonely especially when his son is sent to public school by the financial help of Lord Steyne. Becky's frequent appearances in society in the company of Lord Steyne start gossip which reaches Sir Pitt. Heedless of this gossip and waiting to move her husband out of her way, Becky gets him arrested for his debts.

Her popularity in high society continues until the night Rawdon catches her with Lord Steyne, when they are flirting in Becky's room. He comes out of prison, because Lady Jane lends him money. Rawdon thinks that his wife is ill because Becky refuses to help him, saying that she has no money and she is ill. When he sees them together, he is shocked and throws at the face of the lord all the jewels this old lover has given to Becky. One of them cuts him on his bald forehead: "Steyne wore the scar to his dying day" (621, ch. 53). He reminds of Cain, who

committed sin against God and wore the similar scar on his forehead. Steyne's scar symbolizes his sin of adultery. Hoping that Lord Steyne could be with her again, Becky follows him to Florence, but is frustrated when she is recommended to leave the city by one of Steyne's men or be killed: "The threat had its effect upon the little woman, and she sought no more to intrude herself upon the presence of her old patron" (753, ch. 64). From then on, she realizes that she cannot attract him anymore. He is powerful, and she cannot treat him as she has treated Jos Sedley. After she leaves Italy, Lord Steyne dies in Naples.

A woman in Becky's position may collapse after falling from grace, and the conventional novelist would have us believe that this is a punishment for her wickedness. Thackeray uses, however, the scenes concerning Becky's becoming a prostitute as proof of her resilience and her will to live. The Pumpernickel scenes further comment on her Bohemian nature: "Becky liked the life. She was at home with everybody in the place, pedlars, punters, tumblers, students and all. She was of a wild, roving nature, inherited from father and mother, who were both Bohemians, by taste and circumstance" (755, ch. 65). The accidental meeting of Becky and Jos in Pumpernickel once more brings the two heroines together. Now that Becky's fortune is on the decline, Amelia's is

once more on the rise. It does not take simple-hearted Amelia long to forgive her for having seduced George.

Becky and Amelia are so different in the sense that one of them is "selfishly good and the other is selfishly bad. The criterion which makes judgement possible in spite of this is based on the capacity to love which can lead to unselfishness and an escape from vanity" (Williams 1969, 61). Becky has no capacity to love whereas Amelia has it, the quality which saves her in the end. Becky's lovelessness can be best observed in her relationship with Amelia, her husband, and her son. They are the people closest to her, but they can never see any sign of love coming from her.

In spite of Thackeray's ambivalent attitude to Becky's duplicity, her cruel treatment of her son is shown to be her unforgivable mistake. It may be that the author reflects his own resentment towards his mother, who, like Becky, had sent him to boarding school in England upon her second marriage in India (Williams 1968, 13). Becky is heartless to her son, even in time of his sickness:

He had the measles and the whooping-cough. He bored her. One day when he was standing at the landing-place, having crept down from the upper regions, attracted by the sound of his mother's voice, who was singing to Lord Steyne, the

drawing-room door opening suddenly, discovered the little spy, who but a moment before had been rapt in delight, and listening to the music. His mother . . . struck him violently a couple of boxes on the ear. He heard a laugh from the Marquis . . . who was amused by this free and artless exhibition of Becky's temper. (521-522, ch. 44)

She ignores her son as much as she does her husband: "The consciousness that the child was in the house was a reproach and a pain to her. His very sight annoyed her" (522, ch.44).

In spite of her resentment, she pretends to like him only when she wants to impress other people, such as Lady Jane and Sir Pitt. Lady Jane is an affectionate woman and likes children, and little Rawdon likes her in return:

He allowed Lady Jane sometimes to embrace him: and it was by her side that he liked to sit . . . by her side rather than by his mother. For Rebecca seeing that tenderness was the fashion, called Rawdon to her one evening, and kissed him in the presence of all the ladies. He looked her full in the face after the operation, trembling and turning red . . . 'You never kiss me at home, mama,' he said. (530, ch. 45)



She is an unaffected woman, so she has no time for motherhood unless she wants to show off. Becky desires to get money out of Sir Pitt. By kissing her son in front of everybody, she plans to influence them. Lady Jane is apparently not impressed by hearing what little Rawdon says. From then on, she is not the same again to Becky. The reason she hates her son is that to her "he symbolizes motherhood and marriage--factors which interfere with her ambition to gain access to society through Lord Steyne and Sir Pitt" (Handley 1985, 65). Her eyes are on having position in society, so domestic life style bores her. She has got the fake position in society through Lord Steyne, but she cannot maintain it.

Her last chance to have money and to be back in respectable society goes through Jos. She manages to trap him for his money, Becky acts Clytemnestra once more in her relationship with him. She perhaps kills him for his life insurance:

Becky has redeemed her early failure to capture her first victim by murdering Jos for his insurance money. But the enormity of this misdeed is somewhat offset by an only apparently more generous deed: Becky finally offers Amelia proof of George's unworthiness and convinces her of Dobbin's virtue, making possible their ensuing marriage. (Jadwin

1992, 682)

We cannot say that Thackeray plays down the enormity of Becky's crime, though he presents it half humorously. Behind Becky's wish to awaken Amelia to Dobbin's worth lies her urgent desire to have Jos under her control, removed from his sister's or Dobbin's influence.

Becky plays different kinds of roles which vary from an affectionate mother to a sincere friend, eventually to sentimental piety. Her enchantment influences people like Amelia, Jos and for a while, Lady Jane and Sir Pitt, and Miss Briggs. There are some others who are not influenced by her easily, such as Dobbin and Lord Steyne. Becky's problems are resentment and selfishness: she uses everybody for her own interests. She develops her skills in the art of hypocrisy and tries everything, including prostitution. She never loses her resilience. The narrator warns the reader about her private life. She is like a siren, who can be fatal, and we cannot really know what she is up to:

In describing this siren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling, the author, with modest pride, asks his readers all round, has he once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tale above water? No! Those who like peep down under waves that are pretty transparent, and see it writhing and

twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling round corpses; but above the water-line, I ask, has not everything been proper, agreeable, and decorous . . . however the siren disappears and dives below . . . Becky is out of the way, be sure that she is not particularly well employed, and that the less that is said about her doings is in fact the better. (738, ch. 64)

Becky carefully avoids the people who cannot be influenced by her or those she can no longer manipulate.

Foremost among such people is Dobbin. Amelia's love hinders him from being influenced by Becky; moreover, he is wise enough to see her as she is:

She did not like him and feared him privately; nor was he very much prepossessed in her favour. He was so honest, that her arts and cajoleries did not affect him, and he shrank from her with instinctive repulsion. And, as she was by no means so far superior to her sex as to be above jealousy, she disliked him the more for his adoration of Amelia. Nevertheless, she was very respectful and cordial in her manner towards him. A friend to the Osbornes! A friend to her dearest benefactors. (288,

ch. 25)

So Becky treats him accordingly. She is well aware that he is not an easy catch for her, because Dobbin is a good observer to see the real Becky: "'What a humbug that woman is!' honest old Dobbin mumbled . . . 'She writhes and twists about like a snake'" (338, ch. 29).

Furthermore, Dobbin does not like to see Becky around Amelia. When Jos seeks reconciliation between the two women, Dobbin refuses this, which results in foolish Amelia's estrangement from him. In the end, Becky is the one who convinces Amelia of Dobbin's worth and urges her to marry him. Dobbin keeps his reservation after his marriage to Amelia and is careful to keep his wife out of Becky's influences when they meet again accidentally at the end of the novel at a Fancy Fair where Becky is playing the pious woman. This is the last role she has adopted to be accepted by society:

Rebecca, Lady Crawley, chiefly hangs about Bath and Cheitanham, where a strong party of excellent people consider her to be a most injured woman. She has her enemies. Who has not? Her life is her answer to them. She busies herself in works of piety. She goes to church, and never without a footman. Her name is in all the Charity Lists . . . She is always having stalls at Fancy Fairs for the benefit of these

hapless beings. Emmy, her children, and the Colonel coming to London . . . found themselves suddenly before her at one of these fairs. She cast down her eyes demurely and smiled as they started away from her. (796-797, ch. 67)

Becky. in her new stance as "pious" widow, once more adopts the false values of her society. She is depicted in this scene as a merchant selling her wares:

No matter how Thackeray may satirize the greed or pretense of his society, or the restrictions that such drives place on women, he reaffirms the demonization of women essential to the bazaar topos. He associates women who confront the demands of society aggressively, represented by Becky, with the promiscuity . . . the exaggerated exociticism found in the game of charades at Lord Steyne's, and the false virtue of the fancy fair. (Dyer 1991, 216)

In the chapter "Virtue Rewarded" Thackeray suggests that "women by nature are drawn to behaviour like Becky's" (1991, 216), because of society's double standards. Displaying Becky in the bazaar implies the corruption in society and how this is imposed on women. Siren imagery, like the pious lady, points out her duplicity and shows how she manages to cover the murky sides of her character.

Thackeray approaches Becky ambiguously. He neither supports nor blames her. "The object of Thackeray's strongest attack is selfishness, the only way of avoiding it being the development of an ability to feel affection for other people" (Williams 1969, 65). But Becky has no affection for anybody, so she is criticized by the author. The critic, S. Goldfarb states that "she is a villain, the novel sets out to punish her; and to the extent that she is a potential victim, the novel attempts to rescue her, to facilitate her escape from the dangers of *Vanity Fair*" (1991, 41). She is certainly no worse than the other characters in the book with the possible exception of Dobbin and Lady Jane: "Thackeray reminds us that we, too, belong to *Vanity Fair*. To condemn Becky easily is a fortiori to condemn ourselves; how are we to make any judgement without resorting to hypocrisies deeper and more shameful than her own" (Dyson 1978, 177). Thackeray invites us to think and contemplate on this matter. The origins of his ambivalence are in the system. He describes the social standards as "irreconcilable. . . . He was always aware that he was a novelist of real life . . . He expressed attitudes rather than theories" (Sinha 1983, 446). Creating his puppets, Thackeray attempts to display that society can turn people into hypocrites and they go after vanities for the sake of money and position.

### III. She Was Not a Heroine

The presence of two female characters used in opposition to each other, is one of the reasons for Thackeray's ambiguous style. This ambiguity is largely the product of his equivocal attitude to his characters. His criticism of Victorian values is exemplified by the contrasted qualities of female characters: Becky is the foil to Amelia, setting off the latter's passivity and insipidity with her vitality and resilience. Similarly, nearly every character in the book is used either as a foil to or as a counterpart of some other character.

Another reason for the ambiguity is Thackeray's ever-changing attitude to his characters. He enjoys mocking them by making indeterminate comments on their personalities. Early in the novel, he points to this dubiousness by inviting the reader to consider "female duplicity":

The best of women (I have heard my grandmother say) are hypocrites. We don't know how much they hide from us: how watchful they are when they seem most artless and confidential: how often those frank smiles which they wear so easily, are traps to cajole or elude, or disarm. I don't mean in your mere coquettes, but your domestic

models, and paragons of female virtue.

(210-11, ch. 17)

Here the narrator, or the implied author, presents hypocritical women common to the fair sex. He does not say openly whether he likes such women or not, yet what he implies is that such women are the products of the hypocrisy in society. Lisa Jadwin comments:

Vanity Fair celebrates the powers of female double-discourse first by focusing on the hypocrisy of chaste "virtue" which women maintain by carefully bartering their sexual favors for financial support. Second, it suggests that certain young women develop fluency in double-discourse in order to transcend the purely material imperative to seduce. (1992. 668)

Insinuating that the "double-discourse" of women is the result of the double-standards of society, Thackeray ridicules the follies of the age in which he lived. For this purpose, he neither praises the characters nor exaggerates their favorable or unfavorable traits, but chooses to mock them.

Hypocrisy of women is, Thackeray implies, also largely a product of male despotism and possessiveness:

We are Turks with the affections of our women, and have made them subscribe to our



doctrine too. We let their bodies go abroad liberally enough, with smiles and ringlets and pink bonnets to disguise them instead of veils and yakmaks[sic]. But their souls must be seen by only one man and they obey not unwillingly, and consent to remain at home as our slaves-ministering to us and doing drudgery for us. (216, ch. 18)

Becky and Amelia are both hypocrites, but at variance with one another, so they are presented accordingly. In addition, their characters are completely different from each other. Amelia, as "true believer," is an ideal Victorian woman, who marries her only lover, George. Being loyal to him even after his death, she worships the image of this man. Because of her attitude, she is constantly ridiculed by the narrator: "Amelia thought about her husband, and how best she should show her love for him; as if these were the great topics of the world" (328, ch. 28).

Although she is one of the chief female characters, she is not by any means a "heroine":

There is no harm in saying, at the outset of our acquaintance, that she was a dear little creature; and a great mercy it is, both in life and in novels, which (and the latter especially) abound in villains of

the most sombre sort, that we are to have for a constant companion so guileless and good-natured a person. As she is not a heroine, there is no need to describe her person; indeed I am afraid that her nose was rather short than otherwise, and her cheeks a great deal too round and red for a heroine. (43, ch. 1)

In other words, Amelia's looks are not necessarily in keeping with the physical features of conventional heroines. Thackeray, who writes out of keeping with the norms of conventional fiction, insinuates that in an age devoid of heroes one cannot expect to find heroines either.

Thackeray's ambiguous attitude to his women characters can further be attributed to the contradictory attitudes to women on the part of Victorians. Women were glorified and even deified, but, yet, though they were considered lesser beings with mental capacities far inferior to those of men. The sexual and economic position of women was accepted to be amiss, but the solutions offered to remedy the problem were not effective nor were they largely accepted. Catherine Peters observes that women were seen by some "as a higher order of moral beings not expected" to scuffle in everyday business life (1987, 79). In this case, it

seems apparent that women ought not to be bestowed more control of their own lives by means of political and educational reforms. This was seen as hazardous to women themselves. Meanwhile, the anti-romantic "backlash" admitted that woman was, "in realistic terms the victim of the Byronic hero" (1987, 79). Thackeray, like the other anti-Romantic authors, implied that romantic fiction advocated the manipulation of women. He was not, however, actually in favor of women's liberation. Instead of imagining "a state of affairs in which a woman might take on the role of hero herself," he approved of Victorian society in its undertaking to reinforce the preventive network around women. Society expected even young men not to have any sex before marriage; children were kept innocent. This suppression of sexuality caused hypocrisy. Although Thackeray discerned the hypocrisy and "it was one of his major targets" (Peters 1987. 80), he did not see that he was, in his approval and corroboration of this attitude to women, actually supporting the view he criticized. Thackeray had conflicts in his own heart which he could not resolve, but tried to debate them in his novels.

In this frame of society, he displayed the passive and submissive Victorian woman in the character of Amelia, who is a product of the hypocrisy of society. At the beginning of the story, she is described by the

narrator as being naive and gentle, one who has many friends at Chiswick Academy. Because of her high social class, she has got the best of everything at the school, unlike Becky. Amelia is well liked among her friends and praised by Miss Pinkerton, the manager of the Academy, for her commendable qualities:

Miss Amelia Sedley was a young lady of this singular species, and deserved not only all that Miss Pinkerton said in her praise, but had many charming qualities which that pompous old Minerva of a woman could not see, from the differences of rank and age between her pupil and herself. (42, ch. 1)

As the novel progresses, the reader becomes a witness to her weaknesses of character. She is extremely sentimental and soft-hearted, to the extent of being dull and insipid. She would "cry over a dead canary- bird; or over a mouse, that the cat had haply seized upon; or over the end of a novel, were it ever so stupid" (43, ch. 1). Having both positive and negative qualities make Amelia more human, and yet she is disparaged and derided by Thackeray through the vehicle of Becky, her best friend:

That little pink-faced chit Amelia, with not half my sense, has ten thousand pounds and an establishment secure . . . (and my figure is far better than hers) . . . Well,

let us see if my wits cannot provide me with an honorable maintenance, and if some day or the other I cannot show Miss Amelia my real superiority over her. Not that I dislike poor Amelia: who can dislike such a harmless, good-natured creature?--only it will a be fine day when I can take my place above her in the world. (125, ch. 10)

Kathleen Tillotson observes, it is a mistake to think of Amelia as simply an artless character. The mistake is to regard her as the embodiment of an ideal that has now become old-fashioned. Amelia is "the true believer," obsessed with the feminine ideal of the Victorian period (1954, 245). She does her best to fit into this image of submissive Victorian womanhood and is expected to behave so. It seems that Thackeray is "examining critically one sort of social and fictional type of feminine virtue" (Harry Edmund Shaw 1980, 50) by creating Amelia. The author displays her as an example of ideal, but as the novel progresses, her defects can be observed. Her unquestionable obedience in society is noted by Jadwin: "The 'true believer,' . . . Amelia Sedley believes wholeheartedly in the totalizing myth of female inferiority that is enforced by the self-abnegating behaviour and discourse standardized as 'feminine virtue'" (1992, 664). Whether Thackeray prefers

Amelia to Becky as a female character or dislikes her is the question that needs to be answered. The author evades this question.

It can be said that his aim is to destroy the idea of the conventional heroine by creating two different female characters, neither of which is in keeping with this model:

Deliberately [Thackeray] defeats conventional expectation; he is at pains to warn his readers in the opening chapter 'Amelia is not a heroine', and often employs her as a medium for mockery at the sweet insipid contemporary novel heroine. It is indeed part of his object to exclude heroism. (Tillotson 1954, 229)

Hence, Amelia is contrasted to Becky as the unsophisticated against the sophisticated:

Rebecca patronized her with calm superiority: she was so much the cleverer of the two, and her friend so gentle and unassuming, that she always yielded when anybody chose to command, and so took Rebecca's orders with perfect meekness. (179, ch. 14)

She is always referred to by her friend Becky as "poor little Amelia" (353, ch. 30). Becky is the person who hurts Amelia by trying to seduce her husband, George.

Ironically enough, she helps Amelia to realize the fact about George's worthlessness.

The relationship of Amelia and Becky comes to an end in Waterloo until they meet again and are reunited at the end of the novel. This revealing incident occurs at the ball in Waterloo just before George goes to war. At the ball, George and Becky flirt in Amelia's presence. Amelia prefers, however, to see George as the victim and Becky as the seducer:

"When you were quite poor, who was it that befriended you? Was I not a sister to you? . . . Do you think you could love him as I did? His love was everything to me. You knew it and you wanted to rob me of it. For shame. Rebecca; bad and wicked woman--false friend and false wife." (366, ch. 31)

For the first time, Amelia sees Becky as a "false friend," but it is her jealousy that makes her so furious. When she reminds Becky of their friendship at school, her tone conveys the implication that she has done Becky a favor by being friends with her when she was poor. In contrast to Becky, she is not vindictive in that she does not seek revenge after Becky and eventually she forgives her. In her view, Becky has violated her good will as well as her pride, because Amelia cannot stand the idea of being betrayed by her social inferior which

indicates her class consciousness. She feels she is insulted by Becky who damages Amelia's ego by flirting with her husband.

Even though Thackeray presents this good-naturedness as commendable, it also provides him with material for mockery. Amelia's sentimentality is perfect material for humor. It is made clear that she is not a heroine to be praised, but a silly romantic woman:

This young person (perhaps it was very imprudent in her parents to encourage her, and abet her in such idolatry and silly romantic ideas) loved, with all her heart, the young officer in His Majesty's service . . . She thought about him the very first moment on waking; and his was the very last name mentioned in her prayers. She never had seen a man so beautiful or so clever: such a figure on horseback: such a dancer: such a hero in general. . . . He was only good enough to be a fairy prince; and oh, what a magnanimity to stoop to such a humble Cinderalla! Miss Pinkerton would have tried to check this blind devotion very likely. (152-153, ch. 12)

Thackeray's portrayal of Amelia as being an extremely sentimental person makes her look even a weaker woman in comparison with her foil Becky. Although her treatment of



Becky as a friend is cordial, she cannot receive friendship in return. Furthermore, she tries to arrange a marriage between Becky and her brother Jos. Amelia's attempt is criticized by the narrator: "Miss Amelia; who, like almost all women who are worth a pin, was a matchmaker in her heart, and would have been delighted that Joseph should carry back a wife to India" (72, ch. 4).

In the course of their friendship, Amelia is indulgent with Becky by giving her all kinds of presents and being very nice to her. Becky "seems [however,] a very false friend to Amelia: she behaves very badly at Waterloo, and becomes one of the people that Amelia has to fear" (Dyson 1978, 168). Although Becky harms Amelia by seducing her husband, "she equally contemptuously does her a good turn as the novel is nearing its end. . . . The use of George's old letter to disillusion Amelia about his memory . . . is as finely ambivalent as many of the other decisive actions in the book. (Dyson 1978, 169). Presenting the letter to Amelia is a kind of an aid which helps her to overcome her idolatry. Besides, she realizes the worth of Dobbin's love and decides to marry him. Apparently Thackeray's narration is a complex one which leaves the reader in ambiguity. "There is rather arch playfulness . . . that surrounds both Becky and Amelia: is this simply a sentimental evasiveness on

Thackeray's part, or does it serve some more devious end" (Dyson 1978, 166). In the process of the story, Amelia is ridiculed, but treated less severely, whereas Becky is analyzed at fuller length and displayed as a more interesting person. She is criticized sharply. In contrast to Becky, the portrayal of Amelia is not as vivid as the depiction of Becky:

The active Becky can be displayed, where the suffering, yielding Amelia must be described. The tone of the description is deliberately ambiguous, seeming often sentimentally protective, but with enough impatience breaking through to show that the author wishes to confuse and make fun of the reader. (Kathleen Tillotson 1954, 245)

Thackeray is critical of both of his characters. Pointing out Becky's treatment of her husband and her neglect of her son is one side of his argument. Another side is Amelia's "passionate possessiveness" of her son and her idolatrous love for George. Hence, their extremity causes ambivalence. Harry E. Shaw states that Amelia's "blind worship of her husband and son is based at least partly on pride" (1980, 51). In her relationship with George, she displays the character of an immoderate lover and then excessively loyal wife. She acts as the ideal Victorian woman, accepting male

superiority in the name of George without questioning. Most important of all, she is a self-indulgent and self-denying person in that she belittles herself in her marriage, although George does not deserve her love and loyalty:

Some cynical Frenchman has said that there are two parties to a love transaction: the one who loves, and the other who condescends to be so treated. . . . Perhaps some beloved female subscriber has arrayed an ass in the splendour and glory of her imagination; admired his dullness as manly simplicity, worshipped his selfishness as manly superiority. . . . I think I have seen such comedies of errors going on in the world. But this is certain that Amelia believed her lover to be one of the most gallant and brilliant men in the empire.

(160, ch. 13)

Amelia adores George and makes herself ready to sacrifice everything for him. For this reason, George exploits her and he laughs at her "naiveté" (295, ch. 25).

Amelia is so saturated with her love for George that she does not think of anything else. Her whole world is limited to George who is unworthy of her. Her only happiness or unhappiness rests in the man, who makes her worry all the time:

"How shall I be a companion for him, she thought--so clever and so brilliant, and I such a humble foolish creature? How noble it was of him to marry me--to give up everything and stoop down to me! I ought to have refused him, only I had not the heart. . . . Oh! thought she, I have been very wicked and selfish . . . in foregoing George to marry me. I know I'm not worthy of him."  
(291, ch. 25)

Amelia suggests a person who has no belief in herself but only in George; she has a lack of self-confidence. She reckons that she does not deserve George, because her family is a ruined one; her father has gone bankrupt, so George's father is against their marriage. With Dobbin's efforts, George marries Amelia, but Amelia is not aware of the fact that Dobbin lends money George for his marriage and persuades him to marry Amelia. Dobbin helps them, because of his love for Amelia. He knows Amelia is in love with George so he cannot attain her. The only way to be close to Amelia is through his best friend George. In this way, he can always see Amelia.

When George leaves for the war, she is destroyed by grief. The narrator accuses Amelia for her immoderate grief which almost kills her. She behaves as if she is not in possession of her senses: "The poor soul was

still at the bedside . . . and stood almost crazy with grief" (368, ch. 31). Amelia's sentimentality overwhelms her. As Dyson observes, "what Thackeray makes us see is that Amelia is an incurably neurotic woman, destined to unhappiness whether things go well with her or ill" (1978, 179).

In the depiction of Amelia, her attitude toward George's family is another incident which proves her passivity. Although these people insult her and her family, she never does anything to save her position in their eyes:

Misses Osborne, George's sisters, . . . patronized her so insufferably, that the poor little thing was in fact perfectly dumb in their presence, and to all outward appearance as stupid as they thought her. She made efforts to like them, as in duty bound, and as sisters of her future husband. She passed 'long mornings' with them--the most dreary and serious of forenoons. She drove out solemnly in their great family coach with them. (147, ch. 12)

Her blind love for George has made her self-effacing to the extent of losing her self-respect. Moreover, she cannot see the stupidity and snobbishness of his family. Amelia virtually sacrifices her self-respect for the sake

of having good relations with them. This kind of an attitude is a sign of her weakness and self-deception.

In her treatment of her own family, however, she is not as generous. In fact, she can be said to be selfish, because she deserts them to marry George, when they most need her. Her father's bankruptcy puts her parents into trouble and great depression: "As a daughter, she fails her parents in their years of need" (Dyson 1978, 170). Being too busy with George, she cannot see that her parents need her love and affection. She even insults her mother during little George's illness. In this episode, her treatment of her mother is unexpected and exaggerated. When the child is ill, Mrs. Sedley wants to cure him by using Daffy's elixir. This act pulls them apart because of Amelia's overreaction:

Amelia the gentlest and sweetest of everyday mortals, when she found this meddling with her maternal authority, thrilled and trembled all over with anger. Her cheeks, ordinarily pale, now flushed up. . . . She seized the baby out of her mother's arms, and then grasped at the bottle, leaving the old lady gaping at her, furious, holding the guilty tea-spoon. (455, ch. 38)

From then on, there is always "a sort of coolness about this boy, and a secret jealousy" (455, ch. 38) between

Mrs. Sedley and her daughter. Since that time, their relationship has never been restored. Mrs. Sedley treats her daughter coldly, because of her selfishness in raising her son.

The absence of George makes Amelia obsessive about her son. She directs all her attention to the child, becoming extremely possessive of him. This act displays that she selfishly loves the child and does not want to share him with anyone else. She buys books for him, when the family needs money for food.

Her virtues also turn out to be more tainted than they at first appear. Her great claim to virtue is the passiveness of self-sacrifice, yet it is self-sacrifice, as she practises it, not an insidious self-indulgence in disguise? As a mother she is weakly and harmfully indulgent. (Dyson 1978, 170)

Her excessive treatment of the child spoils him, and he becomes just like his father: domineering, selfish, and brutal. He does not give love and attention to his mother.

When Mr. Osborne wants to get the custody of the child, she becomes extremely angry. She tears up the letter, which is sent by Mr. Osborne, and walks on it by talking to herself: "'I take money to part from my child? Who dares insult me by proposing such a thing?'"

(541, ch. 46). In this case, she prevents the child from having a better education and wider opportunities until she realizes that she has behaved selfishly, when they are completely out of money. Her act is satirized by the narrator or the implied author:

Her selfishness was sacrificing the boy. But for her he might have wealth, station, education, and his father's place, which the elder George had forfeited for her sake. She had but to speak the words, and her father was restored to competency: and the boy raised to fortune. Oh, what a conviction it was to that tender and stricken heart! (544, ch. 46)

Amelia's selfishness is further revealed in her relationship with Dobbin: "This woman had a way of tyrannizing over Major Dobbin (for the weakest of all people will domineer over somebody), and she ordered him about, and made him fetch and carry" (767, ch. 66). She always wants him around as her slave. "Her treatment of Dobbin is unjust and egotistical. She is not above enjoying the power she has over him and wanting to give him nothing in return for it" (Shaw 1989. 51). She clings to him and enjoys unconsciously the authority she has over him. But ironically Dobbin is in love with her weakness, helplessness, and softness, like most men of



his period. Dobbin is no different from a typical Victorian man who is in love with woman's submissiveness:

For almost all men who came near her loved her; though no doubt they would be at a loss to tell you why. She was not brilliant, nor witty, nor wise over much, nor extraordinarily handsome. But wherever she went she touched and charmed every one of the male sex, as invariably as she awakened the scorn and incredulity of her own sisterhood. I think it was her weakness which was her principal charm: a kind of sweet submission and softness, which seemed to appeal to each man she met for his sympathy and protection. (458, ch. 38)

For a long time, Dobbin sees Amelia above everything as if she is a kind of an angel. "Amelia accomplishes her primary conquest--her seduction of Dobbin-- . . . under the illusion of a patriarchal myth of fidelity that binds her the memory of her unworthy husband" (Jadwin 1992, 664). Her relationship with George develops under the same myth, too. She uses her passivity and helplessness as a weapon to impress Dobbin. Besides, she is not as generous to Dobbin as she was to George. Dobbin feels like it is his duty to protect Amelia but, he actually falls in love with the embodiment of Victorian

femininity: "To be permitted to see her was now the greatest privilege and hope of his life, and he thought with himself secretly how he would watch and protect her. I wouldn't have let her go if I had been married to her, he thought" (296, ch. 25). From the time of first meeting Amelia, Dobbin assumes the role of her guardian angel. He displays a character of a good personality, who is too good to be true. Amelia mistreats him, expecting him to be ready whenever she likes, but he cannot get any sign of love in return. She cannot believe Dobbin has left her after their quarrel over Becky:

Amelia stood scared and silent as William thus suddenly broke the chain by which she held him, and declared his independence and superiority. He had placed himself at her feet so long that the poor little woman had been accustomed to trample upon him. She didn't wish to marry him, but she wished to keep him. She wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all. It is a bargain not unfrequently levied in love. (776, ch. 66)

It is partly Dobbin's obsession with Amelia that turns her into a parasite who needs him the whole time.

For a long time, Dobbin, like all Victorian men, enjoys to be needed by this weak woman. Amelia reflects the character traits of Thackeray's own wife Isabella,

who was "unaffected and natural, qualities he always admired in women. He fell immediately and entirely in love with this artless, timid girl," (Peters 1987, 75). This reminds us of the way Dobbin falls in love with Amelia. As time went by, however, Thackeray got tired of his wife's dependence on him and longed for an independent woman. Here perhaps developed his dilemma or ambivalent attitude to womanhood. In the course of the marriage of Dobbin and Amelia the same process is to be observed.

Becky, the independent woman, once more serves as an agent in awakening Dobbin to the misery of his relationship with Amelia. Amelia's preference of Becky to Dobbin is the cause of Dobbin's rebellion and decision to abandon her:

"I know what your heart is capable of: it can cling faithfully to a recollection, and cherish a fancy; but it can't feel such an attachment as mine deserves to mate with, and such as I would have won from a woman more generous than you. No, you are not worthy of the love which I have devoted to you. I knew all along that the prize I had set my life on was not worth the winning; that I was a fool . . . I will bargain no more: I withdraw." (776, ch. 66)

And he leaves her until she writes him to come back to him. After leaving her, Dobbin thinks that they would never be together again, and he is upset about it:

It was gone indeed. William had spent it all out. He loved her no more, he thought, as he had loved her. He never could again. That sort of regard, which he had proffered to her for so many faithful years, can't be flung down and shattered and mended so as to show no scars. The little heedless tyrant had so destroyed it. "No," William thought again and again, "it was myself I deluded, and persisted in cajoling; had she been worthy of the love I gave her, she would have returned it long ago." (785-786, ch. 67)

In his absence, Amelia realizes that she needs somebody to protect her, otherwise she cannot survive. Ironically, it is again Becky makes her realize this:

"You must marry, or you and your precious boy will go to ruin. You must have a husband, you fool; and one of the best gentlemen I ever saw has offered you a hundred times, and you have rejected him, you silly, heartless, ungrateful little creature." (789, ch. 67)

Becky conveys the reality about Emmy's personality and grants her a favor by revealing Dobbin's worth. Amelia, unlike Becky, cannot survive in this society unless she has a husband to take care of her.

At the end, the narrator says Dobbin gets the prize whether he is glad of her or not. The portrayal of Amelia is so equivocal that we cannot say whether or not she is a commendable character. She is, however, the prize which is tried to be gained by many Victorian men like Dobbin.

He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life . . . This is what he asked for everyday and hour for eighteen years. This is what he pined after. Here it is--the summit, the end--the last page. Good-bye, Colonel. --God bless you, honest William!--Farewell, dear Amelia.--Grow green again, tender little parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling. (792, ch. 67)

This is the narrator's opinion of Amelia, who is seen as being a "parasite." We do not know whether she is really a weak, helpless woman or a hypocritical person pretending to be so, because her feelings are veiled all through the novel. She is displayed as a suffering poor woman who needs protection for survival. Her portrayal is not fully developed. This ambiguousness stems from Thackeray's personal feelings about women. He sees them

as being all heart or all brain. Hence, the two extreme female characters come into existence.

Dobbin and Amelia come to realize what they mean for each other. After spending her years being miserable, she "develops as a character acquiring some spirit on occasions and an almost wilful wrong-headedness over the years" (Graham Handley 1985, 70). There are self-awareness and recognition in Amelia but no substantial change as in the other characters of Thackeray. Her submissiveness prevents her from appreciating Dobbin's strong personality and his open mindedness because she is used to treating men as if they are the sole powers in the world. She has been conditioned by society to think in these terms. Nevertheless, Dobbin wants to see a strong woman; he is not satisfied being with a passive wife, so he channels all his attention to their daughter Janey, and Amelia's awareness of this is her punishment: "'Fonder than he is of me,' Emmy thinks with a sigh. But he never said a word to Amelia that was not kind and gentle; or thought of a want of hers that he did not try to gratify" (797. ch. 67). This sounds like the author's experiences with women in his private life. He was like Dobbin who could not satisfied in his own life. Thackeray's own dilemma about women and his frustration by his marriage were very likely among the reasons for the enigmatic ending of his novel.

#### IV. Rachel As the Angel and Not the Angel

In Thackeray's Henry Esmond the two main female characters, Rachel and her daughter Beatrix, are the counterparts of Amelia and Becky in Vanity Fair. Rachel with her submissiveness is the counterpart of Amelia, whereas Beatrix, as an ambitious and rebellious woman, is the counterpart of Becky. The story of these two women takes place around Henry Esmond, who is "the supposedly illegitimate son of an English aristocrat and a young French woman" (Catherine Peters 1987, 203). Henry as an orphan comes to the household of the Castlewoods where Rachel and her husband become his benefactors. He is a "character always on the fringes of a society where honour and birth are intimately bound up together" (1987, 203). The reader is told the story largely through the view point of Henry; therefore, part of the ambivalence of this work arises from his biases as the narrator.

Thackeray makes Henry's position in society vague and ambivalent just as his was as an Anglo-Indian. The indistinctness of Henry's position in the Castlewood family is also responsible for his stance as the narrator. He does not know that he is the legitimate and not the illegitimate son of Lord Castlewood, the third viscount, who died at the battle of the Boyne. The

fourth viscount Francis Castlewood and his wife Rachel take him under their protection. Henry learns the truth about his position from the viscount, as he is dying of the wounds he has received in the duel with Lord Mohun, fought over Rachel's honor. Henry keeps the secret because of his love for this family: he does not want to take the title from Frank, the son of Rachel, for whom he feels love and respect. As the narrator, Henry has contradictory feelings of love and resentment, regarding Rachel and Beatrix. He is unreliable as the narrator in that he cannot be objective to the two women he loves at different times in his life.

Some parts of the novel are similar to the life of Thackeray. Henry and Rachel "were projections from his own private life. Harry is a self-portrait in a strange frame, and Rachel is a portrait, sometimes idealized, sometimes vitiated, of Jane Octavia Brookfield" (J.Y.T. Greig 1950, 165), the woman he loved and who was the wife of one of Thackeray's close friends from Cambridge. Thackeray's complicated experiences with women and his ambivalent attitude to them can be observed more explicitly in the portrayals of Beatrix and Rachel. This ambivalence is reflected by Henry, whose waverings between the two women make it difficult for the reader to decide which woman is preferred over the other.



Hypocrisy, which can be peculiar to both man and woman, is displayed in this novel as basically part of woman's nature because she has to conceal her real thoughts and feelings in order to find social acceptability. Rachel symbolizes the traditional Victorian woman in her treatment of her husband, her children, and Henry. As a wife, she is self-sacrificing; as a mother, she is an affectionate one, "a foolishly fond mother to her son Frank; and alternately fond and jealous of her daughter" (Greig 1950, 165). Rachel's pride of her beauty and jealousy, as well as her eventual punishment, remind one of the Rachel in the Bible. In the Biblical story, Rachel marries her cousin, Jacob, who serves her father for seven years before he gives consent to the marriage. The Biblical Rachel is also beautiful, and well favored, and her elder sister is plain and homely. Duped by the father, Jacob first marries the elder sister, whom he believes to be Rachel herself. It is, however, the elder sister who can give children to Jacob, whereas Rachel, punished for her vanity, cannot become a mother. There are some similarities between the love triangle in the novel and in the Bible.

Rachel's devotion to her husband and son reminds one of Amelia's love for George and her son. Thackeray's depiction of Rachel shows that she worships Lord Castlewood in the name of love:

My Lady had on her side her three idols: first and foremost, Jove and supreme ruler, was her lord, Harry's patron, the good Viscount of Castlewood. All wishes of his were laws with her. If he had a headache, she was ill. If he joked, she smiled and was charmed. If he went a hunting, she was always at the window to see him ride away . . . Hushed the house when he slept in his chair, and watched for a look when he woke. . . . Her eyes were never tired of looking in his face and wondering at its perfection. (72-73; bk. 1, ch. 7)

Rachel symbolizes submissive womanhood and does not realize that she exalts her husband as her idol. Although she is apparently submissive, she is actually a possessive and domineering woman. In her love for her husband, there is more hypocrisy than true submission. What earlier appears to Henry as submissiveness is possessiveness, but she disguises it carefully. This is implied by Henry when he observes, "The opinion of the country was, that my lord was tied to his wife's apron strings, and that she ruled over him" (78; bk. 1, ch. 7). The implication is that at the bottom of a woman's submissiveness and possessiveness, there is often selfishness, as it is also in Amelia's case.

In portraying Rachel, the author shows sympathy and admiration for her domestic qualities, a fact which comments on Thackeray's interest in and respect for family life. The first indications of Henry's love for Rachel are reminiscent of Thackeray's feelings for Jane Brookfield (Peters 1987, 201). Early in the novel, the love of Henry and Rachel for each other is the kind that the son feels for his mother or the mother feels for her son. At this stage, Henry sees her as an angel, very true and beautiful. Gradually this turns into passionate love for both of them, a dilemma they have to cope with.

Shortly afterwards, Henry becomes the witness to the unhappy marriage of his lord and Rachel. As the marriage changes from an apparently happy one to an unhappy one, Henry's views change also. Henry's equivocal attitude to marriage is expressed in connection with his comments on this marriage, reminding one of Thackeray's observations on the marriage of the Brookfields:

After a few years of his marriage, my honest Lord Castlewood began to tire; all the high-flown raptures and devotional ceremonies with which his wife, his chief priestess treated him, first sent him to sleep, and then drove him out of the doors; for the truth must be told, that my lord was a jolly gentleman, with a very little of the august or divine in his

nature, though his fond wife persisted in revering it--and, besides, he had to pay a penalty for this love . . . They live together and they dine together . . . but the man is himself, and the woman herself: that dream of love is over. (75; bk. 1. ch. 7)

According to Henry, the changing course of marriage is unavoidable because of the characters of the marriage partners.

Early in the novel, Rachel fulfils the expectations of society as a submissive woman. Later, she realizes that, as her beauty fades away because of the effects of small pox, her husband begins to be interested in other women. Her being proud of her beauty makes her husband tired of her:

She had been my lord's chief slave and blind worshipper. . . . Her spirit rebelled and disowned any more obedience. First she had to bear in secret the passion of losing the adored object; then to get a farther initiation, and to find this worshipped being was but a clumsy idol: then to admit the silent truth, that it was she was superior and not the monarch her master: that she had thoughts which his brains could never master, and was the better of the two; quite separate from my lord although tied

to him. (96-97; bk. 1, ch. 9)

Her husband realizes this much later than Rachel does. Catherine Peters remarks that the problem between Rachel and her husband occurs when the Lord realizes that his wife is "his superior, in intellect as well as virtue" (1987, 207-208). As Henry matures, he becomes convinced that the problem partly stems from the husband's realization that his wife is his superior:

Much of the quarrels and hatred which arise between married people come in my mind from the husband's rage and revolt at discovering that his slave and bedfellow, who is to minister to all his wishes, and is church-sworn to honour and obey him--is his superior; and that he, and not she, ought to be the subordinate of the twain; and in these controversies, I think, lay the cause of my lord's anger against his lady. (117; bk. 1, ch. 11)

The lord Castlewood never confesses this openly; he neglects and disregards her by having affairs with other women. Meanwhile Rachel gives all her energy to her children and Henry.

Her husband is also unhappy about the fact that Rachel's attitude to him is reserved. Later in the novel, he complains about her coldness to Henry. Henry is aware of Rachel's defects, but prefers to ignore them because,

as his benefactress and mother figure, she is almost perfect. He sees her pride and jealousy as peculiar to her sex:

With the other sex perfectly tolerant and kindly, of her own she was invariably jealous, and a proof that she had this vice is, that though she would acknowledge a thousand faults that she had not, to this which she had she could never be got to own . . . As soon as ever she had to do with a pretty woman, she was cold, retiring and haughty. (77-78; bk.1, ch.7)

Her jealousy is largely the result of the influence of society, which values beauty and youthfulness in women. Rachel always discovers various faults in other women. She can be jealous of her daughter, though she is very fond of her.

Her husband's estrangement from Rachel brings her closer to Henry, in whom she finds a friend and confidant, and later a lover. Although she does not want to admit it, her maternal love for Henry eventually turns into passionate love. Again her pride and sense of propriety hinder her from confessing her true feelings: "Harry still does not comprehend that Lady Castlewood's reproaches arise from her remorse at having come to love him rather than her husband. She feels that she must

punish herself for her dereliction of duty" (Gordon Ray 1958, 185). Rachel has contradictory feelings for Henry: she treats him like her son; she tries to suppress her passionate love for him. Her dilemma makes her behave inconsistently.

Rachel's jealous and possessive love for Henry is revealed in two important incidents. The first one concerns Henry's carrying small-pox from the village girl with whom he flirts. When Rachel gets the disease, she becomes furious not only because her beauty becomes blemished but also because she is jealous of Henry's interest in another woman. Losing her beauty is a punishment for her vanity. According to J.Y.T. Greig,

Rachel . . . is gracious, affectionate, tender, and until she caught the small-pox, very beautiful; apparently self-sacrificing . . . But unjust and petty, too; pious, and for her day, too prim; as a rule dignified but apt in her wild moments to lose control and become hysterically calumnious, lachrymose, or tremulous. (1950, 165)

The second incident concerns the death of her husband in the duel. She blames Henry for the death because she believes that he could have prevented the duel from taking place. As Peters observes,

Lady Castlewood's outraged reaction clearly has

a sexual content . . . She blames him [Henry], quite unjustly, for her husband's death. Again it is revealed to the reader, though not to Esmond, that she feels considerable guilt at having secretly wished it, and that it would have been Esmond's death that would have been a tragedy for her. When the truth about his birth emerges, therefore, he suppresses it in order to sacrifice himself for the woman he loves and her family. (1987, 206-207)

Moreover, she reproaches Henry, because of the remorse she feels for "having come to love him rather than her husband" (Ray 1958, 185).

Her jealousy and possessive love in their extremity remind one of Amelia. In contrast to Amelia, Rachel is a strong woman. She can make decisions of her own, and she is intelligent enough to understand the real nature of her husband and her marriage. Henry's receiving a good education is essential for her because as a mother figure she considers his future important.

The contradictions in her personality can be observed through her relationship with Henry, her husband, and Beatrix. Conflicts in her nature reveal Thackeray's equivocal attitude to his female characters. Like Becky, Rachel is hypocritical, but for different reasons. In keeping with the norms of society, she feels



it necessary to conceal her true feelings, especially the love she feels for a man. As Henry's admiration for her turns into sexual love, he learns to see her true feelings:

His affection leading him easily to penetrate the hypocrisy under which Lady Castlewood generally chose to go disguised, and see her heart aching whilst her face wore a smile. 'Tis a hard task for women in life, that mask which the world bids them wear. But there is no greater crime than for a woman who is ill used and unhappy to show that she is so. The world is quite relentless about bidding her to keep a cheerful face: and our women . . . are forced to go smiling and painted to sacrifice themselves with their husbands. (119; bk. 1, ch. 11)

Thackeray finds this duplicity resulting from the double standards in society, the hypocrisy imposed on women by social expectations.

It is Lord Castlewood who probably suffers most because of Rachel's inhibitions in admitting the love she feels for him. When he complains to Henry about her "coldness," he actually complains about her primness and possessiveness:

My wife's as cold as the statue at Charing

Cross. Her coldness blights my whole life,  
 and sends me to the punch-bowl . . . My  
 children are not mine, but hers, when we are  
 together. 'Tis only when she is out of sight  
 with her abominable cold glances that run  
 through me, that they'll come to me . . . I'm  
 killed by the virtue of that proud woman.

(128; bk. 1. ch. 12)

Henry understands that his lord Castlewood is still in love with his wife. Ironically, the possessiveness he resents is actually a manifestation of love and devotion that society demands of women. The contradictory comments by the narrator, Henry, and other characters about Rachel causes ambivalence regarding her character.

Rachel's superiority to her husband is conveyed through the narration of Henry. Thackeray's sources of this marriage are Jane Brookfield's and his own marriage:

Thackeray thought Jane was superior to [her husband]. Esmond elaborates on the lying and hypocrisy that go on in unhappy households, and the way in which women are made slaves . . . This section of the novel is as clearly addressed to the failings of Victorian husbands . . . The marital disharmony of the Brookfields is in the forefront of Thackeray's mind, but his own wife's unhappiness before and after

Minny's birth underlie the comments, and give them added poignancy. (Peters 1987, 208)

Thackeray reveals his spiritual love for Jane by creating Rachel. Rachel becomes an angel, who is "too good for the world she lives in" (1987, 209). Elsewhere in the novel, Henry says "all women are alike--all jades and heartless" (129; bk. 1, ch. 12). Henry's thoughts regarding women are the results of Thackeray's disappointment with Jane after he was refused by her. Greig notes the similarity between the author and the narrator: "The resemblance between Harry Esmond and William Thackeray is so marked that it has become a commonplace of criticism" (1950, 165).

In the portrayal of Rachel, Thackeray reflects his longing for his own mother from whom he had to separate at his early age like Henry:

Henry's reaction to Rachel is spontaneously to treat her as a replacement for his real mother, Thomas Esmond's first Flemish wife. That real mother he does not remember at all . . . She is long dead when he visits her grave in Flanders. Rachel fills the void created by her loss.

(Miller 1987, 195)

Rachel symbolizes motherhood, because she is compassionate and cares for Henry. For Thackeray, this female character represents his concept of motherhood.

His longing for happiness of family life is conveyed by Henry: "'Tis the peace of the family I love best in the world . . . 'tis the honour of a noble benefactor--the happiness of my dear mistress and her children. I owe them everything in life" (145; bk. 1, ch. 13).

What Henry fails to see is that his filial love for Rachel generates passionate love in the older woman for the younger man. Being neglected by her husband, she finds a new devotee in Esmond, whose constant love and admiration for the mother figure heal her hurt pride and boost her ego. When Lord Castlewood challenges Lord Mohun to a duel, it is because he believes that his wife is in love with Mohun. He misinterprets Beatrix's remarks about her mother's dilemma:

"I am sure mamma talks a great deal more to Henry Esmond than she does to papa--and she cried when Harry went away, and she never does when papa goes away; and last night she talked to Lord Mohun for ever so long, and sent us out of the room, and cried." (137-138; bk. 1, ch. 13)

He thinks Rachel and Mohun are in love, and Henry's pleading with him about Rachel's loyalty is of no avail. In the duel, the lord dies and Mohun is injured. Henry is injured as well and put into prison. Rachel accuses him of being the cause of her husband's death and treats him

badly, which she has never done before. It is this complexity of feeling in Rachel that frustrates Henry, who realizes that she is no angel or a goddess, but a woman with her weaknesses.

The period of separation from the Castlewood household brings about a new attitude in Henry toward Rachel. While he is in prison, his father's widow Isabella helps him by sending some money. After he is released from prison, he goes to see her, and she tells him that he is the real heir Castlewood. Soon afterwards, he goes to the expedition under the command of Admiral Shovell in 1702. On his return to England, he hears about Rachel and Beatrix, and he decides to go to see them. Unexpectedly, they welcome him. He is back in the family again with his beloved, but she has lost her mastery over him:

The year of grief and estrangement was passed . . . His mistress had never been out of his mind all that time . . . No voice so sweet as that of his beloved mistress, who had been sister, mother, goddess to him during his youth --goddess now no more, for he knew of her weaknesses; and by thought, by suffering, and that experience it brings, was older now than she: but more fondly cherishes as women perhaps than ever she had been adored as divinity.

(210; bk. 2, ch. 6)

Beginning life as a bastard, he looks for a name, a place, and someone he hopes to worship, "someone like a king (or a queen), someone ruling by divine right, like a deity" (J. Hillis Miller 1987, 197). He thinks this deity is Rachel, but he now realizes that she is not. From then on, he turns from Rachel to Beatrix, who is fascinatingly beautiful.

Thackeray makes it evident that we should not trust Henry's opinions. As Terry Tierney observes, "the narrator is characteristically inconsistent" (1992, 356). This inconsistency largely concerns his attitude to women:

To Esmond, women are the source of all trouble and joy for all men, and within the context of his own life, women are the basis of his ambitions and his changes of character. . . . At different moments in the novel he calls each woman the very cause of his life. Beatrix is the cause for which he lives during his active life, and Rachel the cause that directs both his youth and his retirement. (Tierney 1992, 358)

After Beatrix becomes Henry's new idol, she will become the cause of his suffering. Beatrix's replacing of her mother in Henry's heart is a punishment for Rachel, whose

chastisement reflects Thackeray's resentment of Jane Brookfield:

Thackeray still felt an obscure resentment against her for having so readily discarded him. So Harry is made to fall in love with Beatrix, who has grown to young womanhood during his absence; and Lady Castlewood has to suffer the prolonged ordeal of witnessing, nay, of being made the confidante, of Harry's love for her own daughter. (Gordon Ray 1958, 187-188)

Since Henry has started to give all his attention to Beatrix, the reader becomes the witness to Rachel's jealousy of her daughter and her love for Henry.

On the later portrayal of Rachel as a mother figure, Thackeray significantly annihilates the father figure in Lord Castlewood. It can be said that he symbolically removes his stepfather, whom he considered to be responsible for his estrangement from his mother. In punishing Rachel, Thackeray's own mother is punished vicariously. Rachel is not only deprived of her husband and authority over Henry, but also of her youth and beauty. She has to play the mother for both Henry and Beatrix, which means great humiliation for a woman of Rachel's nature:

He went back to the house, where the servant

still stood at the open door, ran up the stairs, and found his mistress where he had left her in the embrasure of the window, looking over the fields towards Chelsea. She laughed, wiping away at the same time the tears which were in her kind eyes; he flung himself down on his knees, and buried his head in her lap. She had in her hand the stalk of one of the flowers, a pink, that he had torn to pieces. 'Oh pardon me, my dearest and kindest,' he said: 'I am in hell and you are the angel that brings me a drop of water.' 'I am your mother, you are my son, and I love you always,' she said, holding her hands over him; and he went away comforted and humbled in mind, as he thought of that amazing and constant love and tenderness with which this sweet lady ever blessed and pursued him. (250; bk. 2. ch. 10)

As in Amelia's case, Rachel has to undergo great suffering before she is permitted to marry the hero.

Rachel's humiliation is intensified when she learns from the dowager Castlewood that Henry is the real heir of the estate. Her gratefulness to Henry increases when she discovers that he has concealed the truth all this time. From then on, she treats him as the head of the family. She protects him against Béatrix's insults and,



accustomed to bear her sorrows in a very different way, and to receive them as the stroke of God, with an awful submission and meekness" (389; bk. 3, ch. 7). Thackeray's attitude to the patient endurance and fortitude of women is equally ambivalent. A woman's devotion to her son or husband, and the sacrifices she makes for her husband and children are all unexplainable. Women's emotions are unpredictable:

Sure there is no bound to the trustingness of women. Look at Arria worshipping the drunken clodpate of a husband who beats her; look at Cornelia treasuring as a jewel in her maternal heart the oaf her son; I have known a woman preach Jesuit's bark, and afterwards Dr. Berkeley's tarwater, as though to swallow them were a divine decree, and to refuse them no better than blasphemy. (407; bk. 3, ch. 8)

Although Rachel and Beatrix represent two contrasted female types, contradiction in woman's nature is revealed in Rachel.

Rachel's apparent softness can turn into cruelty, especially in her treatment of Beatrix. When the prince makes advances to Beatrix in her own home, Henry and Rachel send her to the other family house to prevent a scandal. Rachel shows, of course, a mother's concern for the reputation of her daughter, but her attitude to

Beatrice as she packs her things is cruel. Her reminding Beatrice not to leave behind her dead fiancé's gift is at once romantic and heartless:

"Do you leave this, too, Beatrice?" says her mother taking the miniature out and with a cruelty she did not very often show; but there are some moments when the tenderest women are cruel, and some triumphs which angels can't forgo. (434-435; bk. 3, ch. 10)

Use of oxymorons in Rachel's portrayal is indicative of the narrator's ambivalent attitude to her. The use of irony contributes to this ambivalence. It is ironical that though Rachel criticizes her daughter for her cruelty and haughtiness, Beatrice has inherited both from her mother: "If my mistress was cruel, at least she never could be got to own as much. Her haughtiness quite overtopped Beatrice; and if the girl had a proud spirit, I very much fear it came to her by inheritance" (435; bk. 3, ch.10). Although Rachel's portrayal shows similarities to Amelia's in her softness and submissiveness, there are also parallels between her and Becky. This is largely the result of Rachel's double nature, and the changes she undergoes in the face of pain and suffering.

To Henry hypocrisy is peculiar to womanhood. All the four woman characters are hypocrites in varying degrees.

Whereas in Vanity Fair the wicked character Becky uses it deftly, in Esmond it is Rachel who is more adept at falsehood:

i think women have an instinct of dissimulation they know by nature how to disguise their emotions far better than the most consummate male courtiers can do. Is not the better part of the life of many of them spent in hiding their feelings, in cajoling their tyrants, in masking over with fond smiles and artful gaiety their doubt, or their grief, or their terror.

(440: bk. 3, ch. 11)

We may venture to guess, however, that Thackeray finds dissimulation not undesirable in women, for Henry marries Rachel in the end, in spite of the fact that he has come to see all her weaknesses. She is no longer the faultless goddess he had thought her to be. Unlike Dobbin in Vanity Fair, Henry becomes aware of his wife's failings not shortly before the marriage but long before it. His goddess Rachel, already dethroned by Beatrix in beauty and youthfulness, has also lost part of her beauty due to the marks small-pox has left on her face. She has not only lost her pride in her beauty but also has been humiliated by the discovery that Henry is not a dependent of her late husband but the true heir to the Castlewood

estate. All of these are a just punishment for her haughtiness.

One is tempted to question Thackeray's Victorian priggishness in thrusting aside the exciting sex symbol in Beatrix and accepting the subdued womanhood in her mother. There is no doubt his Victorianism--the moral values of his time--are largely responsible for Henry's choice. Judged by the Victorian values of marriage, home, family, and children, Rachel would make a better wife than Beatrix. In the strange psychological shift from a mother-son relationship to a husband-wife relationship, it is very likely that Thackeray felt a latent Oedipus complex for his mother.

Henry's account of his married life is quite free of censure. He once more exalts Rachel and considers himself very fortunate for having married her. There is mutual happiness as well as domestic bliss in their marriage:

In the name of my wife I write the completion of hope, and the summit of happiness. . . .

To think of her, is to praise God. . . . The great joy of my life was bestowed upon me, and that my dear mistress became my wife. . . .

Heaven hath blessed us with a child. (462-463; bk. 3, ch. 13)

One doubts Henry's sincerity in exalting his matrimonial happiness, because we are made aware that he never really

forgets Beatrix, and we are told that he grows to love his daughter more than he does his wife. As readers, we learn to regard Henry as an unreliable narrator. A large part of the ambiguity of the narrator's attitude to the women characters stems from his indecisiveness about the opposed types of womanhood. He cannot really decide whether he prefers a spirited woman like Beatrix or a submissive woman like Rachel.

The contrast between the opposing types of womanhood is more distinct in the characters of Becky and Amelia of Vanity Fair, where the characters are reduced to the puppets of the narrator/puppeteer. In Esmond, however, the female characters are closer to real people and show greater complexities in their characters. As Peters observes:

The contrasted pair of women who appear so often in Thackeray's writing are here linked in the closest possible relationship to each other, and to the hero of the novel. Each is a fully realized character, distinct in appearance and personality, but the hero loves them both, and the preface to his memoirs, written by his daughter, makes it clear that he never entirely loses his feelings for Beatrix, and that Rachel continues jealous to the end, as resentful of Esmond's feelings for

their daughter as of his lingering love for  
Beatrice. (1987, 210)

In both novels, Thackeray's ambiguous attitude to women is reflected through the contrasted female characters. In Esmond his presentation of the sharply opposing types of womanhood is to be found in the portrayal of Rachel herself with all the inconsistencies and incongruities of her character. She is unquestionably the most complex woman character depicted by Thackeray.

### V. Beatrix: The Cold-Blooded Heroine

The heartless Beatrix is an independent and straightforward woman, unlike Thackeray's other female characters. Becky is her counterpart, in the sense of being rebellious, intelligent, ambitious, and independent. She is from an aristocratic family, so she does not have to be accepted by high society. Furthermore, Beatrix is different from the women of her class as a "strong-willed woman perfectly capable of looking after herself" (Rignall 1986, 90), although she lives in the eighteenth century England, which is more strict than the Victorian England.

In her childhood, Beatrix displays a very distinctive character in her dominance over her parents. She is a good observer, so she can understand what people think and feel. She makes her circumstance easy from a very early age:

She ruled over the house with little imperial ways, which her parents coaxed and laughed at. . . . Her father, who laughed his great laugh, and encouraged her in her thousand antics. Lady Castlewood watched the child gravely and sadly: the little one was pert in her replies to her mother, yet eager in her protestations of love and promises of amendments; and as ready to cry

(after a little quarrel brought on by her own giddiness) until she had won back her mama's favour . . . From her mother's sad looks she fled to her father's chair and boozy laughter. She already set the one against the other.  
(118; bk. 1, ch. 9)

She is an intelligent little girl growing into a domineering woman. She is aware of her influence on her parents, and likes to use their love to her own advantage. Beatrix reminds one of Becky, in using her influence on others. Shortly afterwards, Beatrix's capacity to impress people becomes a power for her. Thackeray's resentment of the powerful and authoritative woman type he found in his mother is reflected here in Beatrix. As in the case of Becky Sharp, the father is largely responsible for turning the daughter into a spoiled rebel:

It was about her daughter that Lady Castlewood was the most anxious, and the danger which she thought menaced the little Beatrix from the indulgences which her father gave her . . . and from the company into which the careless lord brought the child. (124; bk. 1, ch. 9)

Again like Becky's, Beatrix's rebelliousness and independence is the source of resentment for women. She



generally repulses women in her circles but invites the admiration of men.

Beatrice fascinates the people around her with her beauty and intelligence. Her cousin Henry becomes her endless admirer when she grows up. After three years in Cambridge, he finds a young attractive girl in the household of the Castlewood:

When she made mischief, used cutting speeches, or caused her friends pain, she excused herself for her fault, not by admitting and deploring it, but by pleading not guilty, and asserting innocence so constantly, and with such seeming artlessness, that it was impossible to question her plea. In her childhood, they were but mischiefs then which she did; but her power became more fatal as she grew older. . . . Almost everything Beatrice did or undid seemed good, or at least pardonable, to him then, and years afterwards. (134; bk. 1, ch. 12)

Henry's admiration for Beatrice makes Henry's position as the narrator biased, since he often dismisses her defects as unimportant. His prejudices as narrator largely contribute to the ambivalence in the portrayal of two women characters because he criticizes Rachel more harshly than he does Beatrice. He claims that Beatrice has inherited the traits of her mother's character. Beatrice

is as hard and proud as her mother is: "If my mistress was cruel, at least, she never could be got to own as much. Her haughtiness quite overtopped Beatrix's; and, if the girl had a proud spirit. I very much fear it came to her by inheritance" (435; bk. 3. ch. 10). His passionate love for Beatrix will blind him to Rachel's true personality until he becomes disillusioned with the daughter.

Henry's ambivalent attitude to the women characters can be attributed to Thackeray's sentimental and complex experiences with women. Rachel is largely modelled on Jane Brookfield, the wife of his close friend, the woman with whom he was hopelessly in love.

To Thackeray she represents the Jane Brookfield who is . . . a disease in the blood, which is temporarily cured by absence. He gave Beatrix more attributes of Jane . . . [like] physical coldness, social ambition, waywardness, to say nothing of her dazzling beauty. (Greig 1950, 166)

If his mother is the model for feminine unpredictability in the Vanity Fair, Jane Brookfield replaces her in Esmond.

Like Becky, Beatrix is an ambitious woman, who wants to attain the best that she can. Her advantage over Becky, however, is that she has the social position the

latter lacks. Her beauty is enough for her to impress the people around her, whereas Becky uses all kinds of arts and cajoleries to climb the social ladder. Henry's lower social position does not suit her aspirations, and she is very frank about this:

I am ambitious, Harry Esmond; and if it be no sin in a man to covet honour, why should a woman too not desire it? . . . A woman of my spirit, cousin, is to be won by gallantry, and not by sighs and rueful faces . . . Had you been a great man, you might have been good humoured; but being nobody, sir, you are too great a man for me; and I'm afraid of you, cousin. (363; bk. 2. ch. 4)

Her frankness about her ambitions is quite unlike Becky's. The other three women characters prefer to hide their feelings. Beatrix conforms to the standards of her materialistic society in her desire to marry a man of high standing. Her attitude to Henry is perplexing because socially he is her inferior whereas he is her superior--"too great a man"--morally:

Like most of Thackeray's characters, she [Beatrix] is too ready to translate situations into incompatible alternatives or intolerable extremes. But Thackeray uses such intractable oppositions expressively as well as critically.

His characters' highly mannered speeches testify that ambivalent passions and contradictory emotional drives are integral to his vision of the human experience. (Joan Garrett Goodyear 1987, 76)

These are the basis of Thackeray's art. He conveys the conflict in the human heart reflecting contradictory attitudes or double standards in society. Accordingly, Rachel's attitude to Henry is equally ambivalent; both are "torn by powerful feelings which pull in opposite directions and are unresolvable" (1987, 75).

Beatrix is, in many ways, a rebel like Becky. She defies male authority openly, whereas Becky does this often indirectly. Beatrix "also knows there is no legitimate queen or goddess" (Miller 1987, 211), and her defiance of female authority can be observed in her treatment of Rachel:

Mrs. Beatrix asserted her own authority so resolutely that her mother quickly gave in. The maid of honour had her own equipage; went from home and came back at her own will: her mother was alike powerless to resist her or to lead her, or to command or to persuade her. (352; bk. 3, ch. 3)

She is equally defiant of her brother, who becomes the head of the family after the father's death: Frank "ruled

the whole household (always excepting rebellious Beatrix)" (222; bk. 2, ch. 7).

Although she rebels against male authority, she knows that her survival in this system depends on finding a powerful husband, one who can liberate her from subjection to other powers. Therefore, Henry is not a suitable match for her. As can be seen in her demeaning of Henry, she can be very cruel to men who are her social inferiors:

I shall go my own way, sirrah, and that way is towards a husband, and I don't want you on the way. I am for your betters, colonel, for your betters: do you hear that? You might do if you had an estate and were younger . . . You and mamma are fit for each other. . . . Where shall I go? . . . I have been long enough Frank's humble servant. Why am I not a man? I have ten times his brains, and had I worn . . . a sword and periwig instead of this mantle and commode, to which nature has condemned me. (340-341; bk. 3, ch. 3)

Her wish that she were born a man is quite common to woman characters of Victorian fiction who yearn for male power. Thackeray displays the dilemma of intelligent and power hungry women in his portrayal of Beatrix. As Miller observes,

Beatrix . . . is the embodiment in Henry Esmond of a dangerous feminine principle of skepticism. She represents a power of radical irony and faithlessness. She disbelieves in any hierarchy or authority. She has a woman's knowledge that there is no king or legitimate male ruler, though she is also an example of the need certain women have to possess the embodiments of this pretended power, if only to destroy them. (1987, 211)

Beatrix wishes she were a man so that she can have endless freedom to do as she wishes, and to enjoy life to the fullest. As her mother accuses her she is worldly, an epicurean in her tastes:

"I solemnly vow, own, and confess, that I want good husband. Where is the charm of one? My face is my fortune. Who'll come?--buy, buy, buy! I cannot toil, neither can I spin, but I can play twenty-three games on the cards. I can dance the last dance . . . I can talk as wicked as any woman of my years, and I know enough stories to amuse a sulky husband . . . I have a pretty taste for dress, diamonds, gambling and old china. I love sugar-plums . . . the opera and everything that is useless and costly." (342; bk. 3, ch. 2)

In her worldliness, she is in binary opposition to her name sake, Dante's Beatrice, the embodiment of spiritual love and divine wisdom. Beatrice's symbolic role in The Divine Comedy is to hint "at the lack of authority of the occupant of the papal throne"; and "she sees the throne of empire to lack genuine authority" (David Higgins 1993, 651). Ironically, Thackeray's Beatrix hates authority and she has no love for anybody. Thackeray, who disliked the classics, perhaps reveals a suspicious disbelief in the woman type represented by Dante's Beatrice.

In spite of her worldliness and defiance of authority, Beatrix is not the hypocrite that Becky is. Of the four female characters, she is the most outspoken, and she actually despises hypocrisy. "'You are a hypocrite, too, Henry with your grave airs and your glum face. We are all hypocrites. Oh dear me! We are all alone, alone, alone'" (356; bk. 3, ch.3). Like Henry Esmond, she is another alienated character, and in her loneliness we can also find traces of Thackeray's own alienation as an Anglo-Indian. Beatrix "has the melancholy of her nihilism. She knows that . . . no prize is worth winning. This is Thackeray's knowledge too" (Miller 1987, 212). Her rebelliousness and compliance make her almost a modern female character rather than an eighteenth century heroine. She is suspicious of

idealized, perfect womanhood; the author expresses his own cynicism and equivocal attitude to women through Beatrix:

"Whenever I see an enormous compliment to a woman, and some outrageous panegyric about female virtue, I always feel sure that the captain and his better half have fallen out overnight, and that he has been brought home tipsy, or has been found out in'. (354; bk. 3, ch. 3)

She prefers being the "naughty little Trix" who "leaves undone those things which she ought to have done, and does those things which she ought not to have done" (354). She is a good observer. Expressing her cynicism reminds us of Becky, who would do the same but in her own mind rather than doing it openly.

Beatrix is contemptuous of her mother's goodness, in the same way that Becky is of Amelia's. According to her, such kindness is only stupidity, and a woman's revealing the love she feels for a man is weakness:

"Oh, what a saint she is! I should be better, I think, if she were not so perfect. She has had a great sorrow in her life, and a great secret; and repented of it. It could not have been my father's death. She talks freely about that; nor could she have loved him very much--



though who knows what we women do love, and why?" (355; bk. 3, ch. 3)

Beatrice is being sarcastic of Rachel's secret love for Henry because she refuses to pine for any ordinary man. Her contempt for her mother arises partly from the jealousy she feels for her. She is jealous of her mother's beauty and goodness. Like Becky, Beatrice feels deprived of maternal love. Her possessive and self-centeredness have made her demanding of maternal love, refusing to share her mother with others.

"My mother's life is all for Heaven, and mine-- all for earth. We can never be friends quite; and then, she cares more for Frank's little finger than she does for me--I know she does: and she loves you, sir, a great deal too much; and I hate you for it. I would have had her all to myself; but she wouldn't. In my childhood, it was my father she loved--(Oh, how could she? I remember him kind and handsome, but so stupid, and not being able to speak after drinking wine). And then, it was Frank; and now, it is Heaven and the clergyman. How I could have loved her!" (356; bk. 3, ch. 3)

Lack of her mother's love turns her into a ruthless and cynical young woman. In Beatrice's resentment of her

mother, we see the author's longing for maternal love because he had to separate from his mother at an early age and had to share her with his stepfather.

Much of Beatrix's willfulness and waywardness, then, can be traced to her feeling of being deserted by her mother. Her mischievousness as a child is largely the outcome of her desire to attract her mother's attention and love. Being denied these, she turns into a proud and capricious young woman, prepared to hurt the feelings of those who love her. She inherits her pride in her beauty from her mother, and she knows very well that her beautiful face is her "fortune. Believing that she has been deprived of maternal love and attention, she demands to find devotion and flattery in men. She is determined to make Henry suffer in the hopeless love he feels for her, not only because she finds him her social inferior but also because he has to pay for having stolen her mother's love from her. Her cruelty becomes unbearable when she is engaged to Hamilton, the duke:

"A duke is a taller man than you. And why should I not be grateful to one such as his grace, who gives me his heart and his great name? It is a great gift he honours me with; I know 'tis a bargain between us: and I accept it . . . 'Tis no question of sighing and philandering between a nobleman of his grace's

age and a girl who hath little of that softness in her nature. . . . I like to be the first of my company, sir; and I like flattery and compliments." (362-363; bk. 3, ch. 4)

As Ahmed Altinel remarks, "Beatrix demands something from [Henry] which he cannot give. He wants to enslave her when she only wants to be enjoyed" (1986, 170). In fact she wants to enslave him.

Since the story takes place around Henry, these two female characters are described largely from his point of view. The third person narration is actually in the form of free indirect speech, with Henry as the central consciousness. It is interesting to note that the chapter headings use the first person point of view, as in "I have the Small-Pox . . ." "I am in Prison . . ." and "I make the Campaign of 1704." The third person narrator, on the other hand, is in a way Henry himself, looking backward and relating the events of the past, through the safe distance of time and place. The older Henry as the third person narrator has gained objectivity and can easily criticize the younger Henry for his weaknesses in judgement. A duality is thus created between the viewpoint of the older Henry and that of the younger one. This is largely responsible for the ambivalent attitude to the female characters, and Henry's appraisals of the two women are full of contradictory points. "He has no

difficulty understanding Rachel, as she is willing to be dominated by him. Beatrix, on the other hand, proves wild and unruly and he cannot really respond to her" (Altinel 1986, 163). Although he learns to prefer Rachel to Beatrix in later years, he cannot completely overcome the charm she has for him. Henry's fear of as well as his admiration for the powerful female type is a reflection of Thackeray's similar attitude.

Beatrix's ambition and coldness hinder her from loving Henry, who stubbornly does not give up hopes of marrying her. He gives the family diamonds to Beatrix as wedding presents in her engagement to Hamilton, the duke, but Henry actually hopes to impress her and win her heart. When Hamilton refuses the diamonds, Rachel thinks his act is offensive on Henry's part, so she reveals the truth about Henry's birth. Beatrix is impressed by his act and "stepping up to him; and as Esmond kissed her, she whispered, 'Oh, why I didn't know you before?'" (369; bk. 3, ch. 4). Beatrix's love of royalty and class are revealed in this act. Shortly afterwards, her fiancé is killed by Mohun at a duel, just as her father had been: "They fought three on a side, as in that tragic meeting twelve years back, which hath been recounted already, and in which Mohun performed his second murder" (386; bk. 3, ch. 6).

Beatrice is at once the source of inspiration and the cause of grief for Henry. He works hard to distinguish himself in the army so that he can deserve her love. When he fails in winning her heart, he begins to see her as an alluring and dangerous woman, a siren like Becky.

"To please that woman . . . I tried to distinguish myself as a soldier, and afterwards as a wit and politician . . . could you see every man's career in life, you would find a woman clogging him; or clinging round his march and stopping him; or cheering him and goading him; or beckoning him out of her chariot, so that he goes up to her, and leaves the race to be run without him; or bringing him the apple and saying 'Eat'; or fetching him the daggers and whispering 'Kill' yonder lies Duncan, and a crown, and an opportunity." (375-376; bk. 3, ch. 5)

In Henry's disillusionment, Beatrice becomes for him an Eve, the temptress, or the dangerously ambitious Lady Macbeth. Nevertheless, he cannot resist her charms. There is something irresistible in her which captivates even her resentful mother's heart:

There was a certain charm about this girl of which neither Colonel Esmond nor his fond mistress could forgo the fascination; in spite

of her faults and her pride and wilfulness,  
 they were forced to love her . . . who in the  
 course of his life, hath not been so bewitched  
 and worshipped some idol or another. (382-383;  
 bk. 3, ch. 6)

Seeing women as idols to be worshipped or as atrocities is quite in keeping with the Victorian attitude to women. This ambivalent attitude, as mentioned earlier, is also the result of Thackeray's frustrating experiences with women. Henry's equivocal feelings for Beatrix are the outcome of the narrative mode used in the novel. The so-called third person narrator is actually Henry himself at a more advanced age. It is interesting to note that although he learns to despise her in later years, he once more falls under Beatrix's spell, as when he relates the story in reminiscence.

If Beatrix is incapable of loving anybody, it is because she fails to find the right kind of man who would captivate her heart. To her Henry is too priggish and obsequious. What has appealed to her in her fiancé is his aristocracy of blood and position in society, which would enable her to realize her ambitions:

"I think I have no heart; at least, I have never seen the man that could touch it; and, had I found him, I would have followed him . . . I do anything for such a man, bear anything for

for him: but I never found one. You were ever too much of a slave to win my heart; even my lord duke could not command it." (397-398; bk. 3, ch. 7)

Like Becky, Beatrix brings about the union of Rachel and Henry, who is the counterpart of Dobbin in Vanity Fair. The difference is that Beatrix does not do this for her own benefit. She may be loveless like Becky, but she is not the artful and devious creature that Becky is. On the contrary, she is often honest about her wickedness and jealousy of other women:

"I am not good, Harry: my mother is gentle and good like an angel. . . . She is weak, but she would die rather than do a wrong; I am stronger than she, but I would do it out of defiance. . . . She is jealous, all women are. I sometimes think that is the only womanly quality I have." (397-398; bk. 3, ch. 7)

It is her constantly reminding Henry of Rachel's goodness that helps him realize the mother's superiority to the daughter.

The death of her fiancé is a cause of grief for Beatrix. It precipitates her determination to find a man of noble blood to materialize her dreams of glory. She may have been frustrated in her initial plans, yet she is not exactly vanquished:

She seemed to accept her grief, and to defy it; nor would she allow it . . . to extort from her the confession of even a tear of humiliation or a cry of pain. . . . she can neither help her beauty, nor her courage, nor her cruelty; nor a single spot on her shining coat; nor the conquering spirit which impels her; nor the shot which brings her down. (389; bk. 3, ch. 7)

Because Beatrix refuses to speak of her grief to anyone, Rachel believes her to be quite insensitive. Beatrix was older, paler, and more majestic than in the year before; her mother seemed the youngest of the two. She never once spoke of her grief, Lady Castlewood told Esmond, or alluded, save by a quiet word or two, to the death of her hopes. (395; bk. 3, ch. 7)

Her independence and defiance of fate are unusual for a woman of the eighteenth century.

Her resilience in the face of catastrophe reminds one of Becky, who forever changes her roles to find acceptance in society and to attain dominance by pretending subservience. In order to impress the prince Beatrix condescends to play the role of an enticing woman who captures a man's heart by her housewifely skills. While Rachel and Beatrix prepare food for the prince's



visit, Henry observes their skills with great admiration: "Both ladies were perfect housewives, having the greatest skill in the making of confections, scented waters . . . and keeping a notable superintendence over the kitchen" (409; bk. 3, ch.9). What impresses the Prince is not Beatrix's housewifely skills, but her beauty and charm.

The prince's obvious interest in Beatrix and her defiance of decorum in openly flirting with him cause much anxiety on the part of Rachel, Frank, and Henry. In keeping with the conservatism of the period, they force her to leave the house to protect her from the Prince, whose attempts to seduce her in her own house are proof of the fact that he does not respect her honor. In her defiance of authority over her, Beatrix turns against her "three kinsfolk" (429; bk. 3, ch. 10) she leaves the house but leaves a note for the Prince to meet her in the other house.

As usual, it is her wilfulness and vanity that prompt her to become the Prince's plaything. She evidently has the ambition to become the queen, if the Pretender succeeds in claiming the throne. Beatrix's risking her reputation in her insistence on continuing her intimacy with the prince kills the love Henry has for her:

The love was dead within him; had she a crown

to bring him with her love, he felt that both would degrade him. But this wrath against Beatrix did not lessen the angry feelings of the colonel against the man who had been the occasion if not the cause of the evil. (454; bk. 3, ch. 13)

When Henry and Frank take her from the Prince, Beatrix is so infuriated by this intervention that she refuses to return to her family:

I know not what infatuation of ambition urged the beautiful and wayward woman, whose name hath occupied so many of these pages, and who was served by me with ten years of such a constant fidelity and passion; but ever after that day at Castlewood, when we rescued her, she persisted in holding all her family as her enemies, and left us, and escaped to France, to what a fate I disdain to tell. (462; bk. 3, ch. 13)

As in Becky's case, Beatrix's wilfulness is not to be seen in any of the male characters in the novel. In spite of Thackeray's fear of strong-willed women, he implies that in the Victorian era men have fallen under the influence of domineering women, mainly because the period can no longer produce heroes. Vanity Fair is a novel "without a hero", and Esmond, though the period

apparently belongs to the eighteenth century, is equally lacking in heroes. The narrator himself reveals his weakness against Beatrix. Frank Castlewood is equally weak, and, like Henry, ruled by women: "Poor Frank was weak, as perhaps all our race hath been, and led by women. Those around him were imperious, and in a terror of his mother's influence over him" (462; bk. 3, ch.13). Even the Prince is presented as a weak character and his ambition to capture the throne is thwarted by his interest in women: "The Prince was only made to exhibit anger because we doubted of his intentions in respect to Beatrix: and to leave us, because we questioned his honour" (444: bk. 3. ch. 11). The author questions the credibility of male authority in the character of the Prince.

In his resentment of strong-willed women, Thackeray punishes Beatrix by turning her into a fallen woman. As in Becky's case, she is distanced from the reader at this stage in her life. Little is told about her adventure in France where she goes in pursuit of the Prince. As Miller remarks, Beatrix

casts an annihilating shadow on Thackeray's pretense of mastery, as well as on any pretensions of sovereignty in the understanding of the novel the reader may have. That chain of pretenses can only be sustained by repudiating

Beatrice. She must be cast out of the novel like a scapegoat, with all the sins of society upon her. Henry in the end repudiates her as without value, as immoral, as worth not loving.

Thackeray has her grow fat and marry Tom Tusher. He takes away all her lunar and solar glow. (1987, 212)

Nevertheless, Beatrice does not submit altogether. If she cannot have the best, she will have the next best. And this is evidenced in her becoming the mistress King George II (10-11; preface).

There is the author's dilemma between his heart and the rules and values of society in Henry's presentation of Beatrice's life. Thackeray blames women for making men insecure of their influence on them, just as his mother had done to him. In his marriage, Thackeray was frustrated by his wife, who was a weak person, but could not get away from his mother's influence either. The author experienced another defeat with Jane Brookfield, with whom he was madly in love. All these unhappy incidents and the double standards of society are responsible for his ambivalent attitude to women.

## VI. Conclusion

This study attempts to reveal the ambivalent attitude and tone of Thackeray to his female characters. The reasons for his ambiguity have been considered. This ambivalence and ambiguity in the author's attitude can be best observed in Vanity Fair and then in Henry Esmond. In these novels, he created contrasted pairs of female characters. Using contrasted characters is one of the techniques of the Victorian fiction tradition. In the first novel, Becky is the evil heroine, and Amelia is the good heroine. In the second novel, Beatrix and Rachel are the counterparts of Becky and Amelia. He both satirizes and praises these woman characters by making vague comments which result in ambiguity. Although he is noncommittal in his characterization of women, he creates a realistic picture of the Victorian society.

In this period, woman was regarded as a kind of a decorative object, in status inferior to her male counterpart. Amelia is the best example of this type of woman in Vanity Fair. She is the submissive female character of Thackeray as Rachel in Esmond. Amelia is a selfishly possessive woman, especially in her treatment of her son by George Osborne. Most likely, Thackeray modelled her on his possessive mother and his submissive wife. Her love for George is extreme in that she worships him in the name of love. Yet she fulfils the expectations

of her society by behaving so. In the end of the novel, she marries Dobbin, her faithful admirer. Dobbin's disillusionment with the woman he has adored is a punishment for Amelia. Being more intelligent and resilient character than Amelia, the rebel Becky is most memorable character of Thackeray. She starts life as a governess and ends up as a prostitute. Eventually, she acts the pious woman in a charity bazaar to be accepted by society. As a social climber, she tries everything to survive in this merchant society. Hypocrisy is her strongest weapon and she uses it well.

In Esmond, Rachel symbolizes the ideal Victorian woman in her attachment to her family. She is an understanding woman to Henry and her son Frank, but cruel to her daughter Beatrix. As a woman of contrasted qualities, she is rather hard in treating her own sex. By having the qualities of a loving mother, Rachel reveals the author's longing for a mother figure. His possessive and domineering mother tried to control his life and was the inspiration for almost all his woman characters, especially Amelia, Rachel, Becky, and Beatrix.

Although Beatrix is the counterpart for Becky, she is not really the hypocrite that Becky is. She is outspoken, but reveals Becky's greed for position and money. Being rebellious, Beatrix is very much like Becky. At the end of the novel, she marries Tom Tusher, then

becomes a courtesan in the palace of Charles II. Most likely, Thackeray modelled Beatrix on Jane Brookfield, who was the wife of one of his close friends from Cambridge (Peters 1987, 136).

By both praising and ridiculing these characters, Thackeray creates ambiguity in his novels. In Vanity Fair, the ambivalence stems from the sarcastic attitude of the narrator. The story is conveyed mostly in the third person narrator, occasionally shifting to the first person. In both cases, the narrator is an experienced middle-aged man. In Esmond, shiftings in point of view cause much of the ambivalence. Although the point of view is third person, it is actually the older Henry telling the story of his youth and young manhood. The difference between younger Henry's views and those of the older Henry contribute much to the ambiguity.

Another reason for his ambivalence is Thackeray's reaction to the heroes and the heroines of the conventional novel. Accordingly, he changed the appearance of his heroes and heroines. He tried to display that there are no heroes and heroines in his age, because his society was acquisitive one, which did not permit the heroism of earlier time. In a society lacking in heroes, there was no room for heroines.

His unlucky relationships with women, beginning with his mother, made him more careful in approaching women.

When he got married, his psychologically disturbed wife became the most important problem in his life. The third woman who was responsible for his frustration was Jane Brookfield. Thackeray was deeply in love with her. Just as Beatrice does to Henry, Jane refused his love (Ray 1958, 185-186).

In Vanity Fair, good and evil are presented in the characters of two different women. Becky and Amelia. Whereas in Esmond, Rachel has both good and bad qualities that make her more human and believable. Rachel and Beatrice are like one woman who has contrasted qualities. In the end, Henry, like Dobbin, marries the submissive woman. Dobbin and Henry reflect the author's preference of docile women. This attitude is better revealed in Vanity Fair, but is modified in Esmond, in which Rachel is portrayed as more intelligent and mature than Amelia. Moreover, Rachel bears some similarities to Becky in her manipulation of people and circumstances to suit her needs.

Thackeray's use of contrasted characters shows some similarity to Fielding's satirical attitudes to morality and sexuality. Thackeray set his stories within a certain historical framework, and thus reminds us of Scott, whom Thackeray wanted to emulate in Esmond. Although Thackeray seemed to criticize the Victorian society, he could not transcend the double standards of his society. This is



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