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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.08.27>

A SOCIO-MORAL OVERVIEW ON SELECTED WORKS OF WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

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Abstract

We know that the historical perspective of English literature is incomplete without considering the works of William Makepeace Thackeray, the renowned member of the amazing galaxy of English novelists. This research paper is intended to throw light on the Socio-Moral aspects seen in the selected works of William Makepeace Thackeray. The Social strata, moral concerns and also the political issues have been observed in the works of Thackeray.

Keywords: Socio, Moral, Political, Militarism, Victorianism, Bourgeois.

Introduction

William Thackeray is a renowned member of the brilliant galaxy of English novelists. Thackeray came from a wealthy family. He was born in Calcutta, India, where his father served in the colonial administration as a judge and chief tax collector. After the death of his father, six-year-old Thackeray was sent to England. Until the age of twelve, Thackeray lived in the care of his grandfather in Middlesex County, and then was sent to the Charterhouse School (Bloom 2). Living conditions in the state-owned boarding house were bleak. In 1829, Thackeray entered the University of Cambridge, but did not complete the university course. Thackeray went for traveling and thereafter he lived in Germany (in Weimar), where he met Gethin, in Italy and France, and studied painting in Paris. From there he sent articles to English newspapers and magazines about French writers and artists, about trials and Parisian manners. Back in London, Thackeray got engaged in publishing and journalistic activities, acting both as a writer and as a cartoonist. Thackeray illustrated many of his works himself (Carey 1).

The early period of Thackeray's work (1829-1845) is associated with journalism. He published his articles, essays, parodies and notes on topical socio-political topics in the magazine "Frazer's Magazine", and later (from 1842) collaborated in the famous satirical weekly "Punch". In the 40s, "Punch" had a democratic orientation and united writers and artists of advanced views. It collaborated with the Democratic poet Thomas Goode, the satirist Douglas Gerrald. The speeches of Thackeray himself also had a democratic character, who, in his burlesques and satirical essays, raised important problems of domestic and international politics, condemned British militarism, raised his voice in defense of oppressed Ireland, ridiculed and condemned the constant, but unchanging in the country, struggle of the parliamentary parties of the Whigs and Tories (Carey 8).

Thackeray's democratic sympathies are evidenced, for example, by his essay "How a Spectacle Is Made of Execution" (1840). In it, Thackeray respectfully writes about the ordinary people of London, about craftsmen and workers, contrasting their common sense with the unreasonableness of those in power and members of parliamentary parties.

"I must confess that whenever I find myself in a large London crowd, I think with some bewilderment about the so-called two great 'parties' of England. Tell me, what do all these people care about the two great leaders of the nation... Ask this ragged guy who seems to have often participated in club debates and is endowed with great insight and common sense. He decidedly doesn't care about Lord John or Sir Robert... he will not be upset at all if Mr. Ketch drags them here and puts them under the black gallows." (Carey 13)

Through these words, Thackeray advises "honourable members of both chambers" to communicate more with ordinary people and appreciate them.

At the same time - and this is especially important to note - Thackeray writes about the increased strength and consciousness of the English people, that while the parliamentarians

"were screaming and arguing, the people whose property was disposed of when he was a child grew up a little and finally grew to the point that they became no stupider than their guardians." (Carey 15)



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In the image of the writer, a guy in a jacket with torn elbows personifies the working people of England.

"Talk to our ragged buddy. Perhaps he does not have the same gloss as in some member of the Oxford or Cambridge Club, he did not study at Eton and never in his life read Horace, but he is able to reason as sensibly as the best of us, he knows how to speak his rough language as convincingly, he has read a lot of different books that have been published recently, and learned a lot from what I read. He is no worse than any of us; and there are still ten million of the same in the country." (Colby 16)

Thackeray's essay warns that in the not-too-distant future, not ten, but twenty million will side with the "simple guy."

Thackeray's social satire is directed at all privileged strata of English society down to the very top. The crowned persons did not escape it either. The poem "George" paints murderous portraits of kings - the four Georges - insignificant, greedy and ignorant. Thackeray's portraits of kings have nothing to do with the writings of bourgeois historiographers exalting their supposed virtues and feats. The satirical pen of the writer depicts the rulers of England as people despicable and pathetic. George I "despised literature, hated the arts", George II, remaining a foreigner on the English throne, "squawked, greedy, saved money", George III - "was weak in mind, but the Englishman was from head to toe". In 1842, for several months, the magazine Punch published the humorous "Lectures of Miss Tickletoby" on the history of England, which showed Thackeray's mocking and disrespectful attitude to the traditional authorities of English history and, at the same time, his fundamental disagreement with the official pseudoscientific versions that history is created by kings and heroes. "Lectures" were illustrated by the author himself. Thackeray's cartoons enhanced the satirical sound of the text. Thackeray uses the technique of double parody: he ridicules the manner of the "lecturer" - verbosity, heaping facts, their superficial coverage - and at the same time parodies historical novels and scholarly works of historians who assert the "cult of heroes". At the same time, Miss Tickletoby's Lectures contained something more that, as they were published, was evident: a condemnation of wars that brought disasters to peoples. They're "nice to read about," but they're "not that pleasant in reality." Battles and battles, which are written about with such enthusiasm, in fact, turn into suffering and death of many people. A reminder of this is directly heard in the "lecture" about Edward III. This lecture turned out to be the last: further publication of Thackeray's satire was suspended. (Clarke 3)

The young Thackeray is invariably witty and brave, he addresses important issues of domestic and international politics, condemns British militarism, raises his voice in defense of oppressed Ireland. Inexhaustible on inventions, Thackeray creates a variety of parodies. He ridicules in them the epigons of romanticism, works far from the truth of life, parodies the works of bourgeois historiographers. Particularly successful were Thackeray's parodies of salon novels and novels of the so-called Newgate school, in which the underworld was portrayed in a halo of romance. (Clarke 9)

The novel about Barry Lyndon is an important stage in the movement towards the creation of such a masterpiece as "Vanity Fair". In it, the image of a crook and an adventurer, claiming to be a gentleman and seeking a place at the very top of society, is created with brilliance. Barry succeeds by understanding the basic mechanism of contemporary life - the power of money and the rejection of moral principles. He is multifaceted and quirky, cunning and bold. Barry appears before us in a variety of guises - a recruit, a deserter, a cheater, a socialite, a contender for membership in parliament. He changes masks and names, serves in one or another army. During the Seven Years' War, the Irishman Redmond Barry wears the uniform of an English and then a Prussian soldier, he appears in the living rooms of European capitals under the name of the Frenchman de Bally Barry, and after marrying Lady Lyndon, he attaches her noble surname to his name. A marriage of convenience brings him wealth and position in society. Thematically, this "career novel" by Thackeray echoes the works of the greatest novelists of his time - Stendhal, Balzac, Dickens, while continuing the traditions of his predecessors - the English writers of the XVIII century - Fielding and Smollett, who wrote about young people entering life, fighting for their place in society, parting with illusions.

Barry Lyndon is involved in the course of events and thereby introduced to history. However, he does not think about the essence of social conflicts and the wars experienced by his contemporaries, and does not seek to understand all this. He is driven by other interests and thoughts. Barry admits:

"I am not enough of a philosopher and historian, to judge the causes of the notorious Seven Years' War, into which all of Europe was plunged at that time. The circumstances that caused it always seemed to me to be extremely confusing, and the books devoted to her are written so incomprehensibly that I rarely felt smarter at the end of a chapter than when I started it, and therefore I am not going to burden the reader with personal considerations about this subject." (Haney 21)



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Indeed, Barry does not delve into the essence of what is happening. However, both his personality and fate bear the stamp of a certain historical era, the originality of which is revealed in the picture of morals created by the writer, in the truthful reproduction of the life of English society. Thackeray connects the personal fate of his hero, his thoughts and actions with the era and history. In private fate, the laws of time are manifested. This principle, manifested in "Barry Lyndon", is fundamental in all the work of the writer.

The question of what is defined today by the term "artistic historicism" has always been of fundamental importance to Thackeray. In one form or another, he addressed it in his articles, in literary parodies, and, of course, in novels. This question is discussed by him, arising again and again, in his works on the authors of famous historical novels, and above all about Walter Scott, and in his disputes with historians and philosophers, and above all with Thomas Carlyle as the author of heroes, the cult of heroes and the historical in history (1840).

Thackeray himself takes a different path in creating the image of the central character of his novel. Barry Lyndon appears to us not so much as a "hero" in the conventional sense of the word, but as an "anti-hero"; perhaps none of the human virtues is peculiar to him, except for the extreme and dashing frankness with which he tells about his adventures, about the deceptions and meannesses he commits. However, he himself evaluates his actions and thoughts in a completely different way and puts himself high, which does not mean that sobriety of judgment is not peculiar to him. "There is no man in all of Europe whose blood is nobler than mine," he writes of himself. "Through my abilities and energy, I have worked my way out of poverty and obscurity to well-being and luxury," he observes. Barry never tires of admiring his "irrepressible temperament", his "brilliant virtues and talents", he considers himself the center of secular society in each of the European capitals. And at the same time, he calls himself a "shameless Irish crook" and, without embarrassment, admits: "There would not be a more hardened scoundrel in the entire Prussian army." His motto is "Go ahead! Go ahead, and the world before you will recede; and if you are given the withers, dare again, and he will submit to you." (Hardey 15)

This rule, not knowing fear and remorse, Barry followed all his life. He dared, embarked on adventures, lied and hypocritical, cunning and seduced. He knew success and failure, never retreated, always went ahead, rose higher and higher, was close to the very tops, tasted the sweetness of wealth, the doors of the capital's living rooms opened before him, he was not only accepted in secular circles, but also recognized as an ornament of society, elected a deputy.

But the fact is that both shamelessness and arrogance only benefit him, they contribute to his promotion, without them his career would not have been so brilliant. These are the laws of the society in which he lives, and maybe of life in general. Barry tends to philosophize at times:

"But how impermanent is the world! After all, it seems how great our sorrows are, and how insignificant they are in practice! It seems to us that we are dying of grief, and to what extent do we, in fact, easily forget everything!.. And why do we seek comfort from Time!"(Haney 23)

Thackeray's early works, in which he acted as a critic of bourgeois society and its morality, prepared the appearance of the most significant things of the writer: "The Book of Snobs" (1846-1847) and the pinnacle of his realistic work - the novel "Vanity Fair" (1848). In these works, created during the rise of the Chartist movement, Thackeray's social criticism, his realistic generalizations and satirical skill reach their greatest strength.

Thackeray caught the connection between the people of contemporary society, based on the "heartless purity", on the magical power of money. This society appears in his works as a huge fair, where everything is sold and everything is bought. Truthfully portraying the repulsive face of the English bourgeois, Thackeray had no illusions, like Dickens, about the possibility of his transformation into a kind and sympathetic person. Thackeray is a somewhat different type of writer. It is dominated by a satirist and a social denouncer. For him, the main thing is the disclosure of the harsh truth of life without any embellishments and illusions.

"The Book of Snobs" is written in the form of essays about the life of modern society. Together, they constitute a broad and expressive picture of English reality. Referring in each of them to a certain, specific phenomenon of public or private life of his compatriots, the writer combines these phenomena into a single satirical canvas.

The word "snob" and the concept of "snobbery" have a certain socio-critical meaning in the work of Thackeray. Thackeray defines a snob as a person who looks up with adoration and downwards with contempt. This word conveys the characteristic for the English bourgeois slavish admiration for the aristocracy and contempt for the inferior. However, the concept of "snobbery" is not limited to this. It is much broader and includes all the variety of bourgeois vices - greed, predation, hypocrisy, swagger, sanctimony.



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For Thackeray, a snob is "one who vilely worships a vile phenomenon." Thackeray finds snobs in all walks of life. He creates images of aristocratic snobs, looking with contempt from the height of their greatness at those who subservient to them; writes about snobs from among the British military, about snobs-clerics and snobs from the City, about literary snobs. The highest rung of this long staircase is occupied by "sovereign snobs". (Haney 28)

In the essay "The Regal Snob", the image of George IV, bred under the name "Gorgias" and named ruler of the fictional kingdom of Brentford, reappears. The author proposes to put a statue of this king in a lackey and depict him behind a cut, because in this art "he knew no equal."

The Book of Snobs prepared the appearance of the novel Vanity Fair. The title of the novel is "Vanity Fair. A Novel Without a Hero" - borrowed from "The Pilgrim's Way" by John Benyan, who created an allegorical image of the bustle of everyday life. Thackeray called the bourgeois-aristocratic society of his time a "vanity fair", comparing contemporary England with a huge fair.

A long line passes before the readers bourgeois businessmen and landlords, members of Parliament and diplomats, noble lords and officials. All of them live according to the inhuman laws of the "vanity fair". The form of presentation of the material in Thackeray's novel is very peculiar. He compares the characters of his narrative to puppets, and himself to a puppeteer who sets them in motion. The puppeteer makes remarks about the puppet heroes, gives his assessments, and expresses his opinions in a number of digressions. The art of Thackeray's "puppeteer" is so great that he makes you forget about the conventionality of his chosen technique and in the game of puppets obedient to his will allows you to see the real relationships of people and manners of the XIX century.

The writer focuses on the fate of two young girls, two friends - Becky Sharp and Emilia Sadley. They both graduate from the same boarding house. This is where the novel begins: the doors of the boarding house close behind the friends, they enter life. But the fate that awaits them is different. Emilia Sadley is the daughter of wealthy parents who will take care of the arrangement of her fate, Becky Sharp is an orphan, there is no one to take care of her fate, except for herself. The moment she leaves the boarding house is the beginning of her difficult struggle for her place in life. And for this struggle, it is armed with the necessary weapons. She understands perfectly well that only money will help her to take the desired place in society and for the sake of money she is ready for anything.

In contrast to Rebecca Sharp, Emilia Sadley is a virtuous and respectable being. However, in the descriptions of the angel-like Emilia, there is an undisguised irony. Emilia is narrow-minded and insignificant, and she is no less selfish than any of the participants in the performance in the fairground.

The two-dimensionality of the novel's composition - the line of Emilia, who belongs to bourgeois circles, and the line of Rebecca, who seeks to join the aristocratic spheres - opened up the possibility for Thackeray to create a wide panorama of English life. The families of Sadley and the merchant Osborne represent bourgeois circles. Sadley's ruin causes his relative, the rich Man Osborne, to turn his back on him. Sadley enjoyed the attention and respect of others only as long as he had money.

Thrown overboard life is and deprived of the state Emilia. Only the inheritance received from her father-in-law helps her regain her place in the world of bourgeois snobs. According to the laws of the society of snobs, Emilia's husband George Osborne lives. He is vain, seeks connections with influential people and does not take into account those who are lower than him in position in society. Empty and narrow-minded, selfish and spoiled by upbringing, George lives easily and thoughtlessly, caring only about his comforts and pleasures.

In the novel, a gallery of images of aristocrats is created. These are numerous members of the Crowley family: the landowner Pitt Crowley, ignorant and rude, "who could not write competently and never sought to read anything", who knew "no worries or joys, except dirty and vulgar"; his sons and his brother Bute Crowley; the owner of a huge fortune, the elderly Miss Crowley, in anticipation of whose inheritance her relatives gnaw. In this world of titled nobility, calculation, hypocrisy, flattery are a proven weapon in the struggle for success.

Selfish interests and base motives make loved one's enemies; for the sake of money, each of the Crowleys is ready to gnaw the throat of his competitor. Among the aristocratic snobs is the Marquis of Stein. This elderly nobleman, cynical and intelligent, is a model of a corrupted representative of the ruling classes. This is a man with a dark past and thieves' habits. But he managed to acquire a title and a huge fortune, married a noble aristocrat and is considered a pillar of society. The size of marquis Stein's condition corresponds to the degree of his meanness.



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Vanity Fair is subtitled "A Novel Without a Hero." Thackeray finds it impossible to find a positive hero among the Osbornes and Crowleys. However, unlike Dickens, he does not introduce people from the people into his novel and does not contrast the self-serving world of the bourgeois of the common man. And yet he does not refuse to fully affirm the principles of moral purity and honesty as positive principles. They are carried by Captain Dobbin. In the cycle of Vanity Fair, he is the only one who maintains kindness and responsiveness, dedication and modesty. The problem of a positive hero was an insoluble difficulty for Thackeray. He sees his main task in "being able to reproduce the sense of truth as accurately as possible." He does not seek exaggeration and, unlike Dickens, avoids the use of hyperbolization. Thackeray avoids calling any of the characters of his novel a "hero", a person ideal in all respects. In his opinion, such people do not exist, although in the novels of Dickens they appeared - Nicholas Nickleby, Walter Gay and many lovely young girls. (Vanity Fair: A novel without a Hero)

Thackeray's skill as a realist and satirist is manifested in his novels of the first half of the 50s - in "The History of Pendennis" (1850) and "Newcomes" (1855). In these novels, Thackeray makes an attempt to find a positive hero in the very environment that he previously denied the very opportunity to nominate such a hero. Realistic irony and accusatory pathos are muted by conciliatory motifs. (Peters 1)

In the 50s, Thackeray published the historical novels The History of Henry Esmond (1852) and The Virginians, a Tale of the Last Century (1857-1859). To the same time belong his lectures - "The Four Georges" (The Four Georges, 1855-1856) and "The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century" (1851, publ. in 1853).

The Story of Henry Esmond is the most significant of these works. The events described in the novel take place at the very beginning of the XVIII century. The Novel is written in the form of a memoir of the main character Henry Esmond. In detail, with a lot of interesting historical and everyday details, the life story of Henry Esmond is unfolded. A childhood spent in an ancient castle in the family of Lords Of Castlewood, the university where Esmond is preparing to devote himself to a spiritual career, the prison where he is thrown for participating in a duel, the battle in the war for the Spanish succession, acquaintance with representatives of the political and literary circles of England - all these events are described with great force of realistic authenticity. The figure of Esmond is also interesting in terms of the manifestation of the features of his personality. This is a brave, selfless and charming person, capable of strong feelings and noble deeds. Deeply and psychologically convincingly developed in the novel is the line of Esmond's relationship with members of the Kestlewood family - especially with Lady Kestlewood and her daughter Beatrice. (Peters 3)

Esmond's participation in the political life of the era ends with an unsuccessful attempt to enthrone Charles Stuart. Esmond's efforts lead to nothing, his plans fail; the reason for this is largely the unworthy and frivolous behavior of the alleged heir, who was carried away by a love affair at the moment when it was necessary to act. Disappointed in everything, Esmond decides to move to America, to Virginia. Sad, pinching notes define the sound of the finale of the novel. The Virginians tells the story of Esmond's grandchildren, who were born and raised in Virginia.

However, at the same time, both Thackeray himself and his hero (Henry Esmond) are confident in the inevitability of the path along which the historical development of England is carried out. Related to this are the conciliatory motifs of his works on historical themes. It is the position of stoic reconciliation that Henry Esmond takes after many years of participation in the political struggle. Thackeray entered the history of world literature as the creator of the Vanity Fair, one of the best satirical works of English critical realism.

The development of the historical theme is carried out by Thackeray in polemical terms in relation to the official bourgeois historiography, represented by the works of Guizot and Macaulay. Thackeray's historical concept is based on his democratism. The writer criticizes the ruling parliamentary parties, the English constitutional monarchy, condemns the wars of conquest and colonialism and writes about the hostility of the policy of the ruling circles to the interests of the people.

Conclusion

The various socio-moral aspects have been thoroughly explored in the selected works of William Makepeace Thackeray and it has been observed that in each of his works, Thackeray has raised social and moral issues of the society along with the national and international political concerns. The major works of Thackeray explored in this research paper includes The Book of Snobs, Vanity Fair, The Luck of Barry Lyndon and The History of Henry Esmonds.



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