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Bakalářská práce

# The Depiction of Victorian Society in W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*

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## **Abstract**

This bachelor's thesis deals with novel *Vanity Fair* written by William M. Thackeray. Theoretical part focuses on political, economic and cultural context of the period, society in the era of prince George IV's regency, period literary conditions and introduction of the author of the work and his literary works. Practical part copes with the depiction of period society in a selected literary work and comparison with real historical facts.

Key words: William Thackeray, Vanity Fair, Victorian society, Victorian values, social class

## **Anotace**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá románem *Jarmark Marnosti* od anglického autora Williama M. Thackeraye. Teoretická část se zaměřuje na politický, ekonomický a kulturní kontext období, společnost v éře regentství krále Jiřího IV, literární poměry doby a představení autora díla a jeho literárních prací. Praktická část se zabývá vyobrazením tehdejší společnosti ve vybraném literárním díle a porovnáním s reálnými historickými fakty.

Klíčová slova: William Thackeray, Vanity Fair, viktoriánská společnost, viktoriánské hodnoty, sociální třída

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The bachelor thesis focuses on the analysis of Victorian novel *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray and his depiction of English society set in the period of known as the Regency era and the subsequent reign of associated with George IV. I have chosen this author for his accurate criticism of the society, and I especially appreciate his intention to highlight the elements of corruption and bad manners of the period society. The second reason for my choice is the author's very entertaining writing style, which includes comic elements and is a delight to read.

The theoretical part aims to present the general context of the given period in the form of an outline of the political, economic and cultural condition of England in the early 19th century, to introduce the socio-economic existing stratification of the society and to establish the literary context of the first half of the given century with a detailed focus on the selected author's work.

In the practical part of the thesis, I attempt to analyse the used narrative style of the author and the way he depicts the social realities of the era with a particular focus on the satirical conception of the entire novel. Thackeray's depiction of the society is compared with the historical facts of the period.

## 2. SETTING THE TIME FRAME

Before looking at the relevant period itself, the time range of this era needs to be defined. The obvious and easiest way to determine the time range of the Victorian era is by dating the reign of Queen Victoria that is the time span between 1837 and 1901. However, in literary studies, the label “Victorian” also includes writers born at the at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. (Poston, 1999) In case of *Vanity Fair*, the primary text of this thesis, was written by William Makepeace Thackeray, born in 1811, which makes him a Victorian writer The plot of the novel itself takes place approximately between the 1810s and 1830s. (Shillingsburg, 2001) This short period of time includes the Napoleonic wars lasting from 1803 until 1815, the final period of George III's reign including the so-called Regency period of the future king George IV that lasted until 1820, followed by Gorge IV's formal reign until 1830. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) Despite this time setting, the novel *Vanity Fair* is considered as a Victorian novel. In addition, there is a more extensive dating of the Victorian era, which dates it from the 1780s and puts its end in 1916, when the Battle of the Somme took place. (Poston, 1999)

### 2.1. Political Situation

In George III's reign in the second half of the 18th century, there were no regular established national parties as we know them today. Still, there were two historically and widely used political labels to distinguish between the main two parliamentary factions: the Tories and the Whigs, which both originated during the reign of Charles II. In 1714, when George I succeeded the throne after queen Anne, the Whigs gained the main political power as they accused the Tories of sympathizing with the old royal regime. The accusation was not entirely unjustified, so the Whigs got a political monopoly until the Reign of George III when the tables turned. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

During the whole eighteenth century England was threatened by pervasive corruption in high political positions. (Langford, 2000) The negative consequences culminated during the reign of George III, more specifically at the time of American War of Independence between the years 1775 and 1783 and the Gordon Riots of 1780. It was decided that action must be taken against this problem. (Harvie, 2000) However, fight with corruption continued even throughout the next century. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)



In June 1830 as an unwanted shock came the death of the aging King George IV. George's younger brother William, also known as Duke of Clarence and nicknamed Sailor Bill because of his Navy career, succeeded George IV as a king the same year. (Poston, 1999) The reason why William IV came to the throne is that the one and only legitimate child of George IV, Charlotte, died during childbirth in 1817 together with her baby. Concerning the order of succession, the throne went to the oldest surviving brother of George IV and that was William IV. Although William had the opportunity to save the Hanoverian dynasty and fathered four legitimate children, all of them died earlier than their father. (Longford, 2005)

Edward Augustus, who devoted his life to the army, was the fourth son of George III and the younger brother of George IV and William IV. He died as early as 1820 but he left behind the only living descendant who could assume the British crown after the death of the last male monarch of the Hanoverian dynasty, William IV. On this day, Victoria, the only daughter of Edward Augustus, became Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain at the age of eighteen. (Longford, 2005) In 1848 Queen Victoria was married to her German cousin Albert of Saxe-Coburg, who later used the title of Prince Consort. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

In 1828, a famous personality of the Napoleonic Wars, the Duke of Wellington accepted the position of Prime Minister, and he kept Tories in office. Nevertheless, during his time in office, his worst qualities came to the surface. He had a dictatorial personality and expected his colleagues to be the same. When the Whigs came to power after almost 50 years of Tory rule, the political conditions in Great Britain were finally convenient enough to adopt several necessary reforms. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

The 1830s are well known as an era of institutional improvements such as the Reform Act of 1832, the Factory Act of 1833, the New Poor Law Act of 1834, and finally the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 and many others. The positive influence of these reforms must not be underestimated as they contributed to a significant modification of the Victorian climate. (Gilmour, 1993)

Nevertheless, it is the Reform Act of 1832, introduced by the Whig politician Lord John Russell, which has earned the attention of many historians as the first major step towards universal suffrage. The reform substantially increased the number of then-only

male voters, from less than half a million to just over 800,000 voters. For comparison, the total male population at that time was around 6 million. Less than a million inhabitants now had the opportunity to vote for Members of Parliament. (Poston, 1999) Perhaps even more significant was the reallocation of seats: fifty-six boroughs with fewer than 2000 inhabitants lost both of their members, while thirty pockets lost one member each. They included many so called “rotten boroughs”, which are criticized in *Vanity Fair*. The seats were redistributed among the counties and new industrial towns. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) Although the reform of 1832 was smaller in scope and impact than its subsequent reforms of 1867 and 1884, it is recognised as the foundation for future changes in voter enfranchisement. (Poston, 1999)

The controversial Corn Laws issued in 1815 became untenable. The laws limited the quantity of grain that could be imported and imposed higher tariffs on these imports, which, as argued by their opponents, caused England's people to suffer from excessive prices for decades. (Harrison, 1999) In 1839, the nationwide grouping known as the Anti-Corn League led by Richard Cobden was settled. The Anti-Corn League's arguments resonated across the country. The claim was that the repeal of this act would make food cheaper. Following that, it would increase the income of the workers and thus lead to a better quality of life for everyone. What is more, Ireland was hit by a disaster in 1845 when the staple food of Ireland's rural population was destroyed by a late blight, a disease that attacked and destroyed potato crops. This period is today known as the Great Irish Famine, a time when one million people died due to starvation and other illnesses. (Campbell Bartoletti, 2001) Sir Robert Peel, prime minister at the time, was powerless under this array of arguments. Furthermore, even in the summer of 1845, the weather did not improve, and excessive rainfall made more than half of that year's potato crop inedible. Peel decided to act quickly – the Corn Law Repeal Act was passed by the House of Commons in June 1846, largely owing to Wellington's influence and the support of many Whigs. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

The politics of the second half of the century was marked by two greats: Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone, who are also known as political rivals of that time. By 1868, they were party leaders, but they operated as main political figures long before that. Both came from completely different social backgrounds. (Blake, 2011)

Disraeli was born into a prominent Jewish family and converted to Christianity. William Gladstone, on the other hand, was the son of a successful corn merchant and shipping magnate from Scotland. At the same time, Gladstone received a quality education at Eton College and Oxford. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) Disraeli, on the other hand, attended minor colleges and never attended university. (Blake, 2011)

Benjamin Disraeli was a significant member of the Conservative party, whose early career goes back to 1834 when Sir Robert Peel was appointed by the King to form his first Tory government and used a new name for his party - 'the Conservatives.' (Richards & Hunt, 1983) In 1846, Peel was forced to step down because of the Corn Laws being repealed and the Conservative party was divided into two factions called Peelites and Protectionists. Later, Disraeli saw it as an opportunity and came to the forefront of one of those parts the Protectionists. (Blake, 2011) In the spring of 1868, Prime Minister Edward Stanley resigned due to ill health, and Disraeli reached his life goal and became Prime Minister for the first time. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

William Gladstone started his political career as a Tory. (Gilmour, 1993) However, in 1859 he joined the Liberals which he supported as chancellor with several significant budgets. The new election was called in late 1868 and Gladstone, who campaigned on a platform for the abolition of the Church of England in Ireland, won and replaced Disraeli as Prime Minister. This is how Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone fought each other in high politics when both took turns at the post of prime minister several times. They differed sharply in their views on politics too. While Disraeli mostly did not care about domestic issues and was more concerned with foreign strategy combined with proud nationalism, Gladstone worked with a wider global perspective and did not hesitate to sacrifice some interests of his own country. (Blake, 2011)

Benjamin Disraeli's main achievements include his part in the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) They also include numerous reforms in the areas of health, housing, the selling of food and medications, industry conditions, and agricultural tenancy during the period of his second mandate. In 1876, the Royal Titles Act was passed which made Queen Victoria the official Empress of India. Disraeli's government was responsible for the acquisition of stock in the Suez Canal Company and

initiatives to prevent Russia from taking up Constantinople. For a while, this delayed the war conflict in Europe. (Blake, 2011)

Among the significant milestones of Gladstone's political activity, we can list the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Ireland passed in 1869. (Blake, 2011) Among other achievements of the Gladstone government, it is worth noting the changes in the field of entry into the army with the help of open competitive examination and the adjustment of the judicial system, for example the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1871. Finally, one of the most crucial reforms that is associated with William Gladstone is the Ballot Act, issued in 1872 and aimed at preventing electoral bribery. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

## **2.2. Economic Conditions**

If we look at the economic situation during the Victorian period, we find that, thanks to the technological advancements of the industrial revolution as well as the reforms of the first half of the 19th century, extensive progress and modernization took place. (Gilmour, 1993) Britain experienced the first economic crisis of the century after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1816 when overall prices rapidly fell. This was followed by the standard post-war demobilization of soldiers and sailors. Consequently, there was no need in producing war supplies such as guns or uniforms, which led to massive unemployment. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) On the contrary, unlike the rest of Europe, England was spared the large-scale revolutions of 1848. England was fortunate enough to not have to deal with any internal political revolution during the rather harsh period of 1848 and had suitable conditions for gradually raising the standard of living of its inhabitants. (Harrison, 1999)

The population alone doubled between 1801 and 1851 to 18 million inhabitants and that number almost doubled again by 1901 when it reached a total of 32,5 million inhabitants. (Gilmour, 1993) In the second half of the 19th century, the British economy did extremely well, which is confirmed by the figures. During that time, England experienced doubling of national income, a growth in per capita income by a third of the value, and finally a rise in exports, which recorded a growth of 229%. (Harrison, 1999)

The so-called the long 19th century meant a flourishing for Great Britain in many different branches, including science and culture. Unsurprisingly, the scientific-technological miracle in the form of the industrial revolution played a key role in that. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) The extensive development of the cities, the application of steam navigation and greater use of railways along with the introduction of the electric telegraph began to reform and modernize the velocity of communication and the overall pace of common life at the beginning of Victoria's reign, particularly during the 1830s and 1840s. (Gilmour, 1993) In the mid-century, thanks to advances in technology and improved industrial productivity, there was an unprecedented period of growth. Construction gained rapid speed and a great number of bridges, railroads, canals, factories, centres of government administration, warehouses, churches, and middle-class houses in the countryside were build. (Harrison, 1999)

In terms of agriculture, according to a recent study, British cultivation was at the beginning of the 19th century two and a half times more productive than the French one, which itself was much more productive than the rest of Europe. (Harvie, 2000) At the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, agriculture was still able to maintain its primacy within the country's economy, but there were persistent problems, mainly due to continuous decrease in workforce. In consequence of socio-economic changes, the majority of the population is had started to move to and live primarily in cities rather than in the countryside. Later, the 1870s saw the start of the 'great depression', which was caused by a series of poor harvests, as well as the opening of North American prairies and faster and cheaper transportation from and to foreign wool-growing regions. (Matthew, 2000)

In the growing industry, three sectors were dominant - coal, iron, and textiles. Coal and iron industries accumulated a considerable amount of tangible property and became the 'foundation stone' for the future country's development. Nevertheless, it was the textile industry that held a leading position in terms of export statistics and remained there throughout the first half of the 19th century. Wool and flax grown chiefly in Ireland and Scotland, were the key materials for textile manufacturing. (Harvie, 2000) Generally speaking, British economy was unusually broad-based compared to

other countries, covering diverse activities and both large numbers and great varieties of products. (Matthew, 2000)

An important event capturing the economic and industrial expansion of the country was the Great Exhibition of 1851. It mainly took place at the instigation of Prince Albert as a showcase of progress and prosperity based on peaceful cooperation between nations. In Hyde Park, the Crystal Palace visitors could see collections of raw materials, artwork, and machinery from all over the world (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

Trade and distribution characterized the British economy and provided the central impulses for industrialization. In the 1860s, economic policymakers finally came to enforce the free market and major protective tariffs were removed. This element became an inseparable part of British trading and celebrated unprecedented success among people of different social status, despite the fact that the abolition of tariff barriers had almost no impact on the economy. (Matthew, 2000)

Towards the end of the century, British trade had to deal with an unexpected crisis caused by insufficient demand for their goods both domestically and globally. The consequence was a rapid drop in prices from the 1870s. Trade conditions improved after 1900, and employment remained relatively stable. However, the country had to cope with negative consequences until the beginning of the First World War with the population struggling to survive on small wages. (Richards & Hunt, 1983)

A substantial part of English economics of the nineteenth century lied in the British empire and overseas trade. A transatlantic trade began to flourish in 1760s when imperial civil servants and ministries created a plan regarding this issue. The plan included an importation of fish and from areas of Quebec and colonies in today's United States should have established a reliable market for goods produced on the British Isles. These intentions did not fulfil after the American War of Independence. (Langford, 2000)

An irreplaceable position in the plan was held the territory of West Indies. (Langford, 2000) This area was administrated by the East India Company founded in 1599. The company cooperated with the English Crown since 1784 when prime minister William Pitt introduced the India Act. By 1819 the British had taken direct or indirect control of all of India save Punjab and Sind. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) India was important in terms of exotic goods import and as a center of slave trade. Successful development of

overseas trade, however, had a darker side. The East India Company employed many men who managed to acquire quite large fortunes in India by sometimes dubious means. They were so-called nabobs. Generally speaking, the management of the Indian colonies was affected by extensive corruption. (Langford, 2000)

Britain as a country had a huge advantage because of its industrial superiority. Thanks to that, the country managed to stand on a winning of the Napoleonic wars and expand its Empire to the to the dimensions it had in the 19th century. (Richards & Hunt, 1983) Her after-war gains were of colossal character. Britain gained dominance over the Dutch East Indies via Singapore, expanded her influence over India, seized control of South Africa from the Dutch, occupied Ceylon between 1795 and 1816, claimed Egypt, and informally established a trading dominion over a former South American and Central American Spanish colony. (Langford, 2000)

### **2.3. Victorian Culture**

In respect of Victorian science and culture, the Great Exhibition of 1851 needs to be mentioned again since it sparked a sudden interest in science. During the Victorian era, new scientific breakthroughs and innovations impacted all areas of life. People could read about them in newspapers and books, see them in museums and exhibitions, and even in the theatre. The most interesting topics of the time included, for example, Darwin's theory of evolution or the first underwater cable across the English Channel. (Lightman, 2010) Darwin caused a general stir with his works *Origin of Species* (1859), where derived the bulk of his evidence for evolution from animals and plants and *The Descent of the Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, which deals with proof that humans descended from "lower forms". (Hughes, 1999)

The technological also progress has its unmistakable place in the Victorian era. The new wave of industrialization of the second half of the 19th century pushed existing technologies to a completely new level, whether for example in the areas of steam, electricity, chemistry or internal combustion engines. New technologies affected Victorian daily life overall. The efficiency of their production or improved communication between regions resulted in the drop in prices for goods. New technologies left their mark even in the fields of culture. Thanks to the steam press,

books and newspapers became much more accessible to the public. The technological progress of the Victorian era significantly influenced future events in Europe and partly also because of its scientific discoveries and inventions, such as, the telephone, the automobile, or the already mentioned electric light. (Daly, 2010)

The popularity of theatre was one of the signs of the rising wealth of the population. According to Newey (2010), the 'origins' of Victorian theatre date back to the late Romantic era. The culture of theatres in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was mainly dominated by Drury Lane, Covent Garden, a small network of Theatres Royal, and leading circuits. In 1843 this stable and well-established theatrical system broke down, because of the Theatre Regulation Act when theatres like Drury Lane and Covent Garden lost their monopoly and all theatres were given the right to show the 'legitimate' plays: farces, tragedies, and comedies. (Booth, 1991)

The theatre of the time provided its audience with texts and performances that reacted rapidly to the great social and cultural shifts of the nineteenth century. Among the frequently used theatrical subjects and themes of the period are the increasingly common urban life, the gradual disappearance of barriers between social classes, the equalization of the status of the sexes, and, last but not least, solutions to the social problems of the time. Melodrama is considered one of the greatest dramatic innovations of the nineteenth century. It was especially popular among ordinary everyday working people, as they were the main subject of the genre. It explored their daily life, whether it was rural or urban, and the stories were often based on the life of a hard-working family that is economically and morally threatened. Furthermore, also typical for melodrama were the endings explaining plotlines and highlighting the extraordinary bravery of the main character. Also, the so-called sensation drama introduced novelties because this genre presented sophisticated female heroines who find themselves in ethically dubious circumstances. Other prominent theatre genres were, for example, farce, comedy, burletta or comic opera. The most memorable playwrights of the period are Douglas Jerrold, Clement Scott, Arthur Wing Pinero, and George Bernard Shaw. (Newey, 2010) Farces and pantomimes were already played during the Regency period. They create an encore after the main drama, thus the evening in the theatre often lasted even five hours. (Murray, 1999)



Victorian audiences were keen on music, but they were short of institutions that would patronize this type of art. In addition, there was also a lack of patrons from among the aristocracy who would provide their finances. (Gilmour, 1993) What is more, they desperately lacked the musical talent that would match the well-known European greats of this art. On the other hand, despite these shortcomings, the British nation showed signs of being one of the most welcoming environments for continental artists. (Sollie, 2010) Victorians were known for adoring mostly German composers such as Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Wagner. (Gilmour, 1993) Regarding the lack of musical talent, an obvious change in the situation occurred at the turn of the century, when prominent names such as Arthur Sullivan, Hubert Parry, Charles Villiers-Stanford, and the great English composer Edward Elgar, appeared on the domestic scene. (Sollie, 2010)

Apart from classical music, there were different branches of Victorian music. At this time in Europe, the so-called Folk Song Revival was already underway. (Scott, 2008) However, England did not take part until the second half of the 19th century. This revival can be seen as a shift in which traditional music becomes more closely associated with emerging capitalist methods of popular music marketing to the public. The Folk Song Society was not established in England until 1898, because it was religion that in nineteenth-century England' replaced nationalism in music. The Church produced a large deal of hymns during the Victorian era. Along with church construction and liturgical reform, it was a component of the reconstruction of Anglican spiritual life. (Gilmour, 1993)

The British had been known as a literary nation—not a visual one—since the Renaissance. Thus, it may seem surprising that visual art suddenly flourished in Victorian Britain. Period paintings were typical for their narrative element. (Prettejohn, 2010) Among the widely used topics are again issues of everyday life or, on the contrary, depicting scenes from national history. The main feature that connects all paintings is catching a moment of drama. (Gilmour, 1993) A significant change also took place in the support of artists. The newly established institutions such as the National Gallery founded in 1824 and the South Kensington Museum established in 1852 and followed by municipal art galleries spreading across Britain implemented a new function by supporting Victorian artists and hiring them as specialized advisors. (Prettejohn, 2010)

The most significant movement, which characterizes British Victorian art was the so-called Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. It was a young man's movement. At the time of the formation of the original Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, it consisted of John Everett Millais, William Hollman Hunt, and Dante Gabriell Rossetti. The most remarkable quality of these artists dwelt in the concentration which they devoted to the topics of their paintings as well as in their use of colour and detailing techniques. In general, their paintings had strong literary and historical connections. Nonetheless, most Victorian paintings avoided social issues as well as the stereotypical social life outside the walls of the home focusing instead on family life rituals and events. (Gilmour, 1993)

The characteristic element of Victorian architecture is its constant connection with the past. Hence, their artistic expression mostly derived from Gothic or Neoclassicism. The fact that Victorian architecture is inextricably linked to the Gothic is evidenced by the example of the reconstruction of the Palace of Westminster partly destroyed by fire in October 1834. Parliamentary Commission launched the competition by inviting architectural proposals in the Gothic or Elizabethan styles. The winning design, submitted by a young architect called Charles Barry, unmistakably linked Gothic architecture with England's political glory. (Poston, 1999) In general, Victorian architecture is known for a great variety of styles used. (Gilmour, 1993)

The historicizing tendencies also looked back to the Italian style associated with Renaissance classicism and, the High Perpendicular Gothic, rooted in Tudor Pre-Reformation period. This style was widely used to build new Anglican churches during the Victorian period. High Victorian Gothic of the 1850s was characterized by carvings on windows, doors, and capitals and different structures of stone. In the 1870s, in response to the High Gothic style, the Vernacular Revival was born that concentrated on enlivening provincial life, while the aforementioned High Gothic dominated civic and other secular buildings. The textile artist William Morris established the Arts and Crafts Movement, which focused on natural simplicity and tried to deviate from the magnificent ornamentation characteristic of High Gothic. William Morris himself is known for various home accessories of different shapes and colours. (Gilmour, 1993)

### **3. REGENCY AND EARLY VICTORIAN SOCIETY**

The Regency period that I include within the greater time span of the Victorian era, falls roughly between the years 1788 and 1830. This period was crucially influenced by two pan-European conflicts: the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Specifically, the Napoleonic Wars and the battle at Waterloo in 1815 required many men to go to war, who subsequently died on the battlefield. Many of the stories of those who survived the battle at Waterloo become famous. Additionally, society celebrated the protagonists of the stories as heroes (Murray, 1999) Britain's final victory in the wars brought not only a defeat of Napoleonic oppression but also a strengthening of national identity and pride. (Spiers, 2010)

It can be marked as an era full of contradiction. On the one hand, the Regency period is perceived as an age full of diverse art and high-class aspirations, display of civilised manners and sophistication. On the other hand, people and society were consumed by hidden evils such as gluttony, gambling, and excessive promiscuity, of which large numbers of illegitimate children were produced as a result. (Murray, 1999)

#### **3.1. Victorian Social Classes**

If we have to single out one thing that has characterized British society for centuries, it is most decidedly the social class system. Victorian society was defined through its social structure, which determined people's lives. It can be divided into three major categories. The most populous part of Victorian society was the so-called working class which formed approximately 70% of people living in Great Britain. Above the working class was the middle class and the best social status was enjoyed by members of the upper class. (Damon, 2006)

The aspiring middle class that we find in 'Vanity Fair' went through an unprecedented development in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, the middle class gained a cohesive identity. Mainly entrepreneurs started to gain strength. They were men who often experienced humble beginnings, nevertheless, they managed to fight their position in society with the help of determination and dynamic behaviour. These men dismissed aristocratic values which was unacceptable for traditional the upper classes. (King & Raynor, 1981) At the same time, the new rich bourgeoisie longed

for a comparable political power, high social positions and comfortable lifestyle as shown in *Vanity Fair*.

The middle class was the branch of society that was influenced the most by the national industrial development as it created new occupations that allowed individuals from the middle class to improve their livelihood. This social class abounded in by far the widest diversity of all and had its internal division into the three subcategories. These were the lower-middle-class (e.g. teachers, police officers), the center of the middle class (e.g. store owners, military officers) and the last and highest was upper-middle-class (e.g. successful industrialists and merchants, bankers, university professors, lawyers, architects). (Damon, 2006)

The highest social layer was the so-called upper class, which consisted of the landed gentry and aristocracy. The main difference between those two groups is in the way in which they gained their property. While the gentry usually came to their fortune through their own initiative, the members of the aristocracy were fortunate enough to be born into a very wealthy family whose fortunes they subsequently inherited. Paradoxically, it was the people from this least numerous class who had initially occupied all the seats in the parliament and made decisions on practically all state affairs. With the changes in social structures, individuals from the middle class increasingly began to compete with the upper class in the political field. (Damon, 2006)

During the Regency period, certain forms of adoration for upper-class life persisted. Middle-class people made an effort to get in closer contact with people from higher levels and improve their own social status. Snobbery and admiration for the upper classes were deeply rooted in society. (Murray, 1999) During the final quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the English aristocracy was gradually losing its luster, even though they still considered themselves elite, and for some time continued to be models for upper middle-class aspirations. Nevertheless, society, in general, began to have different priorities and turn away from aristocracy towards meritocracy. (Yass, 1974)

The English working class comprised people who occupied the lowest-paid jobs, such as agricultural labourers, miners and factory workers. Their wages were extremely low, especially considering the high risk of injury or death. Children were also regularly forced to work in the same conditions. Apart from these occupations, many inhabitants

of the over-populated cities lived the lives of working poor. These included street vendors and small craftsmen offering services such as cleaning chimneys or sharpening knives. Girls, when they were lucky enough, could make a living as domestic servants. (Damon, 2006)

### **3.2. Social Life During Regency Period and post-Regency Period**

The structural changes in the society, led to a significant transformation of social elites. Members of higher social classes had a chance to meet the so-called Beau or Dandy. This was a new kind of man, usually of middle-class origin, who gradually managed to become the leader of social life. They were known for their eccentricity, passion for stylish clothes, gourmet meals, and gambling. They had a special flair for social dexterity, and they did everything to impress the people around them. An interesting example was Beau Brummell for whom late arrivals and insulting remarks were commonplace. Moreover, Brummel's example shows that during the Regency Era, the importance of family origin was becoming very slowly less and less fundamental. Brummell himself was the grandson of a mere valet, and he still came to hold a high position in society. (Murray, 1999)

At this time, people from higher social classes loved social events of all kinds. It was common to mix with a community of the same social status or higher if the individual attempted to infiltrate themselves into higher circles. Members of the middle class could choose from several options for socializing. Some preferred formal dinners overflowing with luxury and unique cuisine in combination with sophisticated tables. Entertaining shows held after dinner, which included family members and guests in the form of small-scale theatre productions, were very fashionable. (Damon, 2006)

The most interesting social events were always held during the so-called "season" that took from three to six months between March and June each year and was considered the peak of social life during the 19th century. (Murray, 1999) This period was overfilled with dance balls, concerts, sports events, and different kinds of parties. The dance balls were often a decisive social event for those who wanted to be noticed by prominent and important people, whether it was ambitions related to improving one's social status or looking for a suitable match. (Damon, 2006)

Social life in the Regency and early Victorian period included visiting various clubs during evenings. This was often a privilege of only the cream of society, like the upper-mentioned beaux, and an invitation card was a must. These clubs served primarily as places of entertainment, people went there to have fun, improve their art of conversation, dance country dances, Scottish reels, quadrilles, and waltzes, and enjoy alcohol. An example was the so-called Almack's Club run by women, which was not an exception. (Murray, 1999)

London was the cultural center of Victorian England, and it was specifically the part West End, which represented the imaginary scene of period social life. (Damon, 2006) The British capital city looked very differently at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries compared to the present. The focal point of upper-class Londoners was the district called Mayfair, located near Buckingham Palace and filled with splendid mansions. (Murray, 1999) The most prominent addresses were to be found in Grosvenor, Berkeley, and Belgrave Squares. Park Lane was an essential and much-frequented street because of its location between Mayfair and Hyde Park. (Damon, 2006) On the other hand, the Bloomsbury district housed successful entrepreneurs of the upper-middle class. (Murray, 1999)

However, Mayfair did not only bear an accommodation function but also served as a place for everyday socializing. People from the upper classes spent their time walking Mayfair's streets to show off luxurious clothes or to buy new ones. It is worth noting that during the Regency period, Londoners started to be carried away by seasonal fashion trends and some of them were extremely willing to spend large sums of money. (Murray, 1999)

Another busy district at the turn of the century was St. James's, even though it was focused mainly on gentlemen's clientele as it housed the most famous gentlemen's clubs where gentlemen rested from their family lives. These clubs gained popularity due to their specific nature which included conversations about various topics such as politics or contemporary trends, business dinner and finally, the most characteristically masculine activity of the time – gambling. It is crucial to emphasize that gentlemen's clubs were visited daily and inevitably belonged to everyday life. Gentlemen usually had valid memberships in several clubs at the same time and changed them as needed. The

main core of gentlemen's social life consisted of the three most visited clubs of the Regency period: White's, Brook's, and Boodle's. (Murray, 1999)

Gambling had one significant drawback – the risk of losing a fortune was an everyday matter and even though it is possible that some individuals just saw it as an entertaining activity to unwind, in most cases it caused a very serious addiction in which many families lost their property. Furthermore, there was one speciality regarding gambling debts - they had to be paid immediately, so if someone lost more money than he had in their bank account, the solution was sometimes either fleeing the country or taking one's own life. The most played games were far, hazard, and whist. (Murray, 1999) Whist later morphed into the now well-known game of Bridge. (Damon, 2006)

When people started to be tired of long streets with imposing houses, they headed straight to the London parks. Londoners loved spending their free time in the green parts of their city whether it was all-day picnics or parties on the boats. In London, locals could choose from several parks with different characters. The first group were the so-called "tea gardens", known for their peaceful atmosphere perfect for enjoying afternoon tea. On the contrary, a completely different spirit was associated with the most frequented Vauxhall Park acknowledged for spectacles and parties. Finally, we must not forget Hyde Park, a popular venue for parades of passing carriages of people from the upper classes. (Murray, 1999)

### **3.3. The Status of Women in Victorian England**

Taking a closer look at the social position of women in the outlined period, we find that the nineteenth century was a time when men still held leading position both at home and in society. (Damon, 2006) Women were perceived as human beings whose main territory was limited only to the home environment. Their activities were associated with children raising or taking care of the household. Religion was also considered a sticking point in the life of a Victorian woman. What is more, women were expected to stand by their husbands and support them in their beliefs and efforts, regardless of their own interests. (Steinbach, 2004)

Marriage meant a significant milestone in the life of every woman. The loss of independence through marriage was foreshadowed during courtship where the woman

was expected to remain completely passive and not take any initiative herself. (Murray, 1999) Needless to say, the sexual side of marriage was a strict taboo in Victorian society in general, and women were only taught about it to fulfil their marital obligations of childbearing. (Damon, 2006)

In a typical middle-class family, the man or the father was the prime and only head of the household and his wife constituted the subordinate part of their family, as she could not even control her own finances and was not entitled to have her own income. Similarly, her pre-wedding possessions naturally went to her husband after marriage. All financial issues were controlled by her husband. (Damon, 2006) As women could not find a regular occupation, they tried to improve the economic situation of their family differently. If the family owned a business, the woman could moderately participate in its running, for example by organizing business dinners or doing some easy administrative work. In general, any form of hard, manual work was not considered for woman as appropriate. (Steinbach, 2004)

However, not all women lived in a marriage bond – single or widowed women had to find a way how to make their living, even though the social conventions were not on their side until the second half of the nineteenth century. There was an enormous lack of occupations for single women. Among those limited options women could choose between working as a governess in an upper-class family, becoming a teacher or earning money as a dressmaker. (Steinbach, 2004) For widowed women, one chance of obtaining some financial securities was being included in their late husband's will, which was not a matter of course. (Morris, 2005)

Aristocratic women had a completely different life. Even though there were some similarities with middle-class women such as running the household and, on a smaller scale, also raising children, there was one major difference – financial independence. Aristocratic women had relative control over their economic matters even if they had a husband. Unmarried upper-class women could enjoy their wealth in the form of the inheritance they received. However, they rarely ever inherited the family lands or could use the title. If there was a male heir in the family, both belonged to him. (Steinbach, 2004)



Outside the bounds of the usual public conventions was a category of women that enjoyed a special social status, namely Victorian mistresses. It was not unusual for a married man to regularly visit his mistress, however the paradox is that a clever mistress often had a better social position than a married housewife, as she was paid by wealthy men after using her services. What is more, if a mistress became officially connected with a man, she was not rejected with contempt, as might have been expected, but she was treated actually with certain appreciation. (Murray, 1999)

In terms of women's education, it was practically impossible for a girl to obtain the same level of formal education as boys did at the beginning of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was one of the other disadvantages that women had to deal with in contrast to men. The situation began to improve significantly throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century; however, it is crucial to note that education in general was immutably determined by social class affiliation. Before 1850, it was common for girls from the elite class to be educated mainly in their home environment. Parents usually paid governesses or male tutors to educate their children. The main pillar of girls' education was not obtaining academic or practical knowledge, but the art of social self-representation and good manners. (Steinbach, 2004)

Children from middle-class families also started their schooling at home, but in their case, usually, the mother had a large share in their educational training. She would teach them the basics of religion and reading. More affluent families could also afford to invest their money in governesses as a sign of particular social status. There were also boarding schools copying the patterns provided by education institutions of the upper classes. Only the middle-class households that were wealthy enough, such as those of successful merchants or professionals, managed to finance this sort of school for their daughters. (Steinbach, 2004)

#### **4. VICTORIAN LITERATURE**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century is considered one of the most significant periods in terms of literature. As mentioned before, the beginning of Victorian literature is dated from before the reign of Queen Victoria together with the end of the Romantic era, roughly the 1820s, and ended with the start of the First World War and the rise of the

Modernists. (Shattock, 2010) The Victorian period itself can be described as a scene of essential improvements and reforms that enabled what is known as literary mass production. Changes took place in the economic field (constant industrial development, available production materials, price reduction of printing matter), social field (better working conditions allowing leisure time, spreading literacy among all classes), and at the final, in the technological field (new printing and type-setting mechanizations, speeding up production and distribution of printed matters). Thanks to those factors, books and periodicals were more accessible to people than ever before. (Guy, 2010)

#### **4.1. Journalism**

The Victorian era was very rich in periodicals. For illustration, in 1860 Victorians could choose from 31 journals. During another 30 years, the situation changed rapidly, and the number of daily papers increased and reached the line of 150 papers across the whole country. (Arata, 1999) According to Rubery (2010) most Victorians were readers of periodicals rather than books. Characteristic for the flourishing of journals, was the abolition of paper duties in the 1850s. (Rubery, 2010) Another reason why daily printing matter was so available was the rail transport. The railways enabled quicker and cheaper distribution of periodicals among the people. (Hammond, 2010)

There were several types of periodicals on its publishing frequency. Quarterly periodicals included, for example, *Quarterly Review*, *Westminster Review* and *Edinburg Review*. However, in the second half of the century, quarterlies started to lose their influence and were gradually replaced by monthlies (eg. *Contemporary Review*, *Nineteenth Century*) and weeklies (eg. *Saturday Review*, *Spectator*), even though they were intended for less-intellectual audiences. In terms of daily papers, *The Times* magazine is worth mentioning for its sales equalled twice that of its competition. A great example of a penny press is the *Sunday papers* which can be defined as the very first paper read by a mass number of readers. *Another* popular penny paper was *The Daily Telegraph*. (Rubery, 2010)

A significant feature of British journalism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was almost an absence of boundaries between period literature and journalism. An example is one of the best-known Victorian authors Charles Dickens. He began his literary career writing

anonymously for a morning paper known as *The British Press*. Consequently, *The Monthly Magazine* published his first literary work in 1833. In 1837 the literary-focused periodical called *Bentley's Miscellany*, at that time edited by Dickens himself, began to serialize his future novel *Oliver Twist*. Charles Dickens was not the only writer who started publishing his prose through journals. Others include Elizabeth Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, or Arthur Conan Doyle. (Rubery, 2010)

#### **4.2. Outline of Victorian Literature**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century can be considered not only as an era of periodicals but also a time of extensive development of book trade. For comparison, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 580 new books were printed per year, by the year 1900, this number increased more than tenfold to 6,000 titles per year. (Davis, 2004) Together with an increase in published books, the necessary modifications in terms of authorship took place. A big advantage was that the authors could now foresee the profitability of their work more clearly. Thanks to the introduction of consistent and transparent accounting practices. The establishment of international copyright agreements, mainly with the United States, is considered as a major step forward. (Guy, 2010)

It can be said that authors of literary works acquired only limited freedom in terms of what books they would write. Just like today, it was all about demand and potential earnings. A convenient example is the period poetry which was seen as unprofitable. The problem did not occur in sales decline, but simply, fiction was sold more. For this reason, authors, such as Thomas Hardy, were forced to reorient from poetry to fiction. Poetry itself experienced another period of flourishing at the end of the century. A specific type of novel, distinctive for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the so-called three-volume novel. (Guy, 2010)

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period when the personality of the author became an important part of the book advertising campaign. Charles Dickens is considered one of the first authors, who developed into a media celebrity of his time. Simply put, people started to buy books also because of interest in the author himself. Author also started to use pseudonyms relatively often. It can be understood as one of the marketing ways

to challenge gender prejudices concerning artistic creativity. It was common for women writers to use male pseudonyms, but also vice versa. (Guy, 2010)

The Victorian literary era was also the scene of change in the field of reading itself between 1830 and 1914. A bigger distribution of books and periodicals together with the growth of literacy meant an increase in readership. However, it was a very slow process. From the 1830s up to 1865, books were still too expensive, and the majority of lower-class people could not afford them. In general, illiteracy was decreasing, nevertheless, lack of education was a current problem throughout the 19th century. The first big reform related to mandatory primary education saw the light of the day no earlier than 1870 in the form of a series of Education Acts. Elementary level schooling became free twenty years later. (Hammond, 2010)

A significant innovation in the field of readership were circulating libraries. The first version of this borrowing system using railways was introduced in the 1860s. People could simply borrow a book at one station and return it at another. The library of Charles Mudie is worth mentioning as it was one of the first cheap circulating libraries, where readers could borrow up to twelve books per year for 21 shillings. During the 1870s, the reform of public libraries of 1850 finally began to be put into practice. Towns had the power to charge ratepayers for the building of a free library. Book loans were then available to practically all readers in the town. The libraries were mostly used by middle-class people. The introduction of public libraries also divided literature into popular and unpopular, in other words, literature that was often borrowed and which was not. (Hammond, 2010)

As the century progressed, the price of books slowly decreased. Consequently, writing works were more and more available which caused literature to be divided into two categories. According to Hammond (2010), “there began to be a marked difference in its types, and in deepening contemporary perceptions of the difference between ‘literary’ and ‘popular’”. Even though some authors could be considered of high quality according to the publishers at that time, the readers could have an opposite opinion. Thus, the great effort of writers, publishers, and newly agents associated with the advertising of books was marked at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Popular authors according to the readers included Marie Corelli and Hall Caine. Other widely read

authors, characteristic mainly for the pre-war period, were adventure novelists Rider Haggard or Rudyard Kipling, Elinor Glyn as a representative of racy literature, Florence Barclay, associated with Evangelical literary works, and John Galsworthy and his best-selling *The Forsyte Saga*. (Hammond, 2010)

### **4.3. Major Victorian Genres**

One of the integral parts of Victorian literature is poetry. The period poetry was known for its two fundamental novelties – dramatic monologue and innovation and use of longer forms. Those two features distinguish Victorian poetry from that written during the era of Romanticism. Especially the dramatic monologue itself represented a unique poetic reform, widely used from the 1830s up to the end of the century. (Slinn, 1999) Dramatic monologue can be described as the single speech of the main poem's character who introduces his own feelings of personal nature. (Davis, 2004) Many poets, such as Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Algernon Charles Swinburne, or Augusta Webster, applied it to their work. (Slinn, 1999) Among other characteristics of Victorian poetry are themes associated with the cult of death, the depiction of the human soul, and the aforementioned internal feelings. (Davis, 2004)

However, it was fiction that experienced a heyday at the expense of poetry. According to the understanding of the time, prose was seen as something new, while poetry, evoked past times. Nevertheless, according to some Victorian contemporaries, prose was perceived as inferior to poetry. Moreover, fiction in its early days was published in the form of serialized articles in newspapers rather than as books. (Davis, 2004)

Victorian novels and fiction in general are distinctive for their portrayals of conflict between the public (outer) and private (inner) life (Schor, 1999) The main effort was to depict the real life of English people without any tinsel, which is characteristic for Victorian realism. (Davis, 2004). Until realism, people from the lower social classes used to be depicted as ludicrous figures without proper education. Nevertheless, since the Victorian times, they became not only the main figures but also likable characters. Realism connected high literature with the everyday life of poor people. In addition, Victorian literature also saw the rise of authors of working-class origins (e.g. Charles

Kingsley) and the growth of new elite female authors (e.g. George Elliot, the Brontës sisters, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barret Browning). (Davis, 2004) Victorian fiction is focuses not only on separate stories and destinies of its characters, but primarily on the story as a whole. Another feature that distinguishes Victorian novels from the Romantic predecessors is a shift in terms of the story setting, which moved back to the capital city – London. (Schor, 1999)

Victorian fiction offers a wide range of different genres. (Davis, 2004) According to Schor (1999): The novels of the period are highly marked by social indicators: the novel of high society, or “silver fork” novel; the novels of lower-class and criminal life, or “Newgate” novel; the building social-realist novel, focusing on factory and industrial-urban life; the novels of middle-class or “domestic” realism”. *Pelham* (1828) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton or *Vivian Grey* (1827) written by future prime minister Benjamin Disraeli represent examples of typical silver-fork novels. On the contrary, a novel named *Paul Clifford* (1830) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great* (1943) by novelist Henry Fielding, or *Things as They Are* (1794) written by William Godwin are classic illustrations of the Newgate novels. Domestic fiction associated with softer family sentiments is represented by Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s successful novel called *The Caxtons* (1849) or *Wives and Daughters* (1866) by Elizabeth Gaskell. Apart from those, historical novel (e.g. *Hypatia* from 1853 by Charles Kingsley) and genres featuring magic and mysticism, which Bulwer-Lytton called the metaphysical novel (e.g. Bulwer’s *Zanoni* from 1842) have their place in Victorian literature (Davis, 2004)

Charles Dickens is a specific case in Victorian literature. Several genres often intertwine and alternate in his works. There are special pauses whose main purpose is to separate individual genre-differing units from each other. For example, in the novel *Nicholas Thuckleby* (1839), some parts seem optimistic and romantic, only to be interrupted by a melancholy passage and vice versa. (Davis, 2004)

One of the significant innovations in the field of Victorian fiction were also the sensation novels introduced through merging short stories and detective fiction. The most defining features of sensation fiction include absorbing and gripping plots, Victorian period settings together with Gothic adventure elements. Fitting examples of the sensation genre are the stories featuring the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes

written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. (Hammond, 2010) Fairy tales and fantastic stories were published, for example, by John Ruskin (*The King of the Golden River*, 1850) and George MacDonald, who perceived fairy tales as a form of escape from the real and ugly world into a new, prettier dimension. (Davis, 2004)

The 19<sup>th</sup> century also encountered a blooming non-fiction, such as life writing. (Booth, 2010) As previously mentioned, a general interest in well-known people was growing in Victorian Britain. Consequently, life stories became very popular among readers. This concerned, for instance, diaries, reminiscences, writers' letters, or autobiographies. (Guy, 2010) However, it was biographies and autobiographies that were the most desirable. An interesting example of autobiography is John Ruskin's *Praeterita* (1885-9). *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) by Elizabeth Gaskell can be mentioned as an example of Victorian biography. Charlotte Brontë herself wrote a personal confession but disguised it in the form of fiction in her work *Jane Eyre* (1847). (Booth, 2010) Except for life writing, the origins of modern literary criticism were laid in the Victorian period as well. (Latané, 1999)

#### **4.4. Satire in Period Literature**

The key milestone in satirical literature is the 1820s when the previous style of satire was renewed with a new one. (Bowen, 2012) In general, satire of the 18th century was focused on moral corruption of the society and unfair situation from the point of view of political supremacy. Its main goal was to mock the social and political conditions of the period. Authors, such as Alexander Pope or Jonathan Swift are recognized as the representatives of this kind of satire. (Szwec, 2011). James Gillray or Thomas Rowlandson belonged to the prominent satirists and cartoonists of the period. The transition to the new era of mockery was smooth, and some authors, such as Dickens or Thackeray, were partly inspired by the satire of the last century. However, both belong to the later period of satire. (Bowen, 2012)

Victorian satire expanded its scope to other subjects and pointed to problems in the social field, which concerned both the class system and the dignified position of women in society, and it also rebelled against invasive imperialism. In terms of periodicals, *Punch* magazine was important for this topic. Major writers include William

Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll or Anthony Trollope. (O’Cinneide, 2013)

Modern Victorian satire was supplemented by another branch, the so-called radical writing. A representative of this satirical section was, for example, Robert Seymour who drew attention to the vast differences between the highest and the lowest social layers with his illustrations. This was the main problem that representatives of the industry tried to draw attention to. (Ledger, 2010)

Even though comic and humour were important features of Victorian literature and culture, it did not reach the same strength as in 18th century. There was a period of decline around the middle of the century as it did not meet the requirements for serious literature and was considered excessively rude. Nevertheless, satirical literature gained in popularity again in the 1880s as a consequence of the arrival of the new generation of authors, such as Tom Hardy, George Gissing or Oscar Wilde. (O’Cinneide, 2013)

## **5. WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY**

William Makepeace Thackeray was an English novelist, social critic and satirist. He is classified as a Victorian author of the turn of the middle of the century. (Dames, 2009) He was also an illustrator, and his drawings adorned both magazines and his own books. (Shillingsburg, 2001)

### **5.1. Life**

William Makepeace Thackeray was born to English parents Richmond Thackeray and Anne Becher in Indian Calcutta in 1811. Richmond Thackeray, William’s father, died four years after William’s birth and Anne found a new acquaintance in an army captain. Thus, William was soon sent to England, in order to gain education. (Dames, 2009) Thackeray received a very high-quality education by the standards of the time as he attended the Charterhouse schools, which he finished in 1828. (Shillingsburg, 2001) Lately, he tried to study the prestigious Cambridge, more specifically, Trinity College (Fletcher, 2003) Nonetheless, William gave up on his studies after two years. (Shillingsburg, 2001)



After his partial academic failure to acquire a degree, Thackeray traveled to the European Continent where he spent some time, especially in Weimar, Germany, where he met Johann Wolfgang Goethe. (Fletcher, 2003) He went to Germany to spend time gambling to get money for the debts he had to pay. Thackeray returned to England in July 1831, shortly before his 20th birthday. (Shillingsburg, 2001)

Even though Richmond Thackeray had left a generous amount of 17,000 pounds for his son, most of the money was lost due to the problems in Indian banks. Consequently, the loss of the fortune pushed Thackeray towards the journalistic profession, as he needed to find the means to support himself. (Fletcher, 2003) Firstly, he bought the newspaper called *The National Standard*, but it stopped all its activity in 1834. At the same time, he said goodbye to the idea of becoming an illustrator of comic drawings, as his work never reached a professional level. (Shillingsburg, 2001)

During Thackeray's depressing summer of 1835 filled with gambling, William met a girl whose name was Isabella Shave. He fell in love with her, and they got married in 1836. They had three daughters, namely Anne Isabelle (b. 1837), Jane (b. 1838), and Harriet Mirian (b. 1840), but Jane died 8 months after her birth. (Shillingsburg, 2001) It was a happy marriage at the beginning, although they often struggled with financial shortage. William worked as a freelance journalist at the time and spent most of his time working, as he wanted to support his family. However, Thackeray's frequent absences left Isabella feeling isolated and depressed. Eventually, she developed suicidal tendencies. After the onset of mental illness, Isabella spent the rest of her life in sanatoriums both in France and England. (Fletcher, 2003)

Thackeray worked as a free-lance journalist approximately for 10 years writing for periodicals such as *Fraser's Magazine*, *The Morning Chronicle*, and *Punch*. He wrote mostly literary criticism, art criticism, topical articles, and fiction. Under the auspices of *Fraser's Magazine*, Thackeray published, for example, the memoirs called *The Yellowplush Papers* (1837-38) and his first novel *Catherine* (1839-40). On the contrary, the satirical *Punch* magazine published his *The Book of Snobs* (1846-47). (Fletcher, 2003) It is also a well-known fact that during this period of his life Thackeray published exclusively under pseudonyms such as George Savage Fitzboodle, Michael Angelo Titmarsh or Major Cahagan. (Shillingburg, 2001)

A fundamental turning point in Thackeray's life occurred in 1847 and 1848 in connection with his greatest work, a social satire called *Vanity Fair*, thanks to which he gained recognition in literary circles. Such an achievement also enabled Thackeray to write reviews for the prestigious *Edinburg Review*. This success was followed by *Pendennis* in 1849-50 and *The History of Henry Esmond* in 1852, which was Thackeray's very first non-serialized book, published in three volumes. (Fletcher, 2003)

Thackeray also undertook a lecture tour to the United States right after the release of *Henry Esmond*. He spent five months there. He made two more lecture tours between 1855 and 1856. (Shillingsburg, 2001) Novels *the Newcomes* (1853-55) and *The Virginians* 1857-59 were published after Thackeray's returns from America. In 1860, He became an editor of the newly established *The Cornhill* magazine. (Fletcher, 2003)

William Makepeace Thackeray built a successful literary career during his lifetime and consequently, he managed to accumulate for his daughters the inheritance he had lost earlier. He died on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1863 due to a ruptured blood vessel in the brain. (Fletcher, 2003)

## **5.2. Works and Style of Writing**

The essential theme of William Makepeace Thackeray's literary works is the contemporary society, which he dealt with from many angles and very believably. He mainly paid attention to the higher social classes and their relationship with the lower classes, focusing on snobbery, social climbing, morality and human nature. He also wrote about the poor classes, following the example of Charles Dickens, but they appear in a greater in his less significant works. (Tillotson, 1954)

As for the characters in his novels, he managed to portray them in depth. In terms of the narrator, he usually used a third-person narrator whilst the first person is used when the narrator speaks about himself. (Tillotson, 1954) In *Vanity Fair*, we have a narrative voice, which according to critics, represents Thackeray himself. (Shillingsburg, 2001)

Thackeray's texts have specific unity as certain patterns, including characters, are repeatedly found in his novels. An example is Lord Steyne, who appears in multiple novels. He first appears in the *Vanity Fair* and later in *Pendennis* and *The Newcomes*.

Also the plots have similar geographical settings. Places like London, Brighton, Brussels, Baden-Baden, or 'Pumpnickel' are repeated very often. Thus, in certain ways, Thackeray's work feels like a whole. (Tillotson, 1954)

Thackeray's novels are known for their extensiveness in terms of length. His novels are rich in detail, which comes from Thackeray's vast imagination. As an author, he devoted himself to each plot line and each character with great care. Nevertheless, at the same time, he placed great emphasis on the continuity, simplicity, and flow of the story. A lightness of writing is another of Thackeray's literary characteristics. He was also able to write about heavy subjects with feelings and insight. (Tillotson, 1954)

Satire is an important building block of several of Thackeray's works. His satirical writing is associated mainly with his work for *Punch*. Initially, his mockery was delicate and not very offensive, however, with *The Book of Snobs* (1846-47), Thackeray's satire became sharp and little sympathetic towards society as the book focuses on depicting different kinds of contemporary snobs. Other examples of Thackeray's satirical works include the novels *Pendennis*, where Thackeray criticizes conditions in the publishing industry or *The Newcomers*. (Palmeri, 2004)

However, his most famous satirical work is the novel *Vanity Fair*. What is particularly characteristic of Thackeray is that instead of pointing out social problems by means of realistic criticism, he used satire and mockery. However, he did not target his criticism to the characters of the novel, but to the society. Writing his characters in *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray emphasized their inner feelings, but does not expose their personal plans. Thackeray's narrative style is also specific in its ability to lead the reader to conclusions that were predetermined by the author himself. Together, these features distinguish Thackeray from other authors of the time. (Erden, 2020)

## **6. VANITY FAIR**

*Vanity Fair* was first published as a serialized novel in the satiric *Punch* magazine, with its first part arriving in January 1947 and the serial continuing for the next 19 months. (Shillingsburg, 2001) According to Altinel (1989, p. 119):" Thackeray uses the serial form to create the illusion that he is merely reporting life as it occurs." Thanks to this gradual way of publication, Thackeray achieved that the readers had a strong

perception of the development of the characters in the novel. (Altinel, 1989) The novel is set roughly 20 to 40 years before the actual publication of the book and mentions true historical events and people connected with them. (Shillingsburg, 2001)

*Vanity Fair* was also Thackeray's very first work published under his own name and became a broad success both in terms of reviews from literary critics and a little later also from a commercial point of view. The proceeds from the sale of the novel earned Thackeray £1,200 plus a share of the profits (Shillingsburg, 2001)

*Vanity Fair* can be described as a Victorian social novel with a satirical tone, whose main focus is on snobbery growing through the whole society and marrying for profiteering reasons. (Fletcher, 2003) In fact, the novel explores various disturbing aspects of the Regency society through a very ambitious and snobbish female protagonist in a very realistic and detailed way. Generally speaking, Thackeray has all his characters surrounded by snobbery and examines how it affects them. Thanks to a great character diversity they all respond in different ways. In the work, Thackeray also deals with the subject of individual isolation.

*Vanity Fair* is not only a complex work from a social point of view but also from a historiographical point of view, as it takes place during and in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. This book therefore excels in presenting a view of individuals both from a narrower social scale and at the same time from a general historiographical one, which is unique. (Dames, 2009)

The novel itself carries the subtitle "*A novel without a hero*". There are several possible explanations for why Thackeray chose subtitle. (Altinel, 1986) According to Altinel (1986), one of the possible answers may be the fact that none of the main characters abound in heroic qualities in the true sense of the word, even though it is a fact that a character with not entirely flattering characteristics can technically be considered the hero of the novel likewise. The second option according to Altinel (1986) is that the characters of the novel are not presented as typical heroes in fiction but, as written in the introduction of the novel, mere puppets.

*Vanity Fair* was great success at the time of first publication, as mentioned before, even though Thackeray was a controversial figure for many contemporary critics who accused him of moral hypocrisy. Although Thackeray is the author of many novels,

*Vanity Fair* is the only work that has been read in large numbers even today. (Dames, 2009)

## **7. ANALYSIS OF THE DEPICTION OF VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN ‘VANITY FAIR’ AND ITS COMPARISON TO HISTORICAL REALITY**

### **7.1. Title and Subtitle**

The novel bears title *Vanity Fair* which represents the whole social situation in this literary work. Most people and characters appearing in the novel are either vain or vanity affects their life so, the title of the novel suggests that the depicted society is characterized by immorality, hypocrisy and other ailments. Specifically, the word ‘fair’ refers to a kind of display or market place, where readers can walk and view the vanity of the people depicted in the novel and society in general. In the following excerpt, the narrative voice states that the story contains both humorous and kind moments.

A man with a reflective turn of mind, walking through an exhibition of this sort, will not be oppressed, I take it, by his own or other people's hilarity. An episode of humour or kindness touches and amuses him here and there. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 11)

As mentioned above, the subtitle “Novel without a hero” carried several meanings. One of them is based on the fact that there is no character endowed with heroic attributes in the entire society described in the novel. None of the characters depicted represents person of outspoken hero potential, who would, for example, save the society from bad morals and injustice. The subtitle may also refer to the novel’s main character - Becky Sharp. She has many opposite qualities opposite to which a hero in the traditional sense of the word would have. Finally, it may reflect the fact that none of the novel characters has a superior role in the plot that is, none of them is given more space than the others.

### **7. 2. Narrator and His View of Vanity Fair**

At the very beginning of the novel, the reader finds a short introduction by the author serving as a preview of the world of *Vanity Fair*. The author speaks of himself as a “*Manager of the Performance*”, which refers to the fact that he is the one who has the fates and lives of the characters in the story in his hands. Importantly, the author blends

with the narrator and they immediately establish a specific, critical approach to the depicted world, nicknamed *Vanity Fair*.

As the Manager of the Performance sits before the curtain on the boards and looks into the Fair, a feeling of profound melancholy comes over him in his survey of the bustling place. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 11)

Words such as "curtain", "performance" and "puppets", used in the introduction called "Before the Curtain" evoke a broader concept of a theatre play. The whole novel can therefore be understood as a theatre play whose task is to show the corrupted morality of society. The readers thus represent an audience watching the play the narrator is presenting. The author invents fictional characters, which he places in the social conditions, events and problems of the Regency and post-Regency period, which he subsequently criticizes.

The narrator does not play tricks with the characters of the novel, or with the puppets as he calls them. Rather, he observes how they behave in various situations. Sometimes, he uses very rude language when talking about them and he does not hesitate to point out their weaknesses, mistakes or not-so-flattering qualities. He often describes the unfortunate fates of his characters with irony, as he is fully aware that many of them are to blame for their predicaments. This is all part of the satirical and humorous nature of the novel. Another characteristic feature of the narrative voice is direct communication with the readers as shown in the following excerpt:

"Oh, ignorant young creatures! How little do you know the effect of rack punch! What is the rack in the punch, at night, to the rack in the head of a morning: To this truth I can vouch as a man? There is no headache like that caused by Vauxhall punch. Through the lapse of twenty years, I can remember the consequence of two glasses!" (Thackeray, 2018, p. 65)

The passage demonstrates the familiar tone he uses to share personal experiences and views with his readers, whom he addresses as "friends and companions". (Thackeray, 2018, p. 195) It creates a feeling as if the narrator himself lived in the world of *Vanity Fair*, or rather, as if he was a person watching the place from within. In some passages of the novel, he suggests that he knows some characters personally, since he talks about them in a knowing tone.

I have heard Amelia say that the first day on which she saw her father lift up his head after the failure was on the receipt of the packet of forks and spoons with the young stockbrokers' love. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 176)

Amelia is introduced as someone who is a win to have as a friend, someone worth knowing, therefore it seems the narrative voice sympathizes with her from his observational point of view. In the excerpt, he also separates her from the villains that appear in the novel and suggests that Amelia is a positive heroine, so he offers one of the possible points of view:

But as we are to see a great deal of Amelia, 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. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 16)

Nevertheless, according to Erden (2020), the fact that the narrator is not a character in the center of the action creates a distance between the characters and the readers themselves, which prevents the readers from sympathizing with the characters. Thus, readers still have room to form their own opinion about the protagonists.

In some parts, the narrator appears to be omniscient and makes himself an outside force that knows everything that happens in the story. Sometimes, he describes what the characters are thinking in their minds. On one occasion, he makes a claim to a kind of copyright and financial reward for allegedly disclosing, exclusive information about specific characters in the novel. This passage also refers to the fact that the very first edition was published in periodicals.

The novelist, it has been said before, knows everything, and as I am in a situation to be able to tell the public how Crawley and his wife lived without any income, may I entreat the public newspapers which are in the habit of extracting portions of the various periodical works now published not to reprint the following exact narrative and calculations—of which I ought, as the discoverer (and at some expense, too), to have the benefit? (Thackeray, 2018, p. 379)

In some passages of the story, conversely, the narrator claims that he was not present at the described events. And only shares his assumptions and beliefs.

My belief is, that one day, when Miss Sharp had gone to pass the forenoon with her dear friend Miss Amelia Sedley in Russell Square, a lady very like her might have been seen entering a church in the City, in company with a gentleman with dyed mustachios, who, after a quarter of an hour's interval, escorted her back to the hackney-coach in waiting, and that this was a quiet bridal party. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 163)

He places himself in the position of an unreliable narrator when he says that he knows some things only from hearsay or second hand. The narrative voice sometimes

reveals the plot ahead in advance or rather hides hints in the text about what will happen later in the story. Readers can imagine or speculate about what will happen in the next chapters. In terms of reading experience, it helps to create expectations about future fates of particular characters, and it also serves as a tool for better understanding of the plot development. In following passage, for example, the narrator indicates a change in the future and reveals that there will be a closer relationship between the two characters:

A time came when she knew him better, and changed her notions regarding him; but that was distant as yet. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 250)

At the very end of the novel, a passage can be found where the narrator compares the situation of the world of Vanity Fair with the real world. He also challenges the readers and asks if they see themselves very different from the characters in the story. Referring to his novel characters that continue to be unhappy despite the “happy” ending, he implies that neither his characters nor people in the real world will ever be satisfied. Such as Amelia Sedley, who is at the end of the story happily married to William Dobbin and has daughter with him, nevertheless she is sorrowful as Dobbin loves his daughter more than her, according to her point of view.

Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?—come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 719)

### **7.3. Prestige and Social Classes**

As mentioned earlier, the basic building block of British society at the time when the story takes place is the system of social classes. The entire novel is interwoven with examples that reflect the social structure and dynamic of the period. For instance, right at the beginning of the story, Amelia Sedley together with Becky leaves the boarding school for girls called Chiswick Mall. Amelia, the daughter of a rich businessman who can afford to pay expensive school fees, leaves as a successful student with a bright future ahead of her. For a woman, this means a marriage of reasonably high status leading to a comfortable life and a decent position on the social ladder.

Becky, who belongs to the lower-middle class, was only an assistant in the school, who was paid with a roof over her head and food. Therefore, from the beginning of the



novel, there is a deep gap between two women caused by their different social positions. Although Becky does not leave Chiswick Mall as a successful graduate, even though she has achieved the same knowledge as Amelia. In certain fields, she may be even smarter than Amelia. However, since she is an orphan from a middle-lower class, she does not have nearly as many options as her friend Amelia. As a single young woman of lover status, she must find employment, in her case most conveniently a job as a governess in a high-ranking family.

However, not all characters of the novel are typical members of the class system. The character of Sir Pitt Crawley can be considered rather unconventional, in terms of his behaviour, which certainly does not correspond to his social position. He acts, behaves and even looks like a person who belongs to a much lower social class. This is how Becky describes him in her letter to Amelia:

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. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 79)

This description does not correspond with the typical picture or expectations of how a nobleman should appear and behave. He cooks his own dinner whereas, it was common for the nobility to have servants who would cook the food for them. His public image is undermined by his appearance, which fails to distinguish him from people coming from lower classes. Nevertheless, there is a logical explanation for Sir Pitt's appearance and, partly, manners. His estate, called Queen's Crawley, is heavily in debt, largely due to Sir Walpole Crawley, one of the Sir Pitt's Crawley ancestors, and a heavy fine the latter he had been charged for peculation, drunkenness and overly generous hospitality. The birth name of Sir Pitt's ancestor, Walpole, refers to the first British Prime Minister, Robert Walpole. His name is connected with political corruption the first half of the 18th century during a period called Robinocracy. (Langford, 2000)

Sir Pitt Crawley is known to be an extreme scrounger, looking after every halfpenny as if it would cost him a whole living, while he is completely ignorant of economics. It is paradoxical that his interest in court intrigues costs him much more money than if he had invested it in farming his estate which, however, he knows nothing about. Pitt is also a member of parliament privilege acquired by birth right. However, his

political career does not interest him much, and he holds the position because of the money it brings. The narrator emphasizes the contradictions associated with Sir Pitt.

Vanity Fair-Vanity Fair! Here was a man, who could not spell, and did not care to read – who had habits and a cunning of a boor; whose aim in life was pettifogging; who never had a taste, or emotion, or enjoyment, but what was sordid and foul: and yet he had rank, and honours, and power, somehow; and was dignitary of the land, and a pillar of a state (Thackeray, 2018, p. 93)

The narrator criticizes the society structured around hereditary privileges where a person slumbers in the hands of power, even if his abilities and nature do not correspond to it at all. This is caused by the fact that each nobleman, who was also the head of the family, not only held power over his entire estate in his hands, but also inherited access to top decision-making positions in the whole country. This is associated with the period corruption. The estate Queen's Crawley is described as a so-called rotten borough. The corruption lies in the fact that even though very few people lived in such constituencies, they still had their representative in parliament. The share of political power was therefore very unequal. (Harvie, 2000)

Queen's Crawley was no longer so populous a place as it had been in Queen Bess's time — nay, was come down to that condition of borough which used to be denominated rotten. (Thackeray, 2018, p.71)

One of the driving forces in the world in *Vanity fair* is the desire for high social status or the unrelenting ambition to become the cream of society and benefit from the privileges associated with it. Becky the prime example of social climber in the novel. She is an outsider in society to some extent for different reasons. She is an orphan of-lower-class origin who needs to find a way to survive. But she is also made an outsider by her ambition to belong to the highest levels of society. She tries at all costs to get into higher society and is willing to do absolutely anything to do so. This causes many people, and mostly women, not to hide their disdain in her presence.

However, Becky is far from the only one in the story who likes the idea of infiltrating the cream of society. The society in the novel is depicted as one where contacts with members of the highest classes are considered very prestigious. In one part of the story, Amelia finds herself among the aristocracy at one of the formal dinners, but she does not feel comfortable among them, as they ignore her and treat her rudely. However, her parents are extremely happy for her:

But though Amelia told all these stories, and wrote home regarding her guests' rudeness, and her own discomfiture, old Mrs. Sedley was mightily pleased nevertheless, and talked about Emmy's friend, the Countess of Bareacres, with such assiduity that the news how his son was entertaining peers and peeresses actually came to Osborne's ears in the City. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 290)

In the excerpt, Mrs. Sedley is not at all bothered by the fact that the aristocratic guest were rude to her daughter, but rather she is happy that her daughter mixes with the upper circles of society. By the conventions of the depicted society, it is an honour to be proud of. The nobility, however, do not treat George Osborne, who pays for the dinner, nor his wife as their equals, and only take advantage of their hospitality. The highest social classes are described in the novel as people who use lower-class people for their own benefit and, above all, are not ashamed of it at all. However, this is not a bad moral associated only with the upper classes. As will be shown later, in the world of *Vanity Fair* there are many people who use others for their own benefit.

"Well, my dear Blanche," said the mother, "I suppose, as Papa wants to go, we must go; but we needn't know them in England, you know." And so, determined to cut their new acquaintance in Bond Street, these great folks went to eat his dinner at Brussel. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 189)

This testifies to the fact that there are established double standards and pretence in the highest classes of society. The excerpt shows that members of aristocracy have no problem attending the dinner that George hosts, as they are currently in Brussels, where no one knows them. However, if it were the same situation in London, where the society knows them, they would not want to have anything to do with George and his wife there, as they do not see them as equals.

In general, Amelia is initially perceived positively by the society, certainly partly due to her kind nature but also due to the relatively high status of her father and thus her family at the time. Nevertheless, after her family goes bankrupt, the society of *Vanity Fair* governed only by social prestige, treats them very bluntly. If a family deteriorates in their social position, it loses the contacts with and favour of people on their previous social level, even if they were friends once. As the narrator puts it, the Sedley family is simply "out of fashion" after the bankruptcy. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 176)

A great example of this corrupted morality is the Osborne family, which are in close contact with the Sedley's as they live on the same square and Mr Osborne and Mr

Sedley were business partners in the past. Mr. Osborne forbids the contact with Sedley's family after they go bankrupt, because they are no longer considered as a prominent family despite the fact that it was John Sedley, who helped the Osbornes to acquire their current prestigious socioeconomic status. According to the social conventions, their reputation would be damaged by thy contact with a bankrupted family. This is well explained in the conversation between Mr Osborne ad his son George about marriage:

“But to return to the other business about Amelia? Why shouldn't you marry higher than a stockbroker's daughter, George – that's what I want to know?”

It's a family business, sir, 'said George, cracking filberts. 'You and Mr Sedley made the match a hundred years ago.'

'I don't deny it; but people's position alters, sir. I don't deny that Sedley made my fortune, or rather put me in the way of acquiring, by my own talents and genius, that proud position which, I may say, I occupy in the tallow trade and the City of London. I've shown my gratitude to Sedley; and he's tired of it late, sir, as my cheque-book can show. George! I can tell you in confidence I don't like the looks of Mr Sedley's affairs.”(Thackeray, 2018, p. 133)

The arranged marriage of his son to Amelia Sedley is cancelled when her father goes bankrupt, even though the wedding was a part of their long-term agreement. Mr. Osborne is firmly behind this cruel decision and opinion: “I'll have no lame duck's daughter in my family”. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 133) In this case, all promises go aside in the Osborne family, as the high social status of the family is considered more important in than good neighbourly, friendly or business relations and solidarity. Consequently, Mr Osborne negotiates for George a more suitable match - a richer young woman with a higher social status.

His son, George Osborne, also sees the world from a similar perspective. From the beginning of the story, he does not have a very good opinion of the Sedley's, and the thought that his future wife's brother should marry a poor governess, when Becky tries to seduce Joseph, drives him to action and he disrupts the impending marriage. The Osborne family judges the quality of people by their social standing and prestige rather than character.

George belongs to the upper-middle class, as his father is successful entrepreneur. This can be seen from his demeanour, as in some passages he behaves like a spoiled son from a rich family. He doesn't have a very good understanding of the

value of money and buys everything he wants without thinking. He is very self-centred and elevates himself above the lower social classes.

Marquis Steyne, who belongs to the high aristocracy, stands the highest among the main characters on the imaginary social ladder. However, he is also the most corrupt of the characters in the novel. He indulges in love affairs, for which his house is also famous. He offers it to his friends and acquaintances meet their one-night companions there. The narrator explains the situation:

Had he not been so great a Prince very few possibly would have visited him; but in *Vanity Fair* the sins of very great personages are looked at indulgently. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 493)

This is one of the main ideas of the entire novel that the narrator wants to draw attention to. Throughout the story, people from the highest social classes are among the most corrupt and evil in the society, but since they hold social or political power, everything is tolerated, and people even look up to them and try to move as close as possible to them. It is the essence of snobbery which permeates the depicted society and affects all levels of people's lives in the novel.

In one of the chapters, Miss Crawley wants to settle the bill for her nephew James. However, she is outraged by the bill, not because of its amount, but because her nephew got drunk with a type of alcohol that mainly people of lower status drink - gin. If James had resorted to more expensive alcohol, she would not see his behaviour as a problem.

Had he drunk a dozen bottles of claret, the old spinster could have pardoned him. Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan drank claret. Gentlemen drank claret. But eighteen glasses of gin consumed among boxers in an ignoble pot-house—it was an odious crime and not to be pardoned readily. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 361)

The novel also shows how the desire for high status and prestige changes the character's personalities. An example is the young Pitt Crawley, who at the beginning of the story appears to be a man with moral values and religious beliefs. Pitt is fortunate in life, because he receives a lot of money from his aunt and marries a good, honest and beautiful woman. Also, he is the elder son and inherits his father's estate and seat in parliament. His contacts with Marquis Steyne and other high-ranking people, however, completely changes him. First, he flirts with Becky behind his wife's back and at the end

of his storyline, he also attends inappropriate meetings occurring at the Marquis's house. His dealings with the aristocracy essentially corrupted him morally.

#### **7.4. Money and Property**

The depicted society portrayed through Osborne and Crawley families is characterized by the pursuit of money and fortune. This is closely related to the previous chapter since money is the gateway to higher society. The main interest most of the Crawley's lies in the person of Miss Matilda Crawley, an older sister of Sir Pitt Crawley and a wealthy widow living in London, whom the family sees an available source of finance.

Since Miss Crawley is a member of the aristocracy, she has the benefit of a certain financial independence that would remain with her even if she were to marry. Although she is older than her brother Pitt, she does not use a noble title because legally, it always belongs to the male heir. (Steinbech, 2004)

The chapters in which Miss Crawley is mentioned are often filled with strategies invented by the family members to secure her inheritance for themselves, and Becky joins in happily. Specifically, Becky is trying to get money by arranging a marriage of convenience for herself. First, she unsuccessfully tries to tempt into marriage a wealthy Indian nabob in the form of Joseph Sedley, and then, after winning the favour of the rich Miss Crawley, Becky marries her nephew Rawdon Crawley in the hope that she will get access to Miss Crawley's inheritance. Rawdon Crawley is Miss Crawley's favourite, whose gambling debts she has been paying who and is, at first, a hot candidate to inherit his aunt's entire fortune.

The assumption that money rules the world is one of the main motifs of the novel. A character who represents this adage the best is Marquis Steyne. He is very wealthy and powerful at the same time. He can do whatever he wants, and it is tolerated by society.

Another example is certain Miss Swartz, a very wealthy mulatto and heiress from St. Kitt's, who is proposed by Mr. Osborne as a surrogate fiancé for his son George after Amelia's family's downfall. George does not like the colour of her skin and rejects the marriage. The main point is, however, that without her wealth, a woman of colour would

be hardly accepted in high society and considered a suitable match for a member of the white British upper classes. As long as she had enough money, however, she was welcome. Even the headmistress of the boarding school, Miss Pinkerton, took advantage of her rich inheritance, as Miss Swartz was the only one who pays double tuition. Due to her wealth, she is seen as a good match for George.

Amelia, on the other hand, became an unsuitable match for George due to her family's loss of fortune and social status. George explains why his sisters stopped liking Amelia, adding that:

"They would have loved you if you had had two hundred thousand pounds,"  
(Thackeray, 2018, p. 210)

It is interesting that the novel depicts two marriages in which the husband loses a large fortune. Rawdon Crawley loses his aunt's potential inheritance by marrying an art teacher's daughter. The same case concerns George Osborne, who is disinherited because he married a poor girl. They have both married below their social level and paid for it by losing a steady income and carefree life. It follows that high-ranking families in the world of *Vanity Fair* will not tolerate someone in their family marrying below their level, and that wealth and social status are closely connected the family distance themselves from the person and he becomes an outsider.

The examples of Mr Osborne, and other wealthy characters in the novel, shows the habits and conventions of higher society, which expects a certain carelessness about money. While raising his son, and later his grandson, Old Mr Osborne, however careful about his family wealth, teaches both boys vanity and encourages them to squander money. Consequently, George eventually gets into habit of going to his father or his friend Dobbin to beg them for more money whenever he runs out of funds. Mr. Osborne rarely objects and always refills his son's wallet without George having to earn it in any way. The consequence is that neither George nor Osborne's grandson know the value of money at all. The Osborne family are not members of the established upper class, which is restricted to the landed aristocracy. Mr Osborne, a rich businessman, is well aware that it is only his fortune that can enable his son and grandson to mix with the upper classes:

"Thank you, sir," says George, making his point at once. "One can't live with these great folks for nothing; and my purse, sir, look at it"; and he held up a little token which had been netted by Amelia, and contained the very last of Dobbin's pound notes.

"You shan't want, sir. The British merchant's son shan't want, sir. My guineas are as good as theirs, George, my boy; and I don't grudge 'em. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 133)

Money and the desire for wealth are much more important to the depicted society than their own family relationships. When Sir Pitt's Crawley's younger brother Bute Crawley and his wife find out that instead of twenty thousand pounds, they will inherit only fifteen thousand and that his nephew Pitt will inherit the majority, they are able to argue even though they belong to the same family.

In general, for the Crawley family, money is more important than family relationships. Pitt Crawley, son of Sir Pitt Crawley inherits the whole estate from his father and also the fortune of his aunt Miss Crawley. However, he refuses to help his younger brother Rawdon's family. Pitt Crawley understands that his brother does not have enough funds, but he does not want to share his inheritance with him. In addition, he would not hesitate to have an affair with his brother's wife.

Another example of morale corruption of society and financial abuse of less fortunate and trusting people can be found in the case of Becky and her husband Rawdon when they move into the house of Mr Raggles. He is a former servant of Miss Crawley, and he considers himself as Crawley's family friend. He is a good man, but Becky and Rawdon take advantage of his kindness. Officially, Mr Raggles rents his house to them. In truth, however, all their bills, which are sometimes in the form of lavish dinners and therefore completely unnecessarily high, are paid by Mr Raggles himself, and he sometimes also assists them as a servant during those occasions. He thus loses his life savings, which he could invest in his family, so the Crawley's literally exploit him and rob him of his hard-earned money.

I wonder how many families are driven to roguery and to ruin by great practitioners in Crawley's way?—how many great noblemen rob their petty tradesmen, condescend to swindle their poor retainers out of wretched little sums and cheat for a few shillings? When we read that a noble nobleman has left for the Continent, or that another noble nobleman has an execution in his house—and that one or other owes six or seven millions, the defeat seems glorious even, and we respect the victim in the vastness of his ruin. But who pities a poor barber who can't get his money for powdering the footmen's heads; or a poor carpenter who has ruined himself by fixing up ornaments and pavilions for my lady's dejeuner; or the poor devil of a tailor whom the steward



patronizes, and who has pledged all he is worth, and more, to get the liveries ready, which my lord has done him the honour to bespeak? (Thackeray, 218, p. 388)

What is interesting is the fact that the narrator mentions it as something that is quite common practice. According to his commentary, it is the order of that the rich rob the poor through trickery and deception day in the world of *Vanity Fair*. He points to a deep gap between the lower and higher society. He demonstrates it on the example of loss of bigger amount of money. When a wealthy person loses a large amount of money, he receives pity from all sides of society, even though he could have impoverished the people who serve him by unfair practices. In general, the narrator is upset that the unfair practices of higher-ranking people and the harm they cause to ordinary people are overlooked by society.

Gambling is portrayed as a common way of losing, or gaining, money. Rawdon Crawley, the younger son of Sir Pitt Crawley, is a well-known gambler. First, he plays cards and other venturous games only for his own pleasure. Nevertheless, after secretly marrying Becky, Rawdon earns a living in this manner. However, debts come with his gambling. Rawdon's debts are first paid by his wealthy aunt Miss Crawley. However, his marriage to Becky antagonizes his aunt and consequently, his debts are not subsidized in any way. Ends up in debtors' prison several times. Rawdon and Becky represent people who are permanently in debt and yet manage to live in relative luxury.

He lived comfortably on credit. He had a large capital of debts, which laid out judiciously, will carry a man along for many years, and on which certain men about town contrive to live a hundred times better than even men ready money can do. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 178)

The narrator dwell admirably on this rarity and he is fascinated by the fact, that quite a lot of families live in luxury, although their financial income does not correspond to this at all. At this moment, he uses the pronoun "I", when he talks about the problem, but he indicates that such practice is so common that he is speaking for everyone who reads the novel:

"I" is here introduced to personify the world in general—the Mrs. Grundy of each respected reader's private circle—every one of whom can point to some families of his acquaintance who live nobody knows how. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 378)

The narrative voice uses irony to highlight the admirable art to be able to live literally from nothing as an ability that cannot be learned immediately and takes time

and practice. In the following way, the narrator depicts Rawdon Crawley and his gambling, which brings him and his wife such unprecedented profits:

To use a cue at billiards well is like using a pencil, or a German flute, or a small-sword—you cannot master any one of these implements at first, and it is only by repeated study and perseverance, joined to a natural taste, that a man can excel in the handling of either. Now Crawley, from being only a brilliant amateur, had grown to be a consummate master of billiards. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 380)

Although the narrator is surprised and infuriated by the practices of some families and upper classes, he does not offer any solutions, and what is more, he is not even interested in finding any. According to him, the world would risk complete destruction, houses would fall into disrepair, people would walk around dressed in rags and there would be no tea parties or lavish celebrations if the existing order of things changed. In short, everything that we know and enjoy would be gone, so that things such as abuse of power or capitalizing on someone else are just minor imperfections.

If his cook is good we forgive him and go and dine with him, and we expect he will do the same by us. Thus trade flourishes—civilization advances; peace is kept; new dresses are wanted for new assemblies every week; and the last year's vintage of Lafitte will remunerate the honest proprietor who reared it. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 530)

After the events of the Napoleonic Wars, when Amelia suddenly becomes a widow, she must deal with finances in a completely different way. At that time, it was very difficult for widows and unmarried women to find employment. (Steinbech, 2004) One possibility was the job of a governess, previously adopted by Becky. Amelia also decides to offer her services as a tutor as well. She is unsuccessful, though.

She writes out a little card in her neatest hand, and after long thought and labour of composition, in which the public is informed that "A Lady who has some time at her disposal, wishes to undertake the education of some little girls, whom she would instruct in English, in French, in Geography, in History, and in Music. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 514)

## **7.5. Social life in *Vanity Fair***

A rich social life can be described as another crucial feature of the society depicted in Thackeray's novel. The text mentions several famous public places in London where people spent their free time and socialized during the Regency period. The main part of the story takes place in London, for example in Grosvenor Square and Russell Square, which are situated in the Bloomsbury area, where the majority of successful businessmen lived. In *Vanity Fair*, it is where the Sedley and Osborn families

reside. (Murray, 1999) Miss Crawley, on the other hand, resides on Park Lane, a street where the cream of society resided during the Regency. (Damon, 2006)

Some well-known parks are mentioned, whether it is Vauxhall Park, which held exuberant celebrations and where, in connection with the story, Becky will visit with the Sedley family, or Hyde Park, where Miss Crawley goes for carriage rides. Another popular place mentioned in the novel is the seaside town of Brighton, where Amelia and George Osborne's spend their honeymoon. The elderly Miss Crawley, on the other hand, goes there for a convalescent stay, as it was a well-known treatment center. (Murray, 1999)

People in the world of *Vanity Fair* live a rich social life as they attend formal dinners, dances, tea parties and go to the theatre. For example, the well-known Drury Lane theatre is mentioned as a representative place which characters seek in order to attend some cultural events. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 587) This is indeed true from the perspective of historical accuracy, as for people living in London social life outside their homes was essential. (Murray, 1999) The story also portrays numerous social places opened to men only, such as mess-rooms, coffee-houses or gentlemen's clubs. For example, the London district called St. James is mentioned several times in the novel in references to gentlemen's club. During the reign of George IV, the district housed a lot of clubs and businesses intended for a male clientele. (Murray, 1999)

Another type of social gathering were lavish dinners hosted in people's houses. In the chapter entitled 'In Which a Charade Is Acted Which May or May Not Puzzle the Reader', the feast is followed by an accompanying program in the form of a charade. Becky figures prominently in it as she plays one of the roles. It was a common entertainment supplementing the dinners of people from high social classes. (Damon, 2006)

It can be stated that the society described by the narrator enjoys social life everywhere and that is no exaggeration, since in the novel society indulges in social pleasures even in Brussels close to the battlefield. Along with the soldiers who are going to the front, their families and loved ones also travel to Brussels with them but they, do the same as what they normally do at home. They go for walks around the city, visit galleries, organize dance balls and formal dinners. This is how the English company's departure to the European continent is described.

Margate packets were sailing every day, filled with men of fashion and ladies of note, on their way to Brussels and Ghent. People were going not so much to a war as to a fashionable tour. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 273)

Participation and organization of such social events, however, is seen a certain kind of obligation for the society depicted in the novel. For members of the society, it is the way to match others in terms of proving that they can still afford tea parties and other social events, which guarantee a certain degree of prestige in the society. The Sedley family tries to maintain their place in London social life in this way and to prove that they still belong among the respected residents of London. This is also the case of the Sedley family, who try not to lag in organizing social gatherings. They do not want the public to look at them as paupers.

One night Mrs. Sedley was writing cards for a party; the Osbornes had given one, and she must not be behindhand. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 181)

It is, however, a very expensive activity, and for financial reasons, the Sedley's are soon forced to leave the "respectable" society and fight for survival.

The society depicted in this novel is famous for its excessive love of food, alcohol, revelry, and gambling, which is very clearly represented by Joseph Sedley or military officers such as George Osborne or Rawdon Crawley. The figure of Joseph Sedley is referred to as '*dandy*' in the dictionary of the period. He indulges in gluttony, delights in telling his stories from India, takes an exaggerated interest in his wardrobe, and enjoys spending time in company and he loves beings in the center of attention.

Joseph Sedley is proud of his dandy status, comparing himself to the real historical figure George Brummell, who was a recognized dandy during the Regency period. It is specifically mentioned that Jos Sedley and Brummell himself should have been famous beaux in London together. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 32) According to Erden (2020), there are also certain similarities between Joseph Sedley and George, prince of Wales, in both character and physical appearance.

However, Joseph Sedley represents not only a 'beau', but he also belongs to the so-called nabobs, men who came to a great fortune in India with the help of questionable practices. (Langford, 2000) This is confirmed by Becky's claim when she states that all the nabobs are very wealthy. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 27)

Gluttony, which has already been mentioned several times, is one of the vices criticized as one of the generally known ills of the period society. Joseph Sedley, for example, takes every opportunity to feast and does not hold back at all. Another example is Miss Matilda Crawley, who on a visit to Queen's Crawley, ate and drank so much that she became ill. The narrator describes it with great irony and sarcasm and makes fun of the fact that it is precisely the noble and rich lady who indulges in gluttony and is not able to restrain herself. Gluttony can hardly be considered a noble lady's virtue.

“The causes which had led to the deplorable illness of Miss Crawley and her departure from her brother's house in the country, were of such an unromantic nature that they are hardly fit to be explained in this genteel and sentimental novel. For how it is possible to hint of a delicate female, living in good society, that she ate and drunk too much, and that a hot supper of lobsters profusely enjoyed at the Rectory was the reason of an indisposition which Miss Crawley herself persisted was solely attributable to the dampness of the weather?” (Thackeray, 2018, p. 140)

The theme of gambling as a leisure activity of the upper classes appears several times in the novel and is depicted mostly in the form of cards or billiards, which were a common men's pastime. Rawdon Crawley is described as the biggest gambler in the novel. Nevertheless, George Osborne is also an avid gambler, but not as proficient as Rawdon, who often outplays him and gets his money. However, gambling is not only a male domain in the novel, but women participate in it too. An example can be Chapter 63 situated place in Pumpnickel, the playroom in Baden-Baden also has non-aristocratic women sitting at the gaming tables.

The character of George Osborne also represents selfishness and egocentricity. He very often uses the people around him for his own benefit, including those who care about him most. Even though he is engaged to Amelia, who has a very kind soul, he neglects her. One day his friend Dobbin gives him money to buy something nice for his fiancé when he neglects her, but George uses the money to buy a shirt-pin for himself. What is more, George is a womanizer, which according to his army friends from army is considered completely normal and worth admiration. Debauchery and riotous living are among the aspects of the rotten society portrayed in the novel.

Stubble and Spooner thought that to be a "regular Don Giovanni, by Jove" was one of the finest qualities a man could possess; and Osborne's reputation was prodigious amongst the young men of the regiment. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 124)

Other character that represents selfishness is Miss Matilda Crawley. Miss Crawley thinks only of keeping her own comfort. She does not care much about the people around her and rather treats them as entertainment. In addition, the fact that she has a large fortune means that she is always the center of attention, and people, including her family, try to please her as much as possible so that, she lists their names in her will. If anyone threatens her comfort, it is a big surprise for her, because she is not used to it. The following excerpt shows how absurdly Miss Crawley reacted to Becky's departure:

"Gracious goodness, and who's to make my chocolate? Send for her and have her back; I desire that she come back," the old lady said. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 169)

Previously, she praised Becky as a dear friend, but now she behaves like a boss. As mentioned before, Miss Crawley treats people as entertainment, and she hates boring people. As soon as something is ordinary, she automatically finds it uninteresting. The constant pursuit of sensations, entertainment and extravagance speaks of the shallowness of the people of the depicted society and the inability to respect the problems faced by ordinary people. Miss Crawley, as a representative of the wealthy class, is unable to appreciate practicality and hard work because she never had to make any effort herself.

Mrs. Bute, that brisk, managing, lively, imperious woman, had committed the most fatal of all errors with regard to her sister-in-law. She had not merely oppressed her and her household — she had bored Miss Crawley. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 343)

Joseph Sedley also represents love of fashion and shopping in the world of the *Vanity Fair*. An exaggerated interest in flamboyance and luxury is another of the vices attributed to the society depicted in the novel. It is related to vain self-care, not only in the case of women but also men. Joseph Sedley is again illustrated as very vain and unhealthily too concerned about his appearance. George Osborne is very similar to him in this respect, and he also wastes money on unnecessary things. The following extract from the novel proves that excessive self-care in some cases, like Joseph Sedley's, could also be inappropriate and tasteless and as the title of the novel suggests. The reasons are pretentiousness and vanity as shown in the excerpt:

He never was well dressed; but he took the hugest pains to adorn his big person, and passed many hours daily in that occupation. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 32)

According to Erden (2020) one of author's intentions was to criticize the society or constantly trying to accumulate as much as possible, including money, food, drink and alcohol, However, the main idea is that gluttony does not lead to any feeling of satisfaction or happiness. (Erden, 2020)

The author portrayed the people in the novel *Vanity Fair* as unusually rude. Many of the characters don't go far for an unkind word, and it is interesting that most of the time it is contempt for characters who are among the more positive ones. For example, George Osborne's sisters tease Amelia for her character and do not understand what their brother can see in her as they seem her as uninteresting and boring. They are basically gossiping behind her back. Captain Rawdon Crawley, in turn, niggles William Dobbin, calling him clumsy and bawdy. It says about the depicted society, that its people are more concerned about the outer qualities and person's appearance rather than character.

People who live in the world depicted in the novel also have no difficulty taking an advantage of the decline of their old acquaintance. When the Sedley's go bankrupt, an auction of their possessions is held in their house afterwards to make some money and Mr Osborne, their former family friend, buys their valuable bottles of wine rather than helping them. The narrative voice describes it as follows:

If there is any exhibition in all Vanity Fair which Satire and Sentiment can visit arm in arm together; where you light on the strangest contrasts laughable and tearful: where you may be gentle and pathetic, or savage and cynical with perfect propriety. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 172)

The narrator also refers to it as a "sordid part" (Thackeray, 2010, p. 172), when every inhabitant of the novel comes to see the humiliating end of a person who was once wealthy and successful. No one dwells on the tragedy for too long, and after the auction, or exhibition, which captures the wasted effort, the people around continue in living their lives without looking back for the sad fate of Mr Sedley and his family.

## **7.6. The Role of Women in Society**

In contrast to the subtitle "Novel without a hero", there are two main protagonists that the story revolves around, namely its main female characters – Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley. In terms of personality, these two ladies couldn't be more

different and together they create a sharp contrast. Amelia Sedley abounds in supremely laudable traits. She can be described as a very sensitive lady who wears her heart on the sleeve and is willing to help everyone. Selflessness, among her most prominent personal qualities, contrasts with most of the other characters in the story.

Born into a wealthy London merchant family, she does not have to worry about making a living. Her thinking might be sometimes labelled as naïve, especially in her early adulthood, as she believes everything the people around her tell her. It seems that she is not fully aware of the ugliness of the surrounding world.

On the contrary, Becky Sharp is Amelia's complete opposite. Becky is not only associated with the word "sharp" because of her name but also because of her sharp tongue. However, this makes her many enemies, especially among conservative people. This applies especially to women who can see competition in her and, are sometimes jealous of her. She is also known for her cleverness, which she is very good at using to her advantage. When Becky sets her mind on something, she goes after her goal head on, and every step and conversation she takes is strategic in nature. She is the master plotter and manipulator:

"Is not this strange place,' she continued, 'for a woman, who has lived in a very different world too, to be found in? I have had so many griefs and wrongs, Joseph Sedley, I have been made to suffer so cruelly, that I am almost made mad sometimes. I can't stay still in any play but wander about always restless and unhappy. All my friends have been false to me – all. There is no such thing as an honest man in the world.'" (Thackeray, 2018, p. 683)

The excerpt shows how she excels in manipulating the people around her and convincing them that she is a poor and virtuous woman, a victim of an evil world. Her main goal is to make people feel sorry for her so that she can influence them easily and convince them to act in her favour.

She usually uses the strategy of pretending to be poor and fragile woman with men. The above quote comes from the chapter called "Full of Business and Pleasure", where Becky tries to apply this technique on Joseph Sedley. However, when Joseph leaves, Becky caricatures him in front of her two student admirers. This clearly shows that the feeling she demonstrates in front of Sedley were not sincere at all.



Just as the two main heroines of the story are very different, so were the positions of women in society at the time. The character of Amelia Sedley corresponds to the more conservative view of the role of women in society, as she takes for natural and granted that her main task is to fulfil the role of a wife and mother. Amelia's role and her fate as a married woman from the upper middle class, if everything would go according to plan, is portrayed by her own mother in the novel:

Mamma had her morning duties, and her daily drive, and the delightful round of visits and shop- ping which forms the amusement, or the profession as you may call it, of the rich London lady. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 120)

The excerpt depicts her mother's life as very carefree, with outings, shopping and courtesy visits for her main activities. There are described as a typical daily activity of a married woman from an upper-middle class household. In the initial stage of marriage, Amelia is portrayed as a devoted wife, who tends to ignore, or misinterpret her husband's faults, and as a loving and warm mother who will do anything for the sake of her child. She is willing and ready to fulfil the role prescribed to her by society and tradition.

Becky, on the other hand, is not preparing for the role of wife and mother in the slightest. In her marriage to Rawdon Crawley, she does not perform the role of a traditional mother and housewife who takes care of the family. She only married for the sake of money and neglects her only son because he interferes with her plans. Her ambitions extend to the highest levels of society, which she infiltrates.

However, her situation is completely different from Amelia's. She is not happy to passively accept the roles available to her. She actively pursues her goals by any means. She can read people and situations very well and use her manipulative abilities to easily influence other people. A good example is her tenure at the Queen's Crawley estate, where she basically does whatever, she wants. She is able to use Sir Pitt's incompetence and her own abilities to partly control the whole estate.

Finally, the reports were that the governess had "come round" everybody, wrote Sir Pitt's letters, did his business, managed his accounts—had the upper hand of the whole house, my lady, Mr. Crawley, the girls and all—at which Mrs. Crawley declared she was an artful hussy, and had some dreadful designs in view. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 103)

Becky, thanks to her constant effort to ingratiate herself with higher society, achieves something that she would never have been able to do given her lower-class origins - a formal introduction into high society or an introduction to the royal family. From a social point of view, this formality mainly concerned the upper middle class and the top elite. (Damon, 2005) Among the characters of the novel, this solemn act would be more suited to Amelia than Becky. However, Amelia has no high social ambitions whereas it opens the very desired path into higher society for Becky.

The technically most powerful female character in the chosen novel is Miss Crawley. She belongs to the highest layer of society, which gives her some privileges and, in combination with a good fortune, also social power. The people around her work hard to fulfil all her wishes and are also willing to forgive her all her bad qualities, just to win her favor.

The narrator highlights some negative qualities in women and portrays them in a not entirely favourable light. In some passages, he speaks of them as of quarrelsome and slanderous creatures. He criticizes their stupidity, such as in the case of Barbara Pinkerton who, according to his words, “she no more comprehended sensibility than she did Algebra.” (Thackeray, 2018, p. 17) He also ascribes vanity to women several times when he speaks of Joseph Sedley as being “vain as a girl”. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 33).

Calculation is also included among qualities associated with a female personality. Becky Sharp is portrayed as a the most calculating woman in the novel. An example can be seen in her strategy of befriending people, which never comes from pure interest in the person, but rather because she might benefit from them. As soon as the people around her are no longer appealing, she stops being interested in them. Nevertheless, the narrative voice ironically defends her actions, reasoning that there is nothing to wonder about. She is poor, single and thus her efforts can be viewed as justified:

Who can but admire this quality of gratitude in an unprotected orphan; and, if there entered some degree of selfishness into her calculations, who can say but that her prudence was perfectly justifiable? (Thackeray, 2018, p. 95)

There are passages which have an almost pro-feminist feeling. They show an understanding of the difficult fates of women, which they bear in the form of their vulnerability and lack of independence and empowerment in the society. In the

following excerpt about Amelia, the narrator also states that women are in some respects stronger than men:

What do men know about women's martyrdoms? We should go mad had we to endure the hundredth part of those daily pains which are meekly borne by many women. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 592)

The narrative voice also deals with the position of women and their role in the household. According to him, they perform a lot of household duties which are not properly evaluated and are rather taken for granted without any appreciation for their hard work:

How many thousands of people are there, women for the most part, who are doomed to endure this long slavery?—who are hospital nurses without wages—sisters of Charity, if you like, without the romance and the sentiment of sacrifice—who strive, fast, watch, and suffer, unpitied, and fade away ignobly and unknown. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 596)

This corresponds with the historical reality where women did not have the opportunities to devote their efforts to something other than taking care of their husbands and households. Women, in general, were subordinate members of the family. (Steinbach, 2004) However, in another demonstration sympathy with women, the narrative voice uses irony. The narrator's regret in this case is not sincere, as it alludes to the “suffering” of high-class women, one of whom Becky wants to be. They play martyrs, even though they are doing very well, as they live in luxury and comfort compared to less fortunate women. The narrator sarcastically expresses his satisfaction that God is male and therefore, the order of the world is made to fit the man rather than the woman.

O you poor women! O you poor secret martyrs and victims, whose life is a torture, who are stretched on racks in your bedrooms, and who lay your heads down on the block daily at the drawing-room table; every man who watches your pains, or peers into those dark places where the torture is administered to you, must pity you—and—and thank God that he has a beard. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 596)

Nevertheless, unfair treatment does not only happen to women, but in the world of Vanity Fair to all lower status people by the authorities. This is the main idea of the entire literary work - social oppression by high-ranking people. The narrator calls for general leniency towards those who are not as fortunate in life as the upper classes of society who do whatever they want and there is no defense against them:

The hidden and awful Wisdom which apportions the destinies of mankind is pleased so to humiliate and cast down the tender, good, and wise, and to set up the selfish, the foolish, or the wicked. Oh, be humble, my brother, in your prosperity! Be gentle with those who are less lucky, if not more deserving. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 596-597)

## 7.7. Marital Relations

From a historical context, middle class women in society had a more passive role of housewives. In marriage, high or low, the man had always the main say. (Damon, 2006) The narrator comments on love and marriage in the world of *Vanity Fair*. In the novel he criticizes that, that in case of several depicted marriages, falling in love with the wrong person can have unfathomable consequences.

There were quite rigid conventions in the upper parts of society in regard to marriages. Members of the nobility usually married women based on dynastic links, but they also sometimes looked mainly for their dowry, hence new property that would now pass to the new heir. There was a radical difference in the positions and marriage options between men and women. (Reynolds, 1998)

The example of Sir Pitt Crawley shows how much choice men have compared to women. In his first marriage, Sir Pitt was married to a noble woman, but she was, in his words: “a quarrelsome high-bred jade”. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 88) After this experience, looked at women of common birth, such as Rose Dawson, who became his second wife the ironmonger's daughter, or later Becky herself, whom he tried to propose to.

However, while it may seem incredibly lucky that a common woman becomes the wife of a noble man overnight, the narrator points out that every luck is redeemed by something else. Sir Pitt's love for his second wife faded very quickly. Rose Dawson is described as a woman tormented by her husband suffering rather than gaining anything from life as a nobleman's wife and lady of the estate.

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, slip-shod and in curlpapers all day. O Vanity Fair — Vanity Fair! This might have been, but for you, a cheery lass.” (Thackeray, 2018, p. 89).

The narrator shows compassion for her person and speaks against the romantic idea of a poor girl marrying a gentleman. However, many noble ladies suffered in their

marriage. Lady Steyne also experiences similar suffering in her marriage to Marquis Steyne in the form of psychological pressure and humiliation.

Furthermore, two marriages of the two main heroines are depicted here, which have certain similarities. In the novel, Becky marries officer Rawdon Crawley for obvious reasons, and Amelia marries George Osborne, who is also a military officer. The main common element in these marriages is that only one individual in each couple feels romantic feelings. They are also similar in that both gentlemen married below their social level. In case of Becky and Rawdon, their marriage is consequence of Becky's calculation and her hunt for the Miss Crawley's inheritance, therefore her feelings towards Rawdon are not entirely pure. Nevertheless, Rawdon married Becky, because he truly loves her. The following excerpt describes the situation in when both discover that their marriage was is of the tactics of Mrs Bute Crawley.

"Gad, I begin to perceive now why she was always bringing us together at Queen's Crawley," Rawdon said.

"What an artful little woman!" ejaculated Rebeca.

"Well, I don't regret it, if you don't," the Captain cried, still in an amorous rapture with his wife, who rewarded him with a kiss by way of reply, and was indeed not a little gratified by the generous confidence of her husband. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 177)

In this extract, we can see that even though Becky's feelings for Rawdon are lukewarm. Rawdon is too blinded by love to realize that Becky is just using him, like everyone else. As soon as Becky gets into higher society and can provide money for herself, Rawdon ceases to be important to her and she is no longer interested in him. She even keeps him locked in debtors' prison instead of sending him money for his release, because at the same time she hosts Marquis Steyne. Love in this marriage is only one-sided.

Their marriage is also interesting in that Becky and Rawdon have partially reversed roles in the relationship. As the narrator's narrative progresses, it is Becky who determines the direction the family will take and manages the family budget. Rawdon has no control over anything in his marriage and he just obediently follows Becky's orders. Becky puts herself in the position of the head of the family when she claims that it is thanks to her that Rawdon can lead such a comfortable life.

"Do what you like—dine where you please—go and have ginger-beer and sawdust at Astley's, or psalm-singing with Lady Jane—only don't expect me to busy myself with

the boy. I have your interests to attend to, as you can't attend to them yourself. I should like to know where you would have been now, and in what sort of a position in society, if I had not looked after you." (Thackeray, 2018, p. 543)

Compared to the respect Amelia gives her dead husband, Becky does not respect her husband at all and completely bypasses him in many areas. Becky is smarter than her husband in many ways, she understands things faster and sees everything as a chance to gain something for herself. Rawdon is not so bright, and Becky thinks he's a fool. Even though Becky is married, it does not stop her from flirting with other men, including those of superior standing, such as George Osborne or Pitt Crawley, sometimes even in front of Rawdon's eyes. When Rawdon discovers that Becky has an affair with Marquis Steyne, he runs out of patience and leaves her for good.

Even in the case of Amelia Sedley and George Osborne, Amelia's selfless love is not reciprocated. This is very well seen in the events of the cancellation of their engagement. Amelia's feelings towards George are sincere so depression and grief almost break out for her. She keeps admiring and does not see that he is as good a person as she believes him to be.

George, however, has completely different concerns. He continues his wasteful way of life at first, but then he falls into melancholia. However, it is not because he loves Amelia, but rather because of feelings of guilt. He is aware of the weight of the loss he goes through as he realizes that Amelia can be a good wife to him, but it cannot be considered pure love. Amelia's feelings are genuine and that's why she was overcome with grief right away, but in George's case, sadness comes later.

A thousand homely scenes and recollections crowded on him — in which he always saw her good and beautiful. And for himself, he blushed with remorse and shame, as the remembrance of his own selfishness and indifference contrasted with that perfect purity. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 189)

In general, this relationship is emotionally very uneven. Amelia literally worships George, and George loves to be worshiped in return. As already mentioned, George is a rather selfish person at his core, which is partly due to the style of his upbringing. He has a very high opinion of himself, and he thinks of people around him as inferior to him. For example, this is how he thinks about his marriage with Amelia whereas he considers himself as the most unselfish man, which is indicative of his narcissistic nature:

And the fact is, that George thought he was one of the generous creatures alive: and that he was making a tremendous sacrifice in marrying this young creature. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 203)

In traditional middle-class marriage, the man acquired complete control over the economic situation of his family. On the contrary, woman could not even control her own finances and was not entitled to have her own income. Women were dependent on their husbands for the sake of their existence. (Damon, 2006) That is why Becky's marriage is so specific. Becky is completely independent of her husband. Typically, the woman's main role was to take care of household and raising of children. (Steinbech, 2004) For Becky, raising her child is more of an obstacle.

The novel also depicts a representative of unmarried woman or a spinster – Miss Jane Osborne, who lives in her father's house. In terms of historical context, some women never married as they choosed this fate, however, the other group, including Miss Osborne, had no other choice as no suitor appeared who was interested in them. (Steinbech, 2004) Nevertheless, the novel *Vanity Fair* also portrays Miss Osborne as an outcast of the society, who spends her entire life at home. Since she is not properly married, she is not respected by the society, not even by the members of her family.

## **7.8. Napoleonic Wars and Army's Morale**

The story takes place during a major pan-European military conflict, known as Napolenic Wars. Several names of events, places and people are mentioned in the novel that set the story in time, such as the battles of Borodino, Leipsic or Waterloo or the of Duke of Wellington. The novel refers to the basic events of the conflict historically correctly. An example is the date according to which Napoleon flees from the island of Elba in March 1815 to France. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 182) According to Richards, D. & Hunt, J. W (1983), this information is presented factually correctly, since the news of the escape of Napoleon Bonaparte interrupted the Congress of Vienna in March 1815 indeed. This means that even though the characters and their fates are fictional, they are placed in a specific historical period of time.

The personality of Napoleon Bonaparte is referred in the novel with undisguised hostility. The narrator calls him, for example, "Corsican upstart" (Thackeray, 2018, p. 62) or "infernal traitor" (Thackeray, 2018, p. 270). In the events of the story before the Battle

of Waterloo, many of the characters are very confident about the upcoming encounter with the French army. They do not see this French emperor as a potential threat at all. George Osborne expresses the general optimistic mood before the battle:

His courage was prodigious. "Boney attack us!" he cried. "My dear creature, my poor Emmy, don't be frightened. There's no danger. The allies will be in Paris in two months, I tell you; when I'll take you to dine in the Palais Royal, by Jove! (Thackeray, 2018, p. 285)

As for the war morale of the soldiers, it is described here as enthusiastic. To some extent, the soldiers in this novel also see war and fighting as an opportunity to achieve higher military rank through their heroic deeds. When the world learns of Napoleon's escape from the island of Elba, the English soldiers are eager to go to war again. Narrative voice uses very strong exaggeration when describing military morale in the sense that they are very excited about being at war again. It can also be interpreted as naivety or even blindness, as the soldiers do not admit that they could lose the battle. However, there is also irony in the excerpt, as it is not believable that the soldiers would be grateful to Napoleon for dragging them into the war again.

From the colonel to the smallest drummer in the regiment, all were filled with hope and ambition and patriotic fury; and thanked the French Emperor as for a personal kindness in coming to disturb the peace of Europe. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 187)

The final battle at Waterloo has a special place among the events of Napoleonic Wars, and the narrator treats it with respect. He sees the terror and horror of war on both sides. He also highlights the bravery and heroism of the English soldiers who led this bloody battle to victory despite numerous losses. In general, it can be stated that the narrative voice itself has a deep respect for all victims and soldiers.

Guns which were heard at Brussels were ploughing up their ranks, and comrades falling, and the resolute survivors closing in. Toward evening, the attack of the French, repeated and resisted so bravely, slackened in its fury. (Thackeray, 2018, p. 339)



## 8. CONCLUSION

The general conclusion to my thesis is, I state William Makepeace depicted the most important and serious moral transgressions of Victorian society accurately, using satire, irony and exaggeration as the most important devices. The criticized transgressions are primarily related to the desire for high social status and the privileges associated with it. Other manifestations of the corruption of society illustrated in the novel include greed and the need to benefit from everything under all circumstances. The narrator also explores, the readiness of people to do immoral or evil things to fulfil their ambitions. He also shows, the domination of snobbery in society.

The society is portrayed through the depictions of social life and interpersonal relations. The author draws attention to bad habits and activities such as gambling, gluttony, immoderate drinking of alcohol, along with vanity related to excessive care for external appearance and shopping. The novel criticizes the society for indulging in the excessive consumerism.

Social life is also the most reliably described aspect of the novel, depicting existing popular public places such as London districts, streets, parks or other cities such as Brighton. Various types of social events and festivities true to historical period are also depicted in the work.

As far as historical accuracy is concerned, the selected novel relies on mentioning real historical events. The main historical pillar in the form of Napoleonic wars and the information associated with it corresponds to real historical facts. The text mentions real historical figures, battlefields and annual dates.

To conclude, the depiction of the society in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is both very accurate and believable. Additionally, the novel is readable and amusing even for the contemporary readers unlike his other literary works.

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