Chapter Two

"They talked about literature and the fine harts (which is both much used by our gentlemen); and Mr. Mike was very merry," reports Mrs. Barbara, waitress at Morland's Hotel, where Mr. Michael Angelo Titmarsh had taken up temporary residence. "After dinner he was sitten over his punch, when some of our gents came in; and he began to talk and brag to them about his harticle, and what he had for it; and that he was the best cricket in Europe." Titmarsh, of course, is a scarcely disguised alter ego for young William Thackeray himself in the mid-1840s when he was acquiring a reputation in magazine circles as "a good hand for light articles." In 1844, with two short-lived editorial ventures already behind him, Thackeray wrote to his publishers to ask if they would "bring me to London and put me at the head of a slashing, brilliant, gentlemanlike, six-penny aristocratic literary paper?" He had every confidence of its success, especially if authoritative writers could be secured and would sign their articles. As for his own contribution: "I would take the Fine Arts, light literature and the theatre under my charge with the dinner giving (all except me paying part) and I know no man in Europe who would handle it better." So Thackeray set himself up in early career as a kind of gourmet of arts and letters, but he was to become something more.

In his "Pictorial Rhapsody," where Mrs. Barbara gives the testimony already quoted, Michael Angelo Titmarsh himself breaks off at a tantalizing point—just as he is about to announce an "Essay on the State of the Fine Arts in this Kingdom, my Proposals for the
General Improvement of Public Taste, and my Plan for the Education of Young Artists." This elaborate title suggests an ambitious program that Thackeray himself might have undertaken had he obtained the editorship he sought at this time, but, as it happened, such a post eluded him until late in life. During these apprentice years he found it necessary to “make a dash at all the magazines,” as he advised a young cousin with writing ambitions to do. Since in his capacity of “cricket” Titmarsh had to chirp widely, his various “Proposals” must be pieced together from scattered places.

Some years later, when, as the author of Pendennis, Thackeray was vying “at the top of the tree” with the author of David Copperfield, one reviewer distinguished Dickens as the more “poetic in style” of the two, whereas Thackeray was regarded as the “more careful artist.” To his deftness both with pen and pencil was attributed Thackeray’s care and exactness of description. “Being the illustrator of his own works, and accustomed, therefore, to reduce his fancies to visible form and outline,” observed this critic, “he attains in the result, greater clearness and precision, than one who works only in language, or who has to get his fancies made visible to himself by the pencil of another.” His technical knowledge derived from several periods of training both at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and at ateliers (particularly the atelier of Antoine-Jean Gros) in Paris, furthermore, provided Thackeray with a special insight in judging the accomplishments of easel painters. However, in the literary preoccupations of his art criticisms—with their emphasis on action, incident, and character—one recognizes the nascent novelist fully as much as the apprentice painter.

Some of the titles of Thackeray-Titmarsh’s art criticisms suggest the monocled museum hopper and dilettante: “Strictures on Pictures,” “May Gambols,” “Picture Gossip,” “A Ramble in the Picture Galleries.” Although it is true that Thackeray once offered himself to an editor as suited to handle “light matters connected with Art,” there is every evidence that he did not take the painter’s vocation lightly. Following him through the numerous exhibitions he viewed and reported on, one is immediately impressed with the quasi-prophetic character he attached to a calling that a good many of his audience at the time were prone to regard as little more than a skilled craft. In one review, for example, Titmarsh referred to artists as “professors at the easel,” a term, one suspects, that he meant in a double sense. At the conclusion of his “Pictorial Rhapsody,” he went so far as to propose himself, probably only half in jest, as the head of a projected government college for artists. This,
like the “aristocratic literary paper,” proved an idle dream, but Fraser's, Punch, the Morning Chronicle, the Pictorial Times, and other journals furnished him with a substitute for an academic chair. These outlets enabled him to promote the moral and social value of “the ingenious arts, which prevent the ferocity of the manners, and act upon them as an emollient,” and much of his critical writing on “the fine harts” was aimed at strengthening the influence of the artist over the public. “What a marvellous power is this of the painter’s!” he exclaims in the course of one of his gallery tours, “how each great man can excite us at his will! what a weapon he has, if he knows how to wield it!” For Titmarsh the “professor at the easel,” no less than the great orator, is in a position to sway and uplift multitudes, and more. A great painting can produce a spiritual effect: “. . . straightway your mind is carried away in an ecstasy,—happy thrilling hymns sound in your ears melodious,—sweet thankfulness fills your bosom. How much instruction and happiness have we gained from the men, and how grateful should we be to them!”

“Instruction and happiness.” The function of delightful teaching that Thackeray’s favorite classical critic Horace had assigned to the writer is here applied to the artist. Titmarsh’s “Plan for the Education of Artists” was to include (like the course of study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts under the auspices of the Institut de Paris, which may have been his model) “the benefits of a good literary education without which artists may never prosper.” In his sketch “The Artists,” which followed shortly after, Thackeray explicitly allied this noble body with the classical ideal of paideia. “If we read the works of the Reverend Doctor Lemprière, Monsieur Winckelmann, Professor Plato, and others who have written concerning the musty old Grecians,” he observes, “we shall find that Artists of those barbarous times meddled with all sorts of trades besides their own, and dabbled in fighting, philosophy, metaphysics, both Scotch and German, politics, music, and the deuce knows what.” He looks back fondly on the times of the “benighted heathens” when “painters were the most accomplished gentlemen—and the most accomplished gentlemen were painters: the former would make you a speech, or read you a dissertation on Kant, or lead you a regiment,—with the very best statesmen, philosopher, or soldier in Athens.” He regrets the fall from eminence of the artist in his own time—a decline he blames in part on the art student himself. “Do our young artists study anything beyond the proper way of cutting a pencil, or drawing a model?” he asks. “Do you hear of them hard at
work over books, and bothering their brains with musty learning? Not they forsooth: we understand the doctrine of division of labour, and each man sticks to his trade; and, in revenge, the rest of the world does not meddle with Artists."  

As one of them, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, very much like his great namesake who also looked to classical antiquity as his ideal, was arguing for recognition of painters as members of a learned profession rather than mere craftsmen. He was much concerned at this time that "young Artists are not generally as well instructed as they should be; and let the Royal Academy look to it, and give some sound course of lectures to their pupils on literature and history, as well as on anatomy, or light and shade."  

In good time, Clive Newcome was to incarnate his ideal of the artist as young man. Meanwhile his art criticism served to disseminate his humanism to his fellows of the brush. As a "professor" at the press as well as at the easel, Thackeray-Titmarsh sought to educate the public of the artist also. One indication of his overriding concern for the status of the painter is his playful device of conferring titles on them—Baron Briggs, Daniel Prince Maclise, Edwin, Earl of Landseer, Lord Charles Landseer, the Duke of Etty, Archbishop Eastlake, and His Majesty King Mulready.  

Concurrently he tried to remove barriers between the artist and his appreciators. He attributed the greatness of Cruikshank, for one example, to his very freedom from pretension: "... living amongst the public, [he] has with them a general wide-hearted sympathy... he laughs at what they laugh at... he has a kindly spirit of enjoyment, with not a morsel of mysticism in his composition."  

Behind much of Thackeray's writing on other artists, and on art appreciation in general, lies a tacit endeavor to bring the painter and his public together. Hence he explores along the way such larger issues as the artist's place in society, his utility, his original contribution to basic human needs. As himself a man of wide culture, intellectual curiosity, and versatility, he manages to demonstrate also, if incidentally, how the various arts interpenetrate and enhance each other. Criticism thereby becomes for him a process of mental and moral cultivation at once humanistic and humanitarian. If his ultimate aim was the improvement of popular taste and of the condition of the arts in general, Titmarsh recognized that the training and practice of artists themselves were fundamental, so that much of his criticism attempted to guide them in what he regarded as the proper choice of subject matter as well as technique. His admiration for the classical curriculum of the Ecole des
Beaux-Arts did not extend to the "antique" mode of representation that was taught there. Some of Titmarsh's caustic reactions to received masterpieces reflect Thackeray's own struggles to throw off the "grand" style that he had been subjected to during his student days, "the bloated, unnatural, stilted, spouting, sham sublime, that our teachers have believed and tried to pass off as real, and which your humble servants and other anti-humbuggists should heartily, according to the strength that is in them, endeavour to pull down." Thackeray complained to his friend Edward FitzGerald that "what I have seen of the German illuminated school is donkeyism—poor précieuse stuff with a sickening sanctified air." He was no more taken with the style historique that seems to have abounded on both sides of the Channel. "We have an exhibition here with 2500 pictures in it, of which about a
Thackeray reported in a letter to his friend and fellow artist Frank Stone in connection with a showing at the Luxembourg Gallery: "lots of history pieces, or what they call here 'école anecdotique,'—little facts cut [out] of history and dressed in correct costumes; battles, murders and adulteries are the subjects preferred. . . . there are lots of six-and-thirty feet canvases, but not a good one among them." We get one sample from the school in the "Boadishia . . . with the Roman 'elmet, cuirass and javeling of the period" painted by Clive Newcome's master Gandish, and another in Clive's own General Wellesley at the Battle of Assaye that he later disowns.

The successful artist for Titmarsh, no less than the successful writer, is dignified without pretension. An unnamed young man who attends a show with him at the Royal Academy described in "Picture Gossip" sounds like Thackeray's spokesman. Like Clive Newcome, this young man has studied "High Art" in Rome, and counterreacts: "At the tragic, swaggering, theatrical-historical pictures he yawned; before some of the grand flashy landscapes he stood without the least emotion; but before some quiet scenes of humor or pathos, or some easy little copy of nature, the youth stood in pleased contemplation." This artist-student turns for refreshment to "little pictures," which to him are "worth a hundred times more than the big ones," whose "heroism is borrowed from the theatre," and whose "sentiment is so maudlin that it makes you sick." "I would sooner have so-and-so's little sketch ('A Donkey on a Common') than What-d'ye-call-'em's enormous picture ('Sir Walter Manny and the Crusaders Discovering Nova Scotia')," he declares, "and prefer yonder unpretending sketch, 'Shrimp Catchers, Morning' (how exquisitely the long and level sands are touched off! how beautifully the morning light touches the countenances of the fishermen, and illuminates the rosy features of the shrimps!) to yonder pretentious illustration from Spencer [sic], 'Sir Botibol Rescues Una from Sir Uglimore in the Cave of the Enchantress Ichtyosaura.'"

Titmarsh obviously shares his friend's predilection toward the "small picture" for a variety of reasons. At times he is simply the antisnob. "'Bertrand de Gourdon pardoned by Richard' is a work of some merit," he concedes about a prize historical painting of the time, "but why kings, Mr. Cross? Why kings, Messieurs artists? Have men no hearts, save under the purple? Does sorrow only sit upon thrones?" As he says elsewhere: "A man, as a man, from a
dustman up to Aeschylus, is God's work, and good to read, as all works of Nature are." At other times he cautions the budding artist to scale down his ambition, as Clive Newcome learns to do. Unlike Browning's Andrea del Sarto, Titmarsh believes that a man's reach should not exceed his grasp. "I see no symptoms of thought, or of minds strong and genuine enough to cope with elevated subjects," complains the disenchanted disciple of "High Art" before the "heroic" paintings at the Royal Academy. "If, however, the aspiring men don't succeed, the modest do," he adds, "and what they have really seen or experienced, our artists can depict with successful accuracy and delightful skill." Fundamentally, however, size, great or small, for Titmarsh was related to the principle of economy—the artist's ability to make much of little. "It is absurd you will say . . . for Titmarsh, or any other Briton, to grow so politically enthusiastic about a four-foot canvas, representing a ship, a steamer, a river, and a sunset," he interrupts his praise of Turner's Fighting Temeraire; "But herein surely lies the power of the great artist. He makes you see and think of a great deal more than the objects before you; he knows how to soothe or intoxicate, to fire or to depress by a few notes, or forms, or colours, of which we cannot trace the effect to the source, but only acknowledge the power." "It is a grand and touching picture; and looks as large as if the three-foot canvas had been twenty," he remarks of William Etty's The Prodigal Son, concluding "what a world of thought can be conjured up out of a few inches of painted canvas." In a museum in Brussels he is struck by a little Rubens portrait of a governess: " . . . just the finest portrait that was ever seen. Only a half-length; but such a majesty, such a force, such a splendor, such a simplicity about it. . . . Here stands the majestic woman in her every day working dress of black satin, looking your hat off, as it were." From such reactions one infers that Titmarsh's rejection of "the ancient, heroic, allegorical subjects," as he denounces them in one sweeping anathema, is part of his campaign for the contemporary, domestic, realistic subject matter he considers more suitable to the modern artist. For one thing, such subjects brought the artist closer to what he was painting than was possible with models, making for that quality he prized above all else in art—a spontaneity of response that can readily be transferred to the viewer. "These pictures come straight to the heart, and then all criticism and calculation vanishes at once," he writes of a genre piece that touched him. "Not one of these figures but has a grace and soul of his own; no
conventional copies of the stony antique; no distorted caricatures, like those of your 'classiques,'” he notes with pleasure about William Mulready’s *Seven Ages*, “... but such expressions as a great poet would draw, who thinks profoundly and truly, and never forgets ... grace and beauty withal.” Thackeray seems here to have carried with him one lesson he learned from his schoolboy reading in Watt’s *Logic*: “... and let as many of your ideas as possible be the representation of things, and not merely the representation of other men’s ideas. ... thus your soul, like some noble building, shall be furnished with original paintings, and not with mere copies.” Various judgments show his inclination toward “original” work in favor of “copies.” Holman Hunt’s portrait heads impress him with their “real nature, real expression, real startling home poetry”; on the other hand, “What could Monsieur Laffond care about the death of Eudamidas? What was Hecuba to the Chevalier Drolling, or Chevalier Drolling to Hecuba?” he asks, as he turns away from two derivative products of the “Imperio-Davidoclassical” school in the Louvre. Far more appealing to him are *La prière* by Monsieur Trimolet, “a quiet little painting” depicting a missal painter and his wife praying for the life of a sickly child; Madame Juillerat’s representation of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary leading a little beggar boy into her house, with its “pleasant, mystic, innocent look,” which leaves one “all the better for regarding it”; Monsieur Biard’s *Slave Trade*, judged “as fine as Hogarth”; Monsieur Meissonier’s *The Chess Players*, “about four-inches square ... truly an astonishing piece of workmanship. No silly tricks of effect, and abrupt startling shadow and light, but a picture painted with the minuteness and accuracy of a daguerreotype. and as near as possible perfect in its kind ... every one of them [chess players and chessmen] an accurate portrait, with all the light, shadow, roundness, character, and colour belonging to it.”

The social and artistic milieu he moved in as well as his temperament conditioned Thackeray’s “plebianism” toward painting. As art student, critic, and observer of the social scene, he came of age in a period of the democratization and popularization of the arts, an era characterized, according to a recent art historian, by “the co-existence of many different genres, often of a highly specialized nature, the relative indifference to mythology, the corresponding love of landscape and seascape, the interest in domestic scenes, mild anecdotic pleasantries, in still life, in very highly finished surfaces, and very minute naturalism, the emphasis on people rather than ideas, on psychological and moral problems, rather than on
In his *Paris Sketch Book*, Thackeray shows that he was very much aware of the new trend. Here he relates "the little pictures" to which he responded with so much pleasure to "that agreeable branch of the art for which we have I believe no name, but which the French call *genre.*" He attaches other labels to these pictures of which "there are at Paris several eminent professors"—such as "small history subjects," "the serious melodramatic," and, with a nod toward the new patrons for the emergent artists of the 1830s and 1840s, "the *bourgeois* style." In 1843, in a fictitious letter addressed to a hypothetical artist, one Sanders McGilp, Esq., he expresses his satisfaction with the analogous trend in his own country toward what came to be known as "Dutch painting." "They paint from *the heart* more than of old, and less from the old heroic, absurd, incomprehensible, unattainable rules. They look at Nature very hard, and match her with the best of their eyes and ability," he reports of the new English school. "They do not aim at such great subjects as heretofore, or at subjects which the world is pleased to call great, viz., tales from Hume or Gibbon of royal personages under various circumstances, of battle, murder, and sudden death. . . . The heroic, and peace be with it! has been deposed; and our artists, in place, cultivate the pathetic and the familiar."

In espousing the "pathetic and familiar" or "bourgeois art" through his alter ego Titmarsh and other mouthpieces such as Professor Byles and M. Gobemouche, or sounding boards such as M. Anatole Victor de Bricabrac and the young dropout from the Academy at Rome, Thackeray obviously was endeavoring to raise not only the status of modern artists but also the prestige of the ordinary, the local, and the temporal as their proper subjects. "Now, as Nature made every man with a nose and eyes of his own, she gave him a character of his own too," he muses on one of his gambols among the galleries of Paris, "and yet we, O foolish race! must try our very best to ape some one or two of our neighbours, whose ideas fit us no more than their breeches!" Accordingly he finds his delectation in scenes taken from popular literature (e.g., Leslie's "Vicar of Wakefield," Maclise's "Gil Blas") as well as from everyday life (e.g., Redgrave's depiction of a governess in sorrow as she reads a black-edged note; Stone's representation of a rustic young lover proposing; Charles Landseer's country drinking party; McNee's "young person musing in a quiet nook and thinking of her love"). In the Louvre he is moved by *The Two Friends*, by a minor genre artist, M. Debay, which concentrates attention on a nursing
mother who has taken on the additional burden of feeding the infant of a feeble companion. “Monsieur Debay’s pictures are not bad, as most of the others . . . appertaining to the bourgeois class,” he observes somewhat condescendingly, “but, good or bad, I can’t but own that I like to see these honest, hearty representations which work upon good simple feeling in a good, downright way; and if not works of art, are certainly works that can do a great deal of good, and make honest people happy.” As one who, he was to write in *Henry Esmond*, “would have History familiar rather than heroic,” he responds with equal emotion to the “human” side of great men, represented in painting. A picture in the Louvre showing Napoleon reading military dispatches while his infant son sleeps on his knee evoked this reaction from the worldly Titmarsh: “What a contrast! The conqueror of the world, the stern warrior, the great giver of laws and ruler of nations, he dare not move because the little baby is asleep and he would not disturb him for all the kingdoms he knows so well how to conquer.” This may not be art either, he concludes, “but it is pleasant to see fat, good-natured mothers and grandmothers clustered round this picture and looking at it with solemn eyes.”

With such responses we find Titmarsh shedding the sophistication of the critic and connoisseur to put himself in the place of the naive appreciator. In this role he displays, like his hero Philip Firmin, a “childish sensibility for what was tender, helpless, pretty, or pathetic; and a mighty scorn of imposture, wherever he found it.”

Out of these twin impulses issue both his denunciation of the “sham sublime” and his championship of the “true pathetic” in art as well as in life. The combination of inclination, trial and error, and circumstance drew Thackeray toward “low art.” His recognition of the rarity of transcendent genius and his own modest accomplishment as a painter have already been suggested as influences on his taste, together with his desire to improve the rapport between the artists and the general public. Above all, however, Thackeray became convinced that the modern artist’s principal function was to interpret his world as his predecessors had interpreted theirs, and much of his writing on art, accordingly, is directed toward stimulating the alertness of his fellow artists to their environment.

“It is the study of Nature, surely, that profits us, and not of these imitations of her,” is the credo advanced by Titmarsh to the copyers of Michelangelo in Saint Peter’s and of Poussin and David in the Louvre. As Thackeray pointed out in an essay on a literary man
of his acquaintance, "originality" should be the primary goal of the creative artist, to be achieved not so much by inventiveness as by working from fresh sources of inspiration: "The very characteristic of genius is to be imitative—first of authors, then of nature. Books lead us to fancy feelings that are not yet genuine. Experience is necessary to record those which colour our own existence; and the style becomes original in proportion as the sentiment it expresses is sincere." Punch's Prize Novelists, which followed this essay by a year, seems to have been intended to demonstrate, among other things, the absurdity of "fancy feelings" produced by reading untested by experience. Books, we gather from this famous series of parodies, can carry the creative mind just so far and no farther. The same goes for pictures and the toadies after the "false antique" and the "sham sublime" in painting. Thackeray once confided to a friend, after attempts to copy two Titians, a Leonardo portrait, and some Dutch masters in the Louvre: "They are all of them very bad, but I don't despair—tonight I begin at the life academy." One has the feeling that here Thackeray meant "life academy" in other than the art student's sense. Here he seems to be in accord with the plein-air creed of the Barbizon painters who anticipated the impressionists.

"Copy Nature," Thackeray-Titmarsh admonished his fellow artists, a doctrine that goes back at least as far as Aristotle—and one always easier to pronounce than to put into practice. What Thackeray meant beyond the classical mimesis can be inferred, if not precisely pinned down. The influence has already been suggested of Watts's Logic, which urged the learning "as much as possible at first hand." Along these lines, some of Titmarsh's "strictures on pictures" are of interest mainly for what they tell the artist not to do. He finds the "humbug" of David and Girodet less deplorable than that of the German Nazarenes, for one instance, because the first, he contends, is "founded on Nature at least," while the latter is "made up of silly affectations and improvements upon Nature." "On n'embeilit pas la nature, my dear Bricabrac," he declares to a supposed Parisian confidant concerning one of his more controversial countrymen; "one may make pert caricatures of it, or mad exaggerations like Mr. Turner in his fancy pieces. O ye gods! why will he not stick to copying her majestical countenance, instead of daubing it with some absurd antics and fard of his own?" Distortion and mannerism, it appears from such remarks, are to be avoided. Thackeray himself freely indulged in "mad exaggera-
tions" when it came to satire and parody, and was not above "pert caricatures" in his cartoons and decorated initials, but he looked for correct representation in scenes and portraits from life.\(^{42}\)

On the positive side, the artist's great gift, according to Titmarsh, seems to be the ability to bring out the qualities inherent in nature. The successful artist, we gather from some pictures that he praises, stimulates our sensuous response to things of this world. Among painters in the grand style, Titian and Rubens are hailed as the harbingers of a new dawn in art "with their brilliant colours and dashing worldly notions." As for contemporaries: "Look for a while at Mr. Etty's pictures and away you rush, your 'eyes on fire' drunken with the luscious colours that are poured out for you on the liberal canvas. . . . You fly from this . . . and plunge into a green shady landscape of Lee or Creswick, and follow a quiet stream babbling beneath whispering trees, and chequered with cool shade and golden sunshine; or you set the world—nay the Thames and the ocean—on fire with the incendiary Turner." Titmarsh's enthusiasms extend also to those artists who stir the elemental emotions: "... you laugh with honest, kind-hearted Webster, or you fall a-weeping with Monsieur Biard for his poor blacks."\(^{43}\) Although a follower of nature, the artist, for Titmarsh, is no literalist. Far from being a mere transcriber of the external world, it is the artist's "great end . . . to strike far deeper than the sight," Titmarsh proclaims in one of his critical pieces.\(^{44}\) Accuracy of drawing combines with spontaneity of feeling in his conception of "nature." A good picture is at once eye-filling and, in his own term, "rhapsodic."

Titmarsh certainly did not believe that technique alone made a painter, as in his judgment, for one example, of Charles Landseer's biblical picture *Pillage of a Jew's House*, in his opinion "a very well and carefully painted picture, containing a great many figures and good points; but we are not going to praise it: it wants vigour to our taste, and what you call actualité."\(^{45}\) A similar fault is found with one of Charles Eastlake's illustrations from the Bible: "The scene is not represented with its actual agony and despair; but it is, as it were, a sort of limning to remind you of the scene."\(^{46}\) From these and other remarks one can easily gather that for Titmarsh, vitality—the illusion of living people—is the greatest value that the artist can impart to his work—and one that can make up for lack of skill. In some of his criticisms he tries to get to the root of this quality. The figures in the Landseer painting, he complains, look "as if they were in a tableau and paid for standing there; one longs
to see them all in motion and naturally employed.” Charles Robert Leslie, a rival painter, is congratulated on the other hand for his illustration of a scene from *Roderick Random*, in which each character “acts his part in the most admirable unconscious way—there is no attempt at a *pose* or a *tableau* . . . everybody is busied, and perfectly naturally, with the scene, at which the spectator is admitted to look.” For Titmarsh dynamism and the sense of motion are among the artist’s means for conveying the illusion of actuality in a picture, whether the scene is in the present or the past, the person king or commoner. “You want something more than a composition, and a set of costumes and figures decently posed and studied,” he observed of a historical episode painted by Charles Leeser, *Charles I Before the Battle of Edge Hill*, in which the doomed monarch is shown relaxing by an inn on the eve of battle, watching a young girl munch on a ham bone. “Now all this is very well, but you want something more than this in a historic picture, which should have its parts, characters, varieties, and climax like a drama. You don’t want the *Deus inter sit* for no other purpose than to look at a knuckle of ham.” To this “cricket” the art of painting, no less than the art of story telling, means involving the audience in active life.

Young Clive Newcome, once he is removed from Gandish’s studio, is thus engaged as he plants himself in the streets of Rome to observe the passing parade: “By this time Clive’s books were full of sketches. . . . Ruins imperial and medieval; peasants and bag-pipemen; Passionists with shaven polls; Capuchins and the equally hairy frequenter of the Café Greco; painters of all nations who resort there; Cardinals and their queer equipages and attendants; the Holy Father himself . . . the dandified English on the Pincio and the wonderful Roman members of the hunt—were not all these designed by the young man and admired by his friends in after days?” Not destined himself for great success as a painter, Thackeray turned his alert eye, sensitivity to color, and heightened tactile sense—all the faculties he endeavored to train in himself and in his fellow art students—to good use in the word pictures and living dioramas that distinguish his novels. Some of his most impressive effects can be attributed to verbal translation of techniques he admired among the pictorial realists and “bourgeois” painters of his time.

One minor French genre painter to whom Thackeray gave what may now seem exaggerated praise was Mme Juillerat, whose paintings on medieval subjects he much preferred to the work of the then more celebrated Nazarene school. He was impressed in par-
ticular with the convincing illusion of her religious subjects, an effect he traces to her adoption of the methods of medieval miniaturists: "What a fine instinct or taste it was in the old missal illuminators to be so particular in the painting of the minor parts of their pictures!" he exclaims; "the precise manner in which the flowers and leaves, birds and branches, are painted, gives an air of truth and simplicity to the whole performance, and makes nature, as it were, an accomplice and actor in the scene going on." He is speaking here of Mme Juillerat's representation of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary succoring a beggar boy, the appeal of which is enhanced by such details as bright-colored roses and chirping blackbirds. In his opinion, "if the flowers on the young ladies' heads had been omitted, and not painted with their pleasing minuteness and circumstantiality, I fancy that the effect of the piece would have been by no means the same." Monsieur Servan, another "artist of the mystical school," is commended for employing these "same adjuncts" with the result that the viewer's perceptions are quickened and he is drawn into the picture almost despite himself: "One of his pictures represents Saint Augustin meditating in a garden; a great cluster of rose-bushes, hollyhocks, and other plants is in the foreground, most accurately delineated; and a fine rich landscape and river stretch behind the saint. . . ." In his own verbal landscapes Thackeray applies this same "minuteness," "circumstantiality," and accuracy of delineation, as in this description of Colonel Newcome's birthplace at Clapham:

When his father married, Mr. Thomas Newcome, jun. and Sarah his nurse were transported from the cottage where they had lived in great comfort to the palace hard by, surrounded by lawns and gardens, pineries, graperies, aviaries, luxuries of all kinds. This paradise, five miles from the Standard at Cornhill, was separated from the outer world by a thick hedge of tall trees, and an ivy-covered porter's gate, through which they who travelled to London on top of the Clapham coach could only get a glimpse of the bliss within. It was a serious paradise. . . . The rooks in the elms cawed sermons at morning and evening; the peacocks walked demurely on the terraces; the guinea-fowls looked more quaker-like than those savoury-birds usually do.

The author (through his alter ego Arthur Pendennis) has indeed made nature "an accomplice and an actor in the scene going on," the very birds taking on the character of this "serious paradise." In another such "set piece" from The Virginians—the estate of the Lambert family, which we see for the first time in company with Harry Warrington—tangible detail helps to identify home and owner:
Two tall gates, each surmounted by a couple of heraldic monsters, led from the high-road up to a neat broad stone terrace, whereon stood Oakhurst House: a square brick building, with windows faced with stone, and many high chimneys, and a tall roof surmounted by a fair balustrade. Behind the house stretched a large garden, where there was plenty of room for cabbages as well as roses to grow; and before the mansion, separated from it by the high-road, was a field of many acres, where the Colonel's cows and horses were at grass. Over the centre window was a carved shield supported by the same monsters who pranced or ramped upon the entrance-gates; and a coronet over the shield. The fact is, that the house has been originally the jointure-house of Oakhurst Castle, which stood hard by,—its chimneys and turrets appearing over the surrounding woods, now bronzed with the darkest foliage of summer. (chap. 22).

This being a literary landscape, the author has supplied us with a historical note.

In his criticisms of portraits—another form of genre piece that he much admired—Thackeray looked for accuracy of sartorial detail. "A painter should be as careful about his costumes as an historian about his dates, or he plays the deuce with his composition," he declared on one of his visits to the Royal Academy. On this occasion his eye is caught by George Richmond's *The Children of Colonel Lindsay*: "Such satins and lace, such diamond rings and charming little lapdogs, were never painted before,—not by Watteau, the first master of the genre,—and Lancret, who was scarcely his inferior." Not surprisingly, Thackeray clothes his own personages fastidiously:

At a quarter past ten the Major invariably made his appearance in the best blacked boots in all London, with a checked morning cravat that never was rumpled until dinner time, a buff waistcoat which bore the crown of the sovereign on the buttons, and linen so spotless that Mr. Brummel himself asked the name of his laundress, and would probably have employed her had not misfortunes compelled that great man to fly the country. Pendennis's coat, his white gloves, his whiskers, his very cane, were perfect of their kind as specimens of the costume of a military man *en retraite*.

He takes pains even with supernumerary figures: "Of the other illustrious persons whom Becky had the honour to encounter on this her first presentation to the grand world, it does not become the present historian to say much. There was his Excellency the Prince Peterwaradin, with his Princess; a nobleman tightly girthed, with a large military chest, on which the *plaque* of his order shone magnificently, and the red collar of the Golden Fleece round his neck. He was the owner of countless flocks." No admirer of still life or static pose, as we have seen, Thackeray is most noteworthy.
for his ability literally to animate a portrait, as in our introduction to Henry Esmond's aunt, Lady Isabella, at home:

My Lady Viscountess's face was daubed with white and red up to the eyes to which paint gave an unearthly glare: she had a tower of lace on her head, under which was a bush of black curls—borrowed curls. . . . She sate in a great chair by the fire-corner; in her lap was a spaniel-dog that barked furiously; on a little table by her was her ladyship's snuff-box and her sugar-plum box. She wore a dress of black velvet, and a petticoat of flame-coloured brocade. She had as many rings on her fingers as the old woman of Banbury Cross; and pretty small feet which she was fond of showing, with great gold clocks to her stockings, and white pantoftles with red heels; and an odour of musk was shook out of her garments whenever she moved or quitted the room, leaning on her tortoiseshell stick, little Fury barking at her heels. 

Visual and kinetic stimuli join to bring My Lady Viscountess to life. She does not merely "sit" for her portrait, but gets up out of her chair and casts off perfume. Even her lap dog is active.

Titmarsh was equally sensitive to the surroundings amidst which his persons sit and move, as indicated in one of his gallery talks by his admiration for the "curious fidelity and skill" of Douglas Morrison's Windsor and Buckingham Palace sketches:

There is the dining-hall in Buckingham Palace with all the portraits, all the candles in all the chandeliers; the China gimcracks over the mantelpiece, the dinner-table set out; the napkins folded mitre-wise, the round water-glasses, the sherry-glasses, the champagne ditto. . . . There is the Queen's own chamber at Windsor, her Majesty's piano, her Royal writing-table, an escritoire with pigeon-holes, where the august papers are probably kept; and very curious, clever, and ugly all these pictures of furniture are too, and will be a model for the avoidance of upholsterers in coming ages.

In his own "interiors" Thackeray succeeds in giving solidity and density to decor. For one notable instance we are quickly made to feel the massiveness and stiffness of the Brian Newcomes' mansion on Park Lane, as we enter it alongside Clive and his father the Colonel: 

A splendid portrait of the late Earl of Kew in his peer's robes hangs opposite his daughter and her harp. We are writing of George the Fourth's reign; I daresay there hung in the room a fine framed print of that great sovereign. The chandelier is in a canvas bag; the vast sideboard, whereon are erected open frames for the support of Sir Brian Newcome's grand silver trays, which on dinner days gleam on that festive board, now groans under the weight of Sir Brian's bluebooks. An immense receptacle for wine, shaped like a Roman
sarcophagus, lurks under the sideboard. Two people sitting at that large dining-table must talk very loud so as to make themselves heard across those great slabs of mahogany covered with damask. The butler and the servants who attend at the table take a long time walking around it. I picture to myself two persons of ordinary size sitting in that great room at that great table, far apart, in neat evening costume, sipping a little sherry, silent, genteel, and glum.88

Furthermore, in Thackeray's remarkable ability to give texture to objects and surfaces, one can recognize the literary equivalent of a technique that he observed among French artists as a further aid to the illusion of actuality. During one of his strolls through the Louvre, he noticed that some landscape painters had "laid aside the slimy weak manner formerly in vogue, and perhaps have adopted in its place a method equally reprehensible—that of plastering their pictures excessively." This method, known technically as impasting (impasto) is effective in the representation of solid masses, "a piece of old timber, or a crumbling wall, or the ruts and stones in a road," but he felt that it was being employed to excess in some of the works he was looking at: "... here the skies are trowelled on; the light-vapouring distances are as thick as plum-pudding, the cool clear shadows are mashed-down masses of sienna and indigo." Still, he concedes that "by these violent means, a certain power is had."89

Thackeray himself liked at times to "plaster" on detail, particularly to suggest human "old timber" or a "crumbling wall" like the well-named Lady Castlemouldy:

A stout countess of sixty, décolletée, painted, wrinkled, with rouge up to her drooping eyelids, and diamonds twinkling in her wig, is a wholesome and edifying, but not a pleasant sight. . . . If even Cynthia looks haggard of an afternoon, as we may see her sometimes in the present winter season, with Phoebus staring her out of countenance from the opposite side of the heavens, how much more can old Lady Castlemouldy keep her head up when the sun is shining full upon it through the chariot windows, and showing all the chinks and crannies with which time has marked her face?90

As the party went down the great staircase of Gaunt House, the morning had risen stark and clear over the black trees of the square; the skies were tinged with pink; and the cheeks of some of the people at the ball,—ah, how ghastly they looked! That admirable and devoted Major [Pendennis] above all,—who had been for hours by Lady Clavering's side, ministering to her and feeding her body with everything that was nice, and her ear with everything that was sweet and flattering,—oh! what an object he was! The rings round his eyes were of the colour of bistre; those orbs themselves were like the
plovers' eggs whereof Lady Clavering and Blanche had tasted; the wrinkles in his old face were furrowed with deep gashes; and a silver stubble, like an elderly morning dew, was glittering on his chin, and alongside the dyed whiskers, now limp and out of curl.61

Human habitations at times appear three dimensional under Thackeray’s trowel-like pen. Queens Crawley looms up ponderously before Becky and Rawdon as they approach the ancestral hall after an absence of nine years: “They were going through the lodge-gates kept by old Mrs. Lock, whose hand Rebecca insisted upon shaking, as she flung open the creaking old iron gate, and the carriage passed between the two moss-grown pillars surmounted by the dove and serpent. . . . The gravel walk and terrace had been scraped quite clean. A grand painted hatchment was already over the great entrance, and two very solemn and tall personages in black each flung open a leaf of the door as the carriage pulled up at the familiar steps.”62 This method of “laying-on” can be seen in full play in a lesser novel where tactile imagery is employed to evoke an unhappy household with an impact that is as much physical as visual:

Everything in Dr. Firmin’s house was as handsome as might be, and yet somehow the place was not cheerful. One’s steps fell noiselessly on the faded Turkey carpet; the room was large, and all save the dining-table in a dingy twilight. The picture of Mrs. Firmin looked at us from the wall, and followed us about with wild violet eyes. Philip Firmin had the same violet odd bright eyes, and the same coloured hair of an auburn tinge; in the picture it fell in long wild masses over the lady’s back as she leaned with bare arms on a harp. Over the sideboard was the Doctor, in a black velvet coat and a fur collar, his hand on a skull, like Hamlet. Skulls of oxen, horned with wreaths, formed the cheerful ornaments of the cornice. On the side-table glittered a pair of cups, given by grateful patients, looking like receptacles rather for funereal ashes than for festive flowers or wine. . . . The drawing-room had a rhubarb-coloured flock paper . . . a great piano, a harp smothered in a leather bag in the corner, which the languid owner now never touched; and everybody’s face seemed scared and pale in the great looking-glasses, which reflected you over and over again into the distance, so that you seemed to twinkle off right through the Albany into Piccadilly.63

This thickening of verbal paint is employed by Thackeray in his living portraits, vivified landscapes, and vitalized interiors to represent the excesses of affectation, pomposity, and ornamentation indulged in by his personages. The technique, in its particular application here, might be called the impasto of imposture.

Thackeray’s ability to bring his leading characters to life is widely acclaimed, but not so much, perhaps, the pains he takes with the
numerous "extras" in his novels. As art critic he complained of one of Sir David Wilkie's large-scale paintings that the men and women in it "seem to be painted with snuff and tallow-grease: the faces are merely indicated, and without individuality; the forms only half-drawn, and almost always wrong." As literary painter Thackeray could not be accused of such negligence. He manages to give precise identity even to figures whom we meet but fleetingly at Lord Steyne's ball in Gaunt House: "There was Mr. John Paul Jefferson Jones, titularly attached to the American Embassy, and correspondent of the New York Demagogue. . . . He and George [Lord Steyne] had been most intimate at Naples, and had gone up Vesuvius together. Mr. Jones wrote a full and particular account of the dinner, which appeared duly in the Demagogue." Mr. Jones has been particularized, not so much by painterly means in this instance, but through the narrative artist's medium of time—past, present, and future fused in one moment. Other subsidiary figures are individualized through names and genealogy:

Here, before long, Becky received not only "the best" foreigners (as the phrase is in our noble and admirable society slang), but some of the best English people too . . . such as the great Lady Fitz-Willis, the Patron Saint of Almack's, the great Lady Slowbore, the great Lady Grizel Macbeth (she was Lady G. Glowy, daughter of Lord Grey of Glowy), and the like. When the Countess of Fitz-Willis (her ladyship is of the King-Street family, see Debrett and Burke,) takes up a person, he or she is safe. There is no question about them any more. Not that my Lady Fitz-Willis is any better than anybody else, being, on the contrary, a faded person, fifty-seven years of age, and neither handsome, nor wealthy, nor entertaining; but it is agreed on all sides that she is of the "best people."

Always diverting, as well as revealing how close he was to the best practices of the genre painters of his time, are the ways in which Thackeray met the challenge, inevitably posed by the panoramic scale of his novels, of "placing" large assemblages. The care he took with such scenes can be exemplified by the episode where Arthur Pendennis goes to dine with "The Knights of the Temple":

In term-time, Mr. Pen showed a most praiseworthy regularity in performing one part of the law-student's course of duty, and eating his dinners in Hall. Indeed, that Hall of the Upper temple is a sight not uninteresting, and with the exception of some trifling improvements and anachronisms which have been introduced to the practice there, a man may sit down and fancy that he joins in a meal of the seventeenth century. The bar have their messes, the students have their tables apart; the benchers sit at the high table on the raised platform, surrounded by pictures of judges of the law and portraits of royal personages who have honoured its festivities with
their presence and patronage. Pen looked about, on his first intro-
duction, not a little amused with the scene which he witnessed.
Among his comrades of the student class there were gentlemen of all
ages, from sixty to seventeen; stout grey-headed attorneys who were
proceeding to take the superior dignity,—dandies and men-about-
town who wished for some reason to be barristers of seven years' 
standing,—swarthy, black-eyed natives of the Colonies, who came to
be called here before they practiced in their own islands,—and many
gentlemen of the Irish nation, who make a sojourn in Middle Tem-
ple Lane before they return to the green country of their birth.
There were little squads of reading students who talked law all
dinner-time; there were rowing men, whose discourse was of sculling
matches, the Red House, Vauxhall, and the Opera; there were
others great in politics, and orators of the students' debating clubs;
with all which sets, except the first, whose talk was an almost un-
known and a quite uninteresting language to him, Mr. Pen made a
gradual acquaintance, and had many points of sympathy.67

One of Thackeray's American admirers rightly pointed out that
his people "are never portrayed in isolation . . . the mutuality of
their numerous and vital relations furnishes an important strand in
the texture of the very story in which they figure."68 In deploying
the large populations of his huge novelistic canvases Thackeray
seems to have learned something from contemporaneous artists
who turned their attention to groups of people. "I wish you could
see the wonderful accuracy with which all these figures are drawn," 
writes Titmarsh to Monsieur Anatole Bricabrac in praise of Daniel
Maclise's Christmas. He marvels at the "extraordinary skill with
which the artist has managed to throw into a hundred different
faces a hundred different characters and individualities of joy." 
Every one of the "five hundred merry figures painted on this can-
von, gobbling, singing, kissing, carousing," he notes, "has his own
particular smile." 68 Thackeray achieves an analogous variety within
unity in one of his big partying scenes—Harry Warrington's ball at
the Assembly Rooms in Tunbridge Wells:

Mr. Warrington had the honour of a duchess's company at his
tea-drinking—Colonel Lambert's and Mr. Prior's heroine, the
Duchess of Queensberry. And though the Duchess carefully turned
her back upon a Countess who was present, laughed loudly, glanced
at the latter over her shoulder, and pointed at her with her fan, yet
almost all the company pushed, and bowed, and cringed, and smiled,
and backed before this Countess, scarcely taking any notice of Her
Grace of Queensberry and her jokes, and her fan, and her airs. Now
this Countess was no other than the Countess of Yarmouth-
Walmoden, the lady whom his majesty George the Second, of Great
Britain, France, and Ireland, King, defender of the Faith, delighted
to honour. . . . And everybody congratulated the youth on his good
fortune. At night, all the world, in order to show their loyalty doubtless, thronged round my Lady Yarmouth; my Lord Bamborough was eager to make her partie at quadrille; my Lady Blanche Pendragon, that model of virtue; Sir Lancelot Quintain, that pattern of knighthood and valour; Mr. Dean of Ealing, that exemplary divine and preacher; numerous gentlemen, noblemen, generals, colonels, matrons, and spinsters of the highest rank, were on the watch for a smile from her, or eager to jump up and join her card-table. Lady Maria waited upon her with meek respect, and Madame de Bernstein treated the Hanoverian lady with profound gravity and courtesy. 70

One notices here how Thackeray has managed to give each participant in this scene (incidental as it is to the novel as a whole) “his own particular smile” or specific motivation, united as they all are in their deference to George the Second’s current paramour. He has also avoided making this group just so many figures in a tableau, but practiced his own principle by seeing to it that they are “all in motion and naturally employed.” 71

This ability to differentiate individuals within a heterogeneous assembly also impressed Titmarsh in one of Maclise’s more serious studies. “A large part of this vast picture Mr. Maclise has painted very finely,” he writes of this painter’s representation of the banquet scene from Macbeth. “The lords are all there in gloomy state, fierce stalwart men in steel; the variety of attitude and light in which the different groups are placed, the wonderful knowledge and firmness with which each individual figure and feature are placed down upon the canvas will be understood and admired by the public, but by the artist still more, who knows the difficulty of these things, which seem so easy.” Furthermore, “The effect, as far as we know, is entirely new; the figures drawn with exquisite minuteness and clearness, not in the least interrupting the general harmony of the picture.” 72 From this appreciation one turns to a sombre scene in The Newcomes, the Founder’s Day chapel service at Grey Friars, as recollected by Arthur Pendennis:

The boys are already in their seats, with smug fresh faces, and shining white collars; the old black-gowned pensioners are on their benches, the chapel is lighted, and Founders’ Tomb, with its grotesque carvings, monsters, heraldries, darkles and shines with the most wonderful shadows and lights. There he lies, Fundator Noster, in his ruff and gown, awaiting the great Examination Day. We oldsters, be we ever so old, become boys again as we look at that familiar old tomb, and think how the seats were altered since we were here, and how the doctor—not the present doctor, the doctor of our time—used to sit yonder, and his awful eye used to frighten us shuddering boys, on whom it lighted; and how the boy next us would
kick our shins during service time, and how the monitor would cane us afterwards because our shins were kicked. Yonder sit forty cherry-cheeked boys, thinking about home and holidays to-morrow. Yonder sit some three score old gentlemen pensioners of the Hospital, listening to the prayers and the psalms. You hear them coughing feebly in the twilight,—the old reverend blackgowns. Is Codd Ajax alive, you wonder ... or Codd Soldier? or kind old Codd Gentleman? or has the grave closed over them? A plenty of candles lights up this chapel, and this scene of age and youth, and early memories, and pompous death. (Chap. 75)

While he has employed the narrator's privilege of extending "this scene of age and youth" back into the past, and enters into the minds of his figures as no purely graphic artist could, we can catch Thackeray working in the manner of the scene painter to impart a "general harmony" to this mingled group, united by a sense of religious awe in the midst of their various worldly concerns. Evocative detail together with imagery of color and shadow combine to create "the variety of attitude and light in which the different groups are placed."

The precision, meticulousness, and carefully wrought scenic effects of Thackeray's novels were not lost on contemporaneous reviewers, some of whom in fact praised him in the very terms he applied to genre painters. Such phrases as "minute accuracy," "minute anatomy," and "telling minuteness of detail" recur in the critical journals of the time. A memorial tribute connected his "scrupulous fidelity to nature" to realistic painting. Graphic analogies occur here and there, as in an American review that spoke of his "pre-Raphaelite school of novel writing" (meant in compliment to his detailism), and Walter Bagehot's reference to his last completed novel, The Adventures of Philip, as "a sort of annotated picture." The popularity of paintings based on scenes from great novels and dramas, together with the widespread diffusion of fiction in parts "with illustrations on wood and steel," helped to bring the worlds of the artist and writer together in the general mind and made such analogy natural.

For Thackeray books and paintings alike were camera obscura in which reader or viewer beheld himself. The copiousness and density of his literary portraiture and landscape painting serve not as ends in themselves, as some of his detractors have contended, but as means of imitating the dynamic quality of life ("vis," "vigour," "actualité," as he referred to it at various times), which he considered it the supreme function of the artist to reproduce. Hence his emphasis on the present moment (or the presentness of the past in
his historical subjects) and on life in process. After his death, Anne Thackeray wrote of her father: "Mr Titmarsh was for ever observing and recording what he saw. . . . He wrote it down, and he drew the pictures and sketches—specially the sketches—abroad, where shadows are crisper than with us, and houses are quaintier, and the people and the scenes more pleasantly varied." The verbal record of this student tour and apprenticeship is left behind in several colorful tableaux vivants.

The street which we enter, that of the Faubourg St. Denis, presents a strange contrast to the dark uniformity of a London street, where everything, in the dingy and smoky atmosphere, looks as though it were painted in India-ink—black houses, black passengers, and black sky. Here, on the contrary, is a thousand times more life and colour. . . . on each side are houses of all dimensions and hues; some, but of one storey, some as high as the Tower of Babel. From these the haberdashers (and this is their favourite street) flaut long strips of gaudy calicoes, which give a strange air of rude gaiety to the street. Milk-women, with a little crowd of gossips round each, are, at this early hour of the morning, selling the chief material of the Parisian café-au-lait. Gay wine-shops, painted red, and smartly decorated with vines and guilded railings are filled with workmen taking their morning's draught. . . .

It is a strange, mongrel, merry place, this town of Boulogne: the little French fishermen's children are beautiful, and the little French soldiers four feet high, red-breeched, with huge pompons on their caps, and brown faces, and clear sharp eyes, look, for all their littleness, far more military and more intelligent that the heavy louts one has seen swaggering about the garrison towns in England. Yonder go a crowd of barelegged fishermen; there is the town idiot, mocking a woman who is screaming "Fleuve du Tage," at an inn-window, to a harp, and there are the little gamins mocking him. Lo! these seven young ladies with red hair and green veils, they are from neighbouring Albion, and going to bathe. Here come three Englishmen, habitués evidently of the place—dandy specimens of our countrymen: one has got a marine dress, another has a shooting dress, a third has a blouse and a pair of guiltless spurs—all have as much hair on the face as nature or art can supply, and all wear their hats very much on one side.

Nature and art combine too in this description, which with its prominence of color and line suggest the sketcher at his drawing board. But for Thackeray, the student of Victor Cousin, the visual is but the outward manifestation of a society and a culture. Light and shade, costume and decor, unfold the spectacle of a people viewed both in aggregate and as "specimens" of cultural types. Paris and Boulogne have been vividly pictured, not merely for the delectation of the tourist, but as living, working cities, represented
through characteristic habitations, occupations, and amusements. This same eye for color combined with insight into ethnic character reveal themselves in this record of a visit to Holland, a literal representation of the kind of convivial gathering that becomes a central image in his best-known novel:

It is fair time—and the town is illuminated with a hundred thousand of extra lights and swarming with people. . . .

The people . . . have a coarse and somewhat ruffianly physiognomy. They look by no means as innocent as a multitude of French or Germans met together for pleasure. The women have bright complexions, twinkling little eyes, and great fresh healthy grinning mouths, wh as they smile upon the passer-by shew rows of gleaming white teeth that are more useful than beautiful. A spotless cap of white lace sits closely round these full-moon countenances; and over the head & skull and terminated by a pair of enormous corkscrew ornaments that butt out at either ear like ram's horns, lies a glistening plate of gold or silver—exceedingly fine. A tight sleeved divinity jacket w h descends as far as a pair of enormous hips, and a pair of splay feet paddling in flat shoes and crumpled stockings, completed the costume of the Friezeland women who were here by thousands.

On another tour the Maltese seaport of Valetta is caught on canvas in work, play, and worship:

The streets are thronged with a lively, comfortable-looking population; the poor seem to inhabit handsome stone palaces with balconies and projecting windows of heavy carved stone. The lights and shadows, the cries and stenches, the fruit shops and fish-stalls, the dresses and chatter of all nations; the soldiers in scarlet and women in black mantillas; the beggars, boat-men, barrels of pickled herrings and macaroni; the shovel-hatted priests and bearded capuchins; the tobacco, grapes, onions, and sunshine; the signboards, bottled-porter stores, the statues of saints and little chapels which jostle the stranger's eyes as he goes up the once famous stairs from the Water-gate, make a scene of such pleasant confusion and liveliness as I have never witnessed before. . . . [The] ornaments are stately; castle and palaces are rising all around; and the flags, towers, and walls of Fort St. Elmo look as fresh and magnificent as if they had been erected only yesterday.

Clive Newcome, sketching in the midst of the moving hordes in the streets of Rome, can be taken for a surrogate of Thackeray as author. Having planted himself amongst the throngs and the bustle of many a busy town years before he created his artist-hero, he anticipated Clive's progress from studio to the life academy to the academy of life. Humanity in juxtaposition, emergent life, the recording of events as they are taking place—these are the proper subjects for the creative imagination—literary or artistic—for
Thackeray. One of the first reviewers of *The Newcomes* wrote: “The world of ‘fable-land’ will never be exhausted; each generation will supply new materials for the novelist no less than for the historian, and whoever has the cunning to reproduce truly what is passing before his eyes will by that very circumstance be an original writer.” He understood well Thackeray's instinct for recapturing the sense of “only yesterday,” the “minuteness” and “circumstantiality” that set “people and scenes” in their original environments—moment and milieu rendered eternal. Titmarsh’s “Plan for the Education of Young Artists,” as we have seen, was intended to turn them away from mere “artificial grace” toward that “natural beauty” that is “fresh and attainable by us all, to-day, and yesterday, and to-morrow.” Even the comic artist, he believed, “ties you to all these grotesque ways by a certain lurking human kindness,” and manages to insinuate “in the midst of the fun a feeling of friendliness and beauty.” Particularly in his famous eulogy of George Cruikshank, he upheld the position of the artist in society as friend to man. One part of his early “Proposals for the General Improvement of Public Taste” called for the breaking down of barriers among classes and degrees of society. The artist works toward this ideal through a generalized sympathy by which he directs the sensitivities of us all to “what is real, and natural, and unaffected.” Universal rapport therefore was essential to the artist's success, according to Titmarsh's program for “literaryture and the fine harts.” “Some clever artists will do no harm in condescending... to suit the general taste,” he wrote in one critical article. Elsewhere he expressed the conviction that in art, as in literature, “there is a higher ingredient in beauty than mere form: a skilful hand is only the second artist's quality, worthless without the first, which is a great heart.”

“Dexterity” remained subordinate to “sincerity” and truth to life for Thackeray in his sketches and in the novels for which they proved a preparation. As writer and artist, moreover, Thackeray seems to have had one eye on his own times, as he believed the responsible painter of life should, but the other on posterity. “Personalities are odious; but let the British public look at the pictures of the celebrated Mr. Shalloon—the moral British public,” he exclaims in contemplating the work of an imaginary contemporary, “and say whether our grandchildren (or the grandchildren of the exalted personages whom Mr. Shalloon paints) will not have a queer idea of the manners of their grandmamas, as they are represented in the most beautiful, dexterous, captivating water-colours
As against the artificial attractions of the Shal­loons of the art world:

Now, any one who looks over Mr. Leech's portfolio must see that the social pictures that he gives us are authentic. What comfortable little drawing-rooms and dining-rooms, what snug libraries we enter; what fine young-gentlemanly wags they are, those beautiful little dandies who wake up gouty old grandpapa to ring the bell; who decline aunt's pudding and custards, saying that they will reserve themselves for an anchovy toast with the claret. . . . Look well at everything appertaining to the economy of the famous Mr. Briggs: how snug, quiet, appropriate all the appointments are! What a com­fortable, neat, clean, middle-class house Briggs' is . . . . How cozy all the Briggs party seem in their dining-room: Briggs reading a treatise on Dog-breaking by a lamp; Mama and Grannie with their respective needleworks; the children clustering round a great book of prints—a great book of prints such as this before us, which at this season must make thousands of children happy by as many firesides!

This scene, like so many that Thackeray admired and emulated, is solid with detail, replete with actuality, and moreover,

The inner life of all these people is represented: Leech draws them as naturally as Teniers depicts Dutch boors, or Morland pigs and stables. It is your house and mine: we are looking at everybody's family circle. Our boys coming from school give themselves such airs, the young scapegraces! our girls, going to parties, are so tricked out by fond mamas—a social history of London in the middle of the nineteenth century. As such, future students—lucky they to have a book so pleasant—will regard these pages: even the mutations of fashion they may follow here if they be so inclined.

This tribute to John Leech sums up the model popular artist for Thackeray. Leech in his view did for the Age of Victoria what Hogarth had done for the Age of the Georges: "To the student of history, these admirable works must be invaluable, as they give us the most complete and truthful picture of the manners, and even the thoughts, of the past century," he had already said in praise of the painter of The Rake's Progress in his lectures on the eighteenth-century humorists. Hogarth was a favorite of Clive Newcome, if not of his father the colonel, and through his portrait of the artist as young man Thackeray may well have been looking forward to the role he hoped to fulfill for our century. His essay on Leech was based on a picture book that brought the lithographer of The Rising Generation to the attention of the great public. In Thackeray's own books, word supplanted picture, but they could just as truly be called "a social history of London in the middle of the nineteenth century."


4. 21 December 1843 to Richard Bedingfield, Letters, 2:137.

5. [David Masson], “Pendennis and Copperfield,” North British Review, May 1851, p. 76. In this article Masson also called attention to the names of Thackeray’s characters as a sign of his distinctness of visual perception (e.g., Dr. Slocum, Mrs. Mactoddy, Glorwy).


7. “On Men and Pictures,” Fraser’s Magazine, July 1841, p. 102; Works, 13:368. In the Paris ateliers, which Thackeray knew as an art student, teachers of anatomy and perspective were called professeurs.


11. Cf. a qualifying remark he once made about Daniel Maclise, generally one of his favorites among contemporary painters: “What might not this man do, if he could read and meditate a little, and profit by the works of men whose taste and education were superior to his own” (“Strictures on Pictures,” Fraser’s Magazine, June 1838, p. 763; Works, 13:267).


15. Ibid., pp. 45–46.


19. The Newcomes, chaps. 17, 22.


21. “Professor Byles’s Opinion of the Westminster Hall Exhibition,” Punch, July 1847, p. 8, referring to John Cross (1819–61); rpt. in Contributions to “Punch” (London: Smith, Elder, 1886), p. 163. This painting, The Clemency of Coeur-de-Lion, won first prize at an exhibition in 1847, and was purchased for £1,000 by the royal commissioners (Bryan’s Dictionary of Painters and Engravers).


27. See above, p. 17.

28. "On the French School of Painting," Works, 5:48; "On Men and Pictures," passim. François-Henri Alexandre Lafond (1815-1901), a pupil of Ingres, was eminent at the time for his paintings based on classical and historical subjects; Michel-Martin Drolling (1786-1851), pupil of David, was the leading master of an atelier, and gained fame for his works based on ancient legend and the Bible; Louis Joseph Trimolet (1812-43) was associated with Daubigny; his La prière was exhibited in the Salon of 1841; Mme Paul Juillerat, née Clothilde Gerard (1806-1905?), pupil of Paul Delaroche, was known for her pastels; her Sainte Elizabeth, reine de Hongrie, ramenant au chateau un petit mendiant was also exhibited in 1841; François-Auguste Biard (1799-1882) was popular during the July Monarchy for his familiar scenes as well as his historical and military pictures, and scenes based upon his travels in Egypt, Syria, and other exotic lands; Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier (1815-91) was a genre painter and engraver and successful imitator of the Dutch style; Thackeray refers here to his La partie d'échecs (1841), one of his several highly esteemed pieces on this subject (Bénézit, Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs); Gabet, Dictionnaire des artistes de l'école française au xixe siècle.


33. "Letters on the Fine Arts," Stray Papers, p. 215. The Frank Stone picture referred to presumably is An Interior with Figures, showing a young man seated before a sweet-faced maiden in a country cottage (photograph in Frick Reference Library).

34. "On Men and Pictures," Works, 5:372. Cf. Thackeray's apology to his readers in Vanity Fair, chap. 1, following the description of Amelia's leave-taking of her friends at Chiswick Hall: "All which details, I have no doubt, JONES, who reads this book at his Club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish, trivial, twaddling, and ultra-sentimental . . . Well, he is a lofty man of genius, and admires the great and heroic in life and in novels; and so had better take warning and go elsewhere."

35. The Adventures of Philip, chap. 6.


38. 8 October 1834 to Edward FitzGerald, from Paris, Letters, 1:276.

39. See above, p. 17.


41. "A Second Lecture on the Fine Arts," Works, 13:275. In the piece he later contributed on Turner to Louis Marvy's Sketches After English Landscape Painters (London: Bogue, 1850), Thackeray called his late pictures "those blazing wonders, whose blood-red shadows, those whirling gamboge suns—awful hieroglyphics which even the Oxford Graduate, Turner's most faithful priest and worshipper, cannot altogether make clear."

42. Cf. his diatribes against the popular Keepsake books of the 1830s with their "artificial grace" and embellishment. One group of prints was condemned as "bad in artistic feeling, careless in drawing, poor and feeble in effect." Furthermore, "There is not one of these beauties, with her great eyes, and slim waist, that looks as if it had been painted from a human figure. It is but a slovenly, ricketty, wooden imitation of it, tricked out in some tawdy feathers and frippery, and no more like a


In his piece on Creswick contributed to Louis Marvy's Sketches After English Landscape Painters, Thackeray commented that he, "Perhaps, more than any other landscape painter, ancient or modern, . . . has united the perfection of aerial perspective in his distances, with a precision in the foregrounds only equalled by the pictures formed in convex glasses, and, we believe, frequently used by artists, to see how nature is 'done.' . . . The beholder has a perfect confidence in the painter whose happy gift it is to translate nature with an admirable fidelity and truthfulness."


45. Ibid., p. 278 (on Landseer's Pillage of a Jew's House).


47. "The Exhibition of the Royal Academy," Morning Chronicle, 5 May 1846; rpt. in Contributions, pp. 144–45.


49. The Newcomes, chap. 39.


51. Ibid., p. 370. Florentin Servan (1810-79) was a landscape painter.

52. The Newcomes, chap. 2.


54. Pendennis, chap. 1.

55. Vanity Fair, chap. 49.

56. Henry Esmond, bk. 1, chap. 3.


59. "On Men and Pictures," Works, 13:382. Among English painters, Titmarsh finds an effective use of impasting in Turner's work: "The rain, in the astounding picture called 'Rain-Steam-Speed' is composed of dabs of dirty paint slapped on to the canvas with a trowel; the sunshine scintillates out of the very smearable lumps of chrome yellow" ("May Gambols," Works, 13:439). This technique is best known to present-day art viewers through the landscapes and interiors of van Gogh.

60. Vanity Fair, chap. 48.

61. Pendennis, chap. 45.

62. Vanity Fair, chap. 41.

63. The Adventures of Philip, chap. 2.


65. Vanity Fair, chap. 49.

66. Ibid., chap. 51.

67. Pendennis, chap. 29.


70. The Virginsuns, chap. 34.

71. See above, p. 69 (comment on Charles Landseer).

excellent in sentiment and general grouping," but faults it because it is "in individual attitude and grouping not sufficiently correct" ("May Gambols," *Works*, 13:442).


