CHAPTER II

SUBJECT MATTER AND THEME

A novel is a prose narrative or tale presenting a picture of life. Story, plot, theme and characters are the components of the novel. It is useful and even necessary to differentiate among these terms to avoid possible confusion. Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto have brought out the difference: "The happenings as they are selected and arranged by the author, are the plot; the participants are the characters; the meaning or point is the theme." The story is the incidents in their sequence but lexicographers often identify it with plot. The difference between story and plot is that
the story is the whole of the narrative dealing with
people, events and situations, while plot refers only to
the significant sequence of events. Thus plot is a less
inclusive term, but it carries, more strongly than the
word, story, the idea of a coherent framework of
interrelated events.

Theme has a totally different meaning. The
theme is what it is about, and the story is what it is.
If the author wants to propound any theory or philosophy,
or express a view, that would be his theme. It is a
subject set or proposed by the author for presentation.
The word 'motif' is often used in the place of theme.
Both the terms mean the dominant thought of the story.
But theme implies also the purpose of the author while
motif is only the main thought and drift of the story.
Francis Vivian identifies motif with moral; but it
does not appear very tenable. Motif may be moral but not
necessarily so always.

As the theme is the dominant thought of the
novelist; it governs generally all his choices in the
course of the work—incursion or omission of events or
characters, the relative range of presentation of
character, the language, that is, all the features which
we group under the term, "treatment," R. L. Stevenson does not consider it necessary for a novelist to be faithful to his original intention, what is more important to him is "the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says." In the beginning of *The Virginians* E. M. Forster wanted to put the two brothers on equal pedestal but with the progress of the story the elder comes in prominence and the younger slips into the background. This happens also with Dickens in *Bleak House*. But both the authors are able to convince the reader about what they say, and so the reader does not mind the shifting of viewpoint.

What does a novel deal with? How does it begin in the author's mind? These questions can have widely different answers. The novel introduces us to a living world which resembles ours, though it has an identity of its own. This world selects characters from the artist's experience. "But in any one artist only some aspects of his experience fertilize his imagination, strike sufficiently deep down into the fundamentals of his personality to kindle his creative spark. His achievement, therefore, is limited to that part of his work which deals with these aspects of his experience."
Flaubert comments: "A good subject for a novel is one that comes all in one piece, in one single jet. It is the mother-idea, whence all the rest flow. One is not free to write this or that. One does not choose one's subject. That is what the public and the critics do not understand. The secret of a masterpiece lies in the concordance between the subject and the temperament of the author." The selection does take place but only among those things which he has already experienced. It is because of this that Thackeray's novels are generally about the upper-middle-class. He belonged to this stratum of society, and was interested in it, and could write very naturally about it.

Thackeray painted the manners and morals of the upper-class which attracted him most. "He proves to be the true child of his age—almost its victim." He presented what he saw, and was prepared to take everything in the form it existed; but, he was never satisfied with the way things were. His was an objective approach to social morals and manners. He was impervious to the influences of his time. He never had the literary measles; he never submitted to the dictation of coteries. He did not find himself by the sedulous imitation
of others. What he was at the beginning he was at the end, — a man of letters, to whom time and experience gave not a new style, but merely a better control of his material. He lived through the romantic movement unscathed ...............7 He does not find anything to say about "social reform, at a time when the novel at large was saying a great deal about it. He seems happier in the world of the eighteen\textsuperscript{th} century and the Regency than in his own time.\textsuperscript{8} This does not mean that he was an escapist or that closed his eyes to life in his own times. He never spared even the slightest of foibles in people around him. "He deprecates and satirizes but seems to see little likelihood of improvement either through specific reform or general change of heart\textsuperscript{9} He was very sensitive, and was pained at the defects and corruptions of his own time. He felt a "guilty impotence in the face of the problems of society."\textsuperscript{10}

Apart from the painting of social manners and morals, he could never concentrate on any intellectual or spiritual complications. This was beyond the range of his interest. He often selects characters from the Church but never cared to present the conflict growing between faith and doubt. Many of his characters have faith in
God and established religion. In Vanity Fair we have conventional churchgoer — Bute Crawley, Evangelicals — Pitt Crawley and Lady Southdown; and a Dissenter — old Ostorne. In Pendennis, a country parson tutors the young hero. The hero of The Virginians has experienced the fanaticism of Wegg and lived with the dissipated chaplain Sampson. Though satirically, the 'Cophem Sect' is yet revealingly presented in The Newcomes. All these various faith-groups are in Thackeray's works but "there is little sense of spiritual struggle or the understanding of deep commitment in faith". He could not comprehend the soul and its various windings. If he did, he never cared to express them. "The faults that he condemns are the faults shown by men and women in the social groupings that are seen to exist, not those of particular institutions or theories."

As he was not a social reformer he seemed to care little about the curse of poverty, under which so many were suffering. Except in The Great Expectations Thackeray never holds up poverty in itself as a subject for pity. Generally speaking, he uses it to bring out a man's better qualities. "At the height of his prosperity even Colonel Newcome is something less than
himself, and his childlike simplicity slightly obscured, to return in its unsullied purity in the Grey Friars, when the broken - down old brother, 'whose heart was as that of a little child, answered to his name, and stood in the presence of the Master.'\(^{13}\) Penury is to Thackery as nothing compared with poverty of mind and heart; he recognizes that physical privations are far less deadly than the starvation of the spiritual faculties; that "we live by 'admiration, hope, and love' and that where these are lacking there must be a living death."\(^{14}\) In his own urban fashion, he shows man's involvement in the affluent society:

'When we read that a nobleman has left for the Continent, or that another nobleman has an execution in his house—and that one or the other owes six or seven millions, the defeat seems glorious even, and we respect the victim in the vastness of 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 ladies' dinner; or the poor devil of a tailor whom the steward patronizes, and who has pledged all his worth and more, to get the liveries ready, which my lord has done him the honour to bespeak? When the great house tumbles...
down, these miserable wretches fell under it unnoticed; as they say in the old legends, before a man goes to the devil himself, he sends plenty of other souls thither."

His inability to suggest any reform is commented upon by Chapman: "What could one man do to reverse the degeneration of society? Even while the novel was reaching the height of popularity and influence, the social problems were coming to need the attention of diverse experts rather than the healing that a single imaginative genius could give. For Thackeray, both vain and shy as he was, there must have been particular anguish in the knowledge. The assumption of bland, almost arrogant detachment and perception had served him well as a shield against early trials, but its failures were more acute. The society should be so much in error and he could not manage to put it right." This does not sound wholly convincing. Jane Austen also presented society, though her range was exceedingly small, but with a difference. She kept herself aloof from the major issues of her days but we do not find any anguish and distress or dissatisfaction on her part. In Thackeray though the realism, conventionality, sentimentality, satire and protest are all there, we do not have the
predominance of any of them, what we get is the 'impressionistic sense' of a living society, moulding the lives of his various characters. His criticism of society is just a hard shell, and under that Thackeray's sympathetic heart is clearly visible. On the surface he appears to criticise society but at a deeper level it is evident that he criticises life as such. Many a time in between the stories he commented on the way of life women had, what men think about themselves, what are gains and losses of life and how men face them. Life's rewards and punishments, success and failure are Thackeray's major themes.

Thackeray was inherently more influenced by the eighteenth century than his own. His novels which have the eighteenth century background are most effective. In Barry Lyndon, Pendennis, The Virginians, we do not feel even for a moment that he is writing about a period which was not his own. He enjoyed those 'jolly good times' though only in his imagination. "The effects of time, indeed, are the occasion of some of Thackeray's most characteristic triumphs. He had a special sensibility to the relics of the past; what more poignant emblems are there of men's transitoriness and vanity? Old pictures, old toys, old
Letters with their yellowing paper and brownish ink, the ridiculous, charming poems of the eighteen-year-old, the ball dress once so fresh and modish, not grotesque in its antiquated fripperies, George Osborne's room opened after years to show a half-finished scrawl on the writing table, a pair of spurs, their gilt dusty now, left on the mantelpiece, a school boy's cap, a carnival favour; these things never fail to touch him to a sort of poetry............17 Thus he reveals in memories. He looked back with a sad longing which is never dull or merely pathetic; and, he seems to enjoy it.

He was highly critical of conventional 'poetic justice'. "As an inventor of stories he shrinks from employing the utmost rigour possible. He is not sure that the poetic justice which the novelist metes out to villains is indeed justice, even were he sure that it is in accordance with probability."18 Contrary to this Begehot believed that, on the whole, in the real world, the good prosper and wicked suffer. If poetic justice is absent it creates the impression of a neglected, ungoverned world. But the extreme form of poetic justice is absurd and unnatural as well. The question of punishment and reward is said to be useless and unimportant. All, the writer can do is to make his
reader sympathise with good persons and not with evil ones. In this ground Thackeray attacked Bulwer's sympathetic criminals like Paul Clifford and Eugene Aram. But the theory of poetic justice Thackeray deliberately dismissed in his own work as in the ending of *Vanity Fair*. Becky lives, and enjoys life happily and respectively on the insurance-money of Joe Sedley after (presumably) poisoning him. Beatrice in *Leyland* attains the wealth and the title which she aimed at in *The Virginians*. Conventional poetic justice may also be considered an evasion of the writer's responsibility because it is not the novelist's only job to please his reader by punishing his villain and rewarding the virtuous. He must give his reader a true insight into the nature of the world. Fitzjames Stephen praised the ending of Thackeray's novels. "In this, as in almost every department of novel literature, Mr. Thackeray appears to us to have conferred immense benefit on novel readers." 

Though Thackeray was never in favour of poetic justice his novels are moralistic in tone and didactic in treatment. Thackeray says: "the solemn
prayer to Almighty God that........ we may never forget truth."20 Tillotson remarks that "those aspiring words could stand as motto for his work early, middle and late."21 Thackeray takes up novel - writing as a solemn and purposeful vocation. Beside amusing their readers, he assigns the task of a preacher to the novelist. He says: "our profession seems to me to be as serious as the person's own."22 He is of the opinion that a novelist should always be just and kind in his judgment of his characters. "And when Thackeray is on attack something else complicates the emotions. I have shown how fair-minded he is by authorial nature. He sees things too completely to want to attack them complete. Unlike Swift in this, he is more like Pope and Dickens, who cannot but allow the aesthetic good in the moral bad. Thackeray knows that what is sham on the moral may be delightful on other grounds. He sometimes allows the truth that he loves first and foremost to make an addition to falsify rather than to supplant it."23 Thackeray is fully aware that one can hardly judge a man's moral worth through his actions only: 'our measure of rewards and punishments is most partial and incomplete, absurdly inadequate, utterly worldly..."24
Roscoe is highly critical of the world of Thackeray's fiction. He says that Thackeray provides a godless society and we have a feeling that the world is uncared for. The cheats and dupes prosper and the virtuous suffer. Again, Roscoe says that no doubt Thackeray was god-fearing and religious-minded, but this is not enough. "He professes to paint human life; and he who does so, and who does not base his conception on that religious substructure which alone makes it other than shreds of flying dreams, is an incomplete and false moralist. And Mr. Thackeray cannot be sheltered behind the assertion that a fitting reverence precludes the intermingling of religious ideas with light literature first because what we ask for does not demand a constant presence of the religious element on the surface, or indeed that it should appear there at all, — only that the spirit of the work and the picture of life should recognise it as at the foundation, or even only not utterly lose sight of it as a fundamental element in the conception of this world; and secondly because he does not scruple (and if we think) reverently to introduce the topic of religion and to picture a humble spirit looking upwards for consolation and support; —
because, while he includes the sentiment, he excludes the realities of religion, and has no place for those aspirations of the higher life, only to form the field for which was this world he deals with created.\textsuperscript{25}

Roscoe's views are only partially acceptable. Religion has different connotations for different persons. It has a certain value for intellectuals and quite another for the ordinary men. A common man is satisfied with whatever sort of religion comes his way. He never stops to brood over it and sort out things for himself. "To demand more of life before you accept it as worth having is in itself a sort of blasphemy, the admission being so often not forthcoming. In any event religious people can still read Thackeray because he gives as complete a picture of the world of men as any man has ever given, and because by example as well as precept he can positively teach the humility that people who are truly religious do not wish to fail to practise."\textsuperscript{26}

Life is a mixed affair. Men are as they are destined to be. So Thackeray considers it useless to chastise them unjustly. "Thackeray is a wise practical moralist because he does not expect too much. Roscoe
blamed him for pointing to the meanness and selfishness of all men instead of 'raising men out of the atmosphere of them.' Thackeray like Newman, had said that we cannot be too suspicious of ourselves. He was well aware of human weaknesses natural to all; and, this made him tolerant of them, though not of vices. Tillotson has summed up Thackeray's views on morality in the following words:

"Virtuous and vicious everyman must be. You being a man and this being so, try to be as kindly as you can and as little of a humbug. Revere the affections of the family, which are sacred, and enjoy the comforts of friends without asking too much of those friends. Avail yourself in a practical way of all the pleasures of company and creature comforts — food and drinks are sometimes good for cheering you up, even when you are downcast as a result of your own folly; the simple pleasure of play pantomine, Punch and Judy are sovereign for a time against a spleen; whistling keeps up the courage, and wit freshens like paint. And so on for a few more steps, ending perhaps with 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' though even here remembering that there is much to be said for vanity before it begins.
to look vain. Out of his mouth, fleshe.d like our own, flows the brook of talk, touching all the terrors, but accepting them without knowing very well what else to do about them." As a moralist he was naturally interested in the representation of vice.

He never misses a chance to preach a moral even at the cost of the story. Besides, he is also a realist; and, often the moral concern clashed with his realism. In this conflict the realism generally has the upper hand. But his realism never quite trespasses into the kind of naturalism which dealt frankly with sex. All his young heroes, addicted to cards and drink, are sexually chaste. They get every opportunity, but remain immune to the snares of sex. This was not so only with Thackeray but was the case with all the novelists of that period. How can a novelist be frank, truthful and complete according to the growing demands of realism, and yet draw a veil over some vital facts of life? This is what puzzled Thackeray most. He, like many Victorians, was dragged between a natural vigorous zest for life and a fear that the beast in men could be released through the pleasures of senses, and partially through sex. This confusion is expressed clearly in the
well-known Preface to *Pendennis*, where he admires Fielding's art of presenting MAN. David Cecil is not wrong in commenting: "The artist's first obligation is to his vision rather than to his moral point of view... The artist must stick to his range, whatever is fidgeting his conscience. And even when writing within his range, he must be careful not to point his moral so ostentatiously that it diverts our attention from the imaginary world he has created. Indeed his moral views are best left to reveal themselves involuntarily. The artist's only conscious duty should be to the truth of creative vision."

Thackeray has also been blamed for his undecided views about morality. He does not always keep to any one view. His attitudes appear too mixed and obscure. He does not seem to be absolutely sure about anything. As a person he was also very indecisive; his biography confirms it. The "result of it was the ambiguous light that hangs over *Vanity Fair*; and another strange vacillation in *Esmond* between first and third person."

The indecision is also due to his commitment to realism. There is a clash between what it is or what
it should be. Mr. Puck refuses to give him the place of a true realist as a moral concern often obstructs in his work: "So little, indeed, is *Vanity Fair*.......
a realistic novel, sticking close to life in all its complexity that Thackeray's pen stops, paralysed, when confronted with great emotions, either of the sublime kind or the lowest, those of the senses. The realism of *Vanity Fair* — if one wishes to make use of the word — is in fact a paralysed realism, impaired by reticence and sous entendens. Consider how the whole plot hinges, at one moment, upon the fact that Becky Sharp is Lord Steyne's mistress. But is she really? Thackeray never says so except indirectly — and there is no chance of finding descriptions of private meetings between the two lovers, such as we should certainly find with a French novelist....... In *Pendennis*, Blanche's frivolity is demonstrated in the same way.*32* The absurd and unconvincing outcome of the Fanny-and-Pen affair was the result of Thackeray's indecision and hesitancy. He was unable to decide what his young *Pendennis* should do in his affair with Fanny. Here realism goes to the wall, and the moral concern tumbles. Hence the unnatural behavior of Pen. *Properly investigated, it was no accident that led to
Pen's critical collision with Fanny Bolton in Temple Gardens. Ill at ease with repressed guilty love, he "has taken a fancy" before returning to his rooms to "take a little walk in the Gardens." Thus Thackeray avoided the physical aspect of sexual realism. Prudery prevents him from presenting sex in the form it always has existed.

Apart from morality and realism, we have a sentimental strain running through all of the stories. He took pains to avoid sentimentality but it is there in his works in spite of himself. The feeling of loneliness, of wasted emotion, of desolation is perhaps the strongest feeling in Thackeray, and this is the root of his melancholy. This may have had its origin in his school years where he felt a stranger among all the boys. As Mario Praz says: "His was a case of heart-broken solipsism, of loss of contact with the world, characteristic of an extreme stage of bourgeois individualism. Forced back upon himself, the individual becomes reserved, unsociable, mistrustful of contacts, shy even of sympathy — 'the horrible pain of sympathy' — seeking every possible pretext to react against sympathy by becoming aggressive."
His ideal was a quite fire-side in a home, with family affection, which he could not have; he became a frequenter of clubs and taverns, and tried to find a family amongst strangers. He was temperamentally made for hearth and home, but could not have it for long. His loftiest notes are concerned with the 'sacred and secret family affections.' The anguish and pain of unfulfilled desires drove him to the 'waste of clubland.' His apparent cynicism and his sarcastic tone are the symptoms of dissatisfaction with his own life, which his correspondence reveals. He could not fully express what he felt; hence the melancholy which underlies his works. Mario Praz is of the opinion that if Thackeray had unfolded all that he felt, it would have been a sickly sentimentality. He cites an example of 'tearful and emblematic sentimentality' from *The Virginians:* 'You remember. It may be all dead and buried; but in a moment, up it springs out of its grave, and looks, and smiles, and whispers as of yore when it clung to your arm, and dropped fresh tears on your heart. It is here, and alive, did I say? O far far away. O lonely heart and cold ashes; Here is the vase, but the roses are gone; here is the shore, and yonder the ship was moored;
but the anchors are up, and it has sailed away for ever. 36

The tone of Thackeray's sentimentality is elegiac. "Elegiac, too, and not cruel (as they would be, were the novelist perfectly logical) are the endings of Thackeray's novels." 36 His view of life itself can be described as sad and sentimental. Those who deem him a cynic have entirely misunderstood the cries of anguish wrung from the heart of one who saw with such painful clearness the baseness and falsehood of the world about him and was driven to despair of the ultimate victory of good.... 37

"Thackeray is most typical and most effective in reliving the years of early manhood." 38 His stories, except for The Newcomes, are generally about spirited young men and girls; and a mellow sadness runs through them. The themes concentrate on the adjustment of amiable, impressionable sort of young men and women to a society which is full of selfishness and deception. But to the reader's satisfaction, after stumbling over many obstacles, they find some good persons and adjust themselves among them, aloof from fashionable society. This is the world of the thirties when he was young and spirited; the time of the transition from the Regency to
Victorian life. Hence the tension between these two conflicting forces is strongly evident in his work. It is also remarkable that all his good characters get satisfaction in isolation from society. In *Vanity Fair*, Aelia enjoys happiness with Dobbin in seclusion. Pendennis finds a happy contentment with Laura in the isolated Fairoaks. Henry Esmond goes to the extent of leaving England for the Virginia plantation. Major Pendennis, a society figure, ultimately prefers the simple domestic pleasure with Arthur and Laura, and leaves his much-beloved clubs and balls.

All his heroes neglect education; and, they never aspire for high position through academic attainments. Except for Barry Lyndon, they are content with what they have. His pen, Dobbin, Henry, Clive, George and Philip do not desire to acquire money or titles. They are in pursuit of real happiness, which they attain through honest sincere unions. In the beginning they might have been attracted towards rich society girls like Blanche, Beatriz, and Lady Arin; but in the end the victory was for Laura, Rachel and Theo. Clive marries Ethel only after she was purified of the vices of her
superior social background.

Thackeray revels in portraying human follies and weaknesses. His attack on snobbery was the out-come of his anger at hypocrisy, falsehood and deception. Supreme virtues like heroism, loyalty, sincerity were not his concern, and it is clear that he considered these impossible. He does present a few characters having these qualities, but they are found coupled with stupidity as in Dobbin and Colonel Newcome. All his scoundrels are extremely fascinating. He himself seems to enjoy portraying them. He is not interested in how the battle of Waterloo was fought or how his soldier, Osborne, fared in that battle; rather he enjoyed the confusion and panic at Brussels.

"Almost all the hotels occupied by the English in Brussels face the Parc, and Joe wandered irresolutely about in his quarter, with crowds of other people, oppressed as he was by fear and curiosity. Some families he saw more happy than himself, having discovered a team of horses, and rettling through the streets in retreat; others again there were whose case was like his own, and who could not for any bribes or entreaties procure the necessary means
of flight. Amongst these would-be fugitives, Jos remarked The Lady Bressores and her daughter, who sate in their carriage in the porte-cochère of their hotel, all their imperials packed, and the only drawback to whose flight was the same want of motive power which kept Jos stationary." 39

This cowardice of Sedley is more remarkable than the conventional tragic death of Osborne. "That is the kind of thing which shows Thackeray at his best; the ironic, uncommitted description of human frailty." 40

All his stories are based on love, and its various complications. His heroes are in search of true love which they are unable to get in their early attempts. All his major characters except Colonel Newcome are on the lookout for a suitable marriage partner. This desire is inspired by various considerations - an eagerness to move up the social ladder, love of money or titles; or the simple expectation of calm, domestic bliss by the fireside. The general pattern of his novels is governed by love and marriage, but he is squeamish about portraying love-scenes though he considers it the 'very easiest part of the novel - writer's business'. 41 He himself admits his unwillingness to go on with lovers: "Nothing is to me
so sweet as sentimental writing. I could have written hundreds of pages describing Philip and Charlotte, Charlotte and Philip. But a stern sense of duty intervenes. My modest Muse puts a finger on her lip and says, 'Hush about that business.' Wagenknecht also remarks: 'Passion is outside Thackeray's range; he cannot write a love scene.... And love is not the only one of the intenser human experience he approaches gingerly.' Thackeray believes in suggesting rather than describing love-transactions. He only hints at it, and leaves the rest to the conjectures of the readers. He himself has said that while writing love-passageg he blushed like anything though he was alone in his study. For his suggestive method the following example can be cited from—

The Virginians: 'Don't Sir, well, I ought to be wretched and it's very very wicked of me if I'm not,' says Theo; and one can understand her soft-hearted repentance. What she means by 'Don't' who can tell? I have said the room was dark, and the fire burned fitfully — and 'Don't' is no doubt in one of the dark fits.'

For Thackeray, the culmination of love is marriage, and he leads all his young major characters to
the altar. This seems very simple; but, what interested
Thackerey most was how to unite virtuous characters, what
should the basis of marriage be, and what complications
arise after marriage. As noticed earlier, his heroes
never get the virtuous partners or the girls whom they
love in first attempt. They really try hard and this
makes the reward more valuable when it comes. Thackerey
seems to imply that only after one is purified of vanity
and vice, does one get true love. Ethel's return to
Clive is the best example. Another point which Thackerey
stresses is that marriage should always be based on love.
Loveless unions end in separation, wretchedness, loneliness
and misery. Barry Lyndon marries for money, and ends his
life in prison. Becky marries for money as well as social
status, and ends up her life in continental bohemian
society. Helen was married by her parents while her
affections were engaged somewhere else. Being a virtuous
woman, somehow she adjusted with her husband but could
not get the happiness which she sought. Blanche fails
altogether. Beatrix could not marry at all till the end
of Esmond. Later she marries a baron for his money but,
in moments of reflection, she regretted having lost the
devoted Harry. Clive marries Rosa according to the wishes
of his father, and makes her and himself miserable.
Likewise Thackeray is clearly of the opinion that love
should be the only basis for marriage. Unions which are
prompted by other reasons than the natural spring of true
love can never be a success. The Barnes-Clare marriage
is the most notable example of the fact.

Love between mother and child is also one of
his favourite themes. In each of his novels we find a
set of mother and child, and through them he presents his
ideal concept of the relationship. The love of Barry’s
mother for her son is exemplary. She backed and supported
him even in his errors. Love had blinded her. We may
notice similarly Amelia and her little George, Helen and
Pen, Rachel and her two children, Laura and her offspring.
We have also foolish and incapable mothers who could not
secure the welfare of their children, like Lady Ann and
Ethel, and Philip and his mother. In these cases,
Thackeray makes others come forward, and take charge of
the children. Lady Kes took Ethel; Philip’s mother
died early, and Little Sister gave him motherly love and
protected him from troubles. The worst mother we find in
Becky. She has even a positive dislike for the child,
which she felt to be an obstacle in the way of social
progress. Thackerey is ready to pardon every fault except this. He forgives Rawdon and, is angry with Becky just on this account. He is prepared even to consider sexual laxity as a human weakness, but not a mother's neglect of her child.

Such is Thackerey's attitude towards some of the major points which has been detailed and discussed in his novels. It certainly has a relation with the sort of characters he created.
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"Even the gentlemen of our age — this is an attempt to describe one of them, no better nor worse than most educated men — even these we cannot show as they are, with the notorious foibles and selfishness of their lives and their education. Since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper. Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art. Many ladies have remonstrated and subscribers left me, because, in the course of the story, I describe a young man resisting and affected by temptation. The object was to say that he had the passion to feel, and the
munliness and generosity to overcome them.
You will not hear—it is best to know it—
what moves in the real world, what passes in
society, in the clubs, colleges, mess-rooms—
what is the life and talk of your sons. A
little more frankness than is customary has
been attempted in this story; with no bad
desire on the writer's part, it is hoped, and
with no ill consequence to any reader........

Preface to Fædinia

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