THACKERAY MIGHT BE CHARACTERIZED AS A born artist, a developed writer, and a suppressed actor. In offering himself to Bradbury and Evans as a pundit on theater as well as on graphic arts and “light literature,” he was seeking expression for one essential part of his many-sided talent—a mimetic gift that was oral as well as visual. A boyhood friend has left a recollection of young William Makepeace amusing his cousins the Ritchies and their children in their house in Southampton Row by drawing caricatures as well as performing in little plays that the two of them produced. One of the roles that young Thackeray played, according to this companion, was Dr. Pangloss in “a wig capitally got up.” More in anticipation of the future parodist was his playing a character named Fusbos in a performance at Charterhouse of a burlesque tragic opera called Bombastes Furioso. From Cambridge he wrote gleefully to his mother: “I am going to take part I believe in a play; to be acted at a Dr. Jermyns at Swaffham a little distance from Cambridge. I am to be the heroine! . . . Dr. J[ermyns] has got scenes & c. My dress I shall make myself with the aid of your needle & thread, & some silver paper tucked to my white trousers. My bedmaker is going to lend me a white gown.” The letter is accompanied by a drawing of himself in apron and crinolines, topped by a feathered headdress, dwarfing a fellow student actor identified simply as “my lover and Dr. Faustus.” In his adult life, an artist friend recalled Thackeray regaling a group of other artists in a tavern in Rome by improvising a grisly ballad, and an Irish acquaintance has recorded a jolly eve-
ning in Dublin when Thackeray entertained some fellow writers by acting out, with song and pirouette, a scene from a trashy music drama he had seen, called "Belshazzar's Feast."4

Thackeray’s participation in the theater, as events turned out, proved to be more as spectator than actor, but his love of the stage never flagged. A letter written to his mother while he was still in his teens reports: “I went to Matthews on Saturday night—I was very much amused indeed—he performed the Trip to Paris.”5 A diary entry made nine months before his death reads: “St James’s Theatre. Lady Audley’s Secret & Effie Deans.”6 In the richly reminiscential The Adventures of Philip, his last completed novel, Thackeray’s persona Arthur Pendennis recalls theatergoing in Old Parr Street, where “The yellow fogs didn’t damp our spirits—and we never thought them too thick to keep us away from the play: from the chivalrous Charles Kemble . . . my Mirabel, my Mercutio, my princely Falconbridge . . . from the classic Young; from the glorious Long Tom Coffin; from the unearthly Vanderdecken . . . from the sweet ‘Victorine’ and ‘The Bottle Imp.’” Of pleasant memory also was a place near Covent Garden where he “heard the most celestial glees, over a supper of fizzing sausages and mashed potatoes, such as the world has never seen since” (chap. 2).

In these jottings Thackeray conveys an omnivorous relish for the art of performance, extending from classical and Shakespearean tragedy down to melodrama and vaudeville, and a musical ear ranging from grand opera to burletta. This wide tolerance can easily be documented from his school days, professional life, and travel. While a student at Cambridge, Thackeray heard the tragic actor Charles Reece Pemberton read Shylock; that summer he was excited by the acting of Mile Mars (recalled fondly by Major Pendennis) in Dumas’s Henri III et sa cour at the Comédie-Française; later this same season he enjoyed the French comic actor Adrien Perlet at the Théâtre de Madame, and raved to his mother about the “divine” Leontine Fay. (“It gives me the best French lesson possible,” he rationalized, feeling on the defensive with his mother about attending the theater, as did his hero Arthur Pendennis much later.)7 There were other continental Miss Fotheringays, notably the great soprano Giulia Grisi, the “beautiful creature” whom he heard at the Italian opera in Paris during the season of 1833 and intermittently during the next fifteen years, both in Paris and in London.8 Another passion was Mlle Déjazet, who “looked as mignon as a China image, and danced fought sang and capered in a way that wd have set Walpole mad could he have seen her.” Gentil
Bernard; ou, l'art d'aimer, a vaudeville in which Mlle Déjazet appeared, struck him as "... the wickedest I ever saw and one of the pleasantest—adorably funny and naughty." During his lehrjahr in Weimar, in line with his triple pursuit of "study, or sport, or society" (as he later characterized this interlude to George Henry Lewes), young Thackeray kept a scrapbook into which he pasted playbills, pictures of costumes, and critical notices. His theatergoing, at least as set down here, appears to have been suited to the Olympian atmosphere of this cultural capital—Hugo's Hernani (in German translation), Schiller's Die Räuber; Shylock, Hamlet, and Falstaff, as interpreted by Ludwig Devrient, "the Kean of Germany"; operas, such as Medea in Corinto, a then popular work in the bel canto style by Johann Simon Mayr, and the more enduring The Magic Flute, The Barber of Seville, and Fidelio. Here his hand kept busy, along with his eyes and ears, as he engaged in his typical activity of translating mental impressions into visual images, and fixing scenes on paper as they were transpiring before him. One letter includes a sketch of the composer-conductor Hummell. Another catches him in a characteristic absorption with the criminal mentality: a drawing of Devrient as Franz Moor in Die Räuber, praying while his castle is burning, and uttering the words "I am no common murderer Mein Herr Gott."

We have more extensive records of Thackeray's theatergoing in Paris, where he was an avid attender at "the play," both classical and popular. Among his most vivid impressions is curtain time at the Théâtre Ambigu-Comique: "Presently the prompter gives his three heart-thrilling slaps, and the great painted cloth moves upwards: it is always a moment of awe and pleasure. What is coming? First you get a glimpse of legs and feet; then suddenly the owners of the limbs in question in steady attitudes, looking as if they had been there one thousand years before; now behold the landscape, the clouds, the great curtain vanishes altogether, the charm is dissolved, and the disenchanted performers begin." As "cricket" or as correspondent he sometimes displays pleasure, at other times disenchantment, with the spectacles that passed before his eyes at the Ambigu-Comique and other Parisian theaters. An article sent to the American journal the Corsair bubbles over with joy at the comedians of the season "who make a French farce the most sparkling, joyous delightful thing in the world," leading one to "love [them] with their merriment, and their wit, and their follies, and their delightful absurd affectation." The tragedies fall somewhat heavier on his ear: "Bajazet is only a bawling bore (let it be
said in confidence), Athalia is a great imperious Mademoiselle Georges of a woman—the Cid himself, the largest and noblest figure of French tragedy, would talk more nobly still, if he would but talk in prose, and get rid of that odious jiggling rhyme.”¹³ In *The Paris Sketch Book* he has occasion again to scoff at the “old tragedies in which half-a-dozen characters appear, and spout Alexandrines for half-a-dozen hours.”¹⁴ Before the curtain, as at the easel, Titmarsh regards himself as a deflater of the “sham sublime.” Obviously Thackeray had not forgotten these “old tragedies” when he was writing *The Newcomes*. One of the minor characters of this domestic chronicle, the intriguing continental adulteress Madame la Duchesse d’Ivry, could almost be a disciple of Mademoiselle Georges: “Like good performers, she flung herself heart and soul into the business of the stage, and was what she acted. She was Phédre, and if, in the first part of the play, she was uncommonly tender to Hippolyte, in the second she hated him furiously. She was Medea, and if Jason was volage, woe to Creusa!” (chap. 34). The Duchesse may feel grand classical thoughts and gesture in the grand manner, but in line with a bourgeois tragedy set in modern Paris, she talks in prose, not in alexandrines.¹⁵

On his rounds of the Paris theaters, Titmarsh is not much drawn either to French classical comedies “wherein the knavish valets, rakish heroes, stolid old guardians, and smart free-spoken servingwomen discourse in Alexandrines, as loud as the Horaces or the Cid.”¹⁶ An advocate of the “bourgeois style” in drama as well as in painting, he would have all actors, serious and comic, speak, like M. Jourdain, in prose. As author Thackeray practices what he preaches with his own versions of “knabish valets,” like Charles Yellowplush and Jeames De La Pluche, who, whatever their pretensions, discourse in “Cockniac dialect,” just as his “rakish heroes,” like Algernon Deuceace, George Brandon, and Barry Lyndon, devious as they may be in thought and deed, speak in plain language. The same may be said for his equivalents of “old guardians,” like the Earl of Crabs in “Dimond Cut Dimond,” and “outspoken servingwomen,” like Becky, the cook in *A Shabby Genteel Story*.

Posing as the ordinary visitor from across the Channel, Titmarsh seeks refuge in the popular theater from the stuffiness of the Comédie-Française. “For my part,” he affirms, “I had rather go to Madame Sacqui’s, or see Durburan dancing on a rope; his lines are quite as natural and poetical.” An etching that accompanies the original edition of *The Paris Sketch Book* is entitled “The Gallery at Deburau’s Theatre. Sketched from Nature.” Here the reader is
absorbed by the real-life comedy acted out in the facial expressions and gestures of the commonplace audience—a boy leaning, rapt, over the gallery railing; a sleeping mother with a toddler seated before her on the railing; a young man flirting with her, the husband visibly resenting these attentions; a gendarme with an eye peeled for possible disturbances; others looking at the stage apathetically.\(^{17}\)

For Thackeray accessible humanity obviously meant far more than "fine words and grand sentences."\(^{18}\) One might have expected him, therefore, to respond more enthusiastically to the new romantic drama that emerged during the July Monarchy, which proudly proclaimed its freedom from the classical rules, but this too left him unmoved. "In the time of Voltaire the heroes of poetry and drama were fine gentlemen; in the days of Victor Hugo they bluster about in velvet and mustachios and gold chains," he wrote in a diary he kept during his youth. For him the change did not bring about improvement. "The poets and the dramatists of the old time had to combat against the coldness of custom, & yet circumscribed in metre time and subject they occasionally produced true poetry," continues this entry. "The gentlemen of the Ecole Romantique have thrown away all these prejudices, but still seem no wiser better or more poetical than their rigid predecessors."\(^{19}\)

If Titmarsh found classical drama for the most part cold and rigid, though sometimes poetical, the romantic drama for him was unpoetical and all too "warm." He denounces Hugo's *Marion Delorme* in words that look forward to *Catherine*, his satire of the following year on criminal romances: "I ... am so disgusted and sick with the horrid piece that I have hardly heart to write," reads a letter from Paris to his wife, Isabella. "The last act ends with an execution, & you are kept waiting a long hour listening to the agonies of parting lovers, & grim speculations about head chopping, dead-bodies, coffins & what not—Bah! I am as sick as if I had taken an emetic."\(^{20}\) He is repelled by all the "heroes" of Hugo's dramas since *Hernani*: "Triboulet, a foolish monster; Lucrèce Borgia, a maternal monster; Mary Tudor, a religious monster: Monsieur Quasimodo, a hump-backed monster, whose monstrosities we are induced to pardon—nay, admiringly to witness—because they are agreeably mingled with some exquisite display of affection." Not to be outdone, Hugo's rival in the new drama, "the great Dumas," usually includes in his cast of characters "half-a dozen [monsters] to whom murder is nothing; common intrigue, and simple breakage of the [seventh] commandment nothing; but who
live and move in a vast, delightful complication of crime that cannot easily be conceived in England, much less described."\textsuperscript{21}

For his English audiences Thackeray, after Catherine, preferred to scale down his monsters, maternal, adulterous, religious, and otherwise, but he seems to have taken a cue or two from this French theater of cruelty. "Such tragedies are not so good as a real downright execution; but in point of interest, the next thing to it," he observed in reaction to Mlle George's portrayals of some of these villainesses; "with what a number of moral emotions do they fill the breast; with what a hatred for vice, and yet a true pity and respect for that grain of virtue that is to found in us all: our bloody, daughter-loving Brinvilliers; our warm-hearted, poisonous Lucretia Borgias." Significantly, he found a "grain of virtue" in the uxoricidal Catherine, "heroine" of his first novel, who is shown to be capable of a sincere maternal feeling. He could easily swing to the other side of the scale, as in his summing up of the human comedy at the conclusion of \textit{Pendennis}, where he refers to both "flowers of good blooming in foul places" and "in the most lofty and splendid fortunes, flaws of vice and meanness, and stains of evil."

Despite his own preference for "mixed characters," Thackeray could still ask (in the voice of his alter ego Titmarsh), when speaking of "small pictures" that "can do a lot of good, and make honest people happy," "Who is the man that despises melodramas? ... Away with him who has no stomach for such kind of entertainments, where vice is always punished, where virtue always meets its reward."\textsuperscript{22} This toleration of sentimentality eventually was expressed by the narrator of \textit{Pendennis}, commenting on a play by Kotzebue enjoyed by the hero at the theatre where Miss Fotheringay holds forth: "The Stranger's talk is sham, like the book he reads and the hair he wears, and the bank he sits on, and the diamond ring he makes play with—but in the midst of the balderdash, there runs the reality of love, children, and the forgiveness of wrong, which will be listened to wherever it is preached, and sets all the world sympathising" (chap. 4). In his roundabout of the Parisian theaters, Titmarsh notices that the more popular dramatists "do not deal in descriptions of the agreeably wicked, or ask pity and admiration for the tender-hearted criminals, and philanthropic murderers, as their betters do." No, vice is vice on the Boulevard; and it is fine to hear the audience, as a tyrant king roars out cruel sentences of death, or a bereaved mother pleads for the life of her child, making their remarks on the circumstances of the scene. "Ah, le gredin!" growls an indignant country-
man. "Quel monstre!" says a grisette in a fury. You see very fat old men crying like babies; and, like babies, sucking enormous sticks of barley-sugar. Actors and audiences enter warmly into the illusion of the piece. . . . Surely there is fine hearty virtue in this, and pleasant childlike simplicity.

On the whole, concludes Titmarsh, "while the drama of Victor Hugo, Dumas, and the enlightened classes is profoundly immoral and absurd, the drama of the common people is absurd, if you will, but good and right-hearted."

Confronted with a choice, Titmarsh sides with the Jacobins over the "enlightened classes" among theater audiences, but the implication is clear that the drama, at its best, should be "good and right-hearted" without absurdity. One lesson, at any rate, that Titmarsh carried back home from his student tour of the continent was that the stage afforded a vivid medium to bring images of vice and virtue before a wide public. It is not surprising, therefore, that devices of the theater should figure so prominently in the illusion of actuality provided by his novels.

Thackeray-Titmarsh was not, of course, oblivious to the pure diversion offered by stage spectacle, as we can see in Arthur Pendennis's reaction to the delight that Fanny Bolton expresses at her first view of Vauxhall: "... O-O-law, how beautiful!" She shrank back as she spoke, starting with wonder and delight, as she saw the Royal Gardens blaze before her with a hundred million of lamps, with a splendour such as the finest fairy tale, the finest pantomime she had ever witnessed at the theatre, had never realised. Pen was pleased with her pleasure, and pressed to his side the little hand which clung so kindly to him. 'What would I not give for a little of this pleasure?' said the blasé young man.

Immersing himself in the popular theater of Paris, he can identify himself with the naive, childlike populace, as in this rhapsody on vaudeville: "The classic drama may pale before the romantic, and the romantic, after assuming a thousand extravagant shapes, may go down in brimstone and red and blue lights; but the vaudeville, will mount up, light as a champagne bubble, coloured with the gay rays of wit and animal spirits, and immortal as France, its own sunny land."

But there are always two sides to him as theatergoer and drama critic, just as with all the arts, and the more prudential part of his nature complains of the decline of the theater as a moral force: "Your modern dramatists are mechanics, not artists: cobblers, not creators; wanting in imagination, and destitute of nice perceptions." Viewing with alarm what has happened to comedy now that it has fallen into the hands of the popular "cobbler" Scribe, he looks back with nostalgia on the classic comedy at its height: "How hearty, and kind, and
natural and generous is Molière, even in his occasional extravangance. How coldly quick, how smartly pretty, how shallow in the fulness of his pretension is his successor! But the age has always much to do with the creation of its oracles. Molière lived in an age of great men and brilliant deeds. Scribe lives in an age of commonplace actions and commonplace men . . . and Scribe is the poet laureate of the Financiers of the Chaussee d'Antin."  

"Good heavens! with what a number of gay colonels, smart widows, and silly husbands has that gentleman peopled the play books!" a jaded Titmarsh had reacted earlier to this "father" of "the comedy of the day." "How that unfortunate seventh commandment has been maltreated by him and his disciples! . . . When is this joke to cease?" Subsequently he was amazed to discover that this playsmith was turning his superficial talents to more elevated subjects: "The atmosphere of the French Academy, which has always been an unhappy influence upon the genius of dramatic writers, has lately transformed Eugène Scribe, the Vaudevilliste, into a Professor of English History. . . . The Sorbonne is transferred to the Théâtre Française, and Scribe takes the place of Guizot," begins a review article covering several historical dramas that Thackeray attended at the national theater. Here he is annoyed by the numerous misrepresentations of his nation's history and distortions of English character by alien dramatists, but he is most disturbed by Scribe's lapses in taste. A certain "indelicacy," which he regards as the sign of a "dull moral sense," leads him to ask: "Does the presence of these in a play from the most popular of living dramatic writers exhibited upon the boards of the most classic theatre, demonstrate a vice in the social state of society? or do a careless people seek to be amused without reflecting upon the means provided only they are novel?"

This question, of course, has a significance beyond its immediate occasion. In his attack on one of France's most popular purveyors at the time of not so innocent merriment, Thackeray is raising the larger issue of the pleasure principle versus the didactic function of art. We catch him here engaged in debate with himself whether the writer merely serves the public, or can in some way influence it. As far as Scribe is concerned, it will be said that he does not aspire to be either [a teacher of morals or history]. If so, let him remove his enervating pictures of an ill drawn and worse imagined society from beside the rich comedy of Molière. . . . Let Scribe return to the Gymnase, now under the ban of the displeasure of the authors' society. Let him fix again in some
new combination his never-changing personages. The old colonel of the empire; the rich young widow; the banker; the gallant sea lieutenant; and the half-sentimental heiress. In his hands these are "marionettes" to be shifted about at his pleasure: without character, colour, or physiognomy, it is true, but exciting curiosity by varying changes of position, and still appearing to talk from themselves, though it be the author's voice which is heard in one unchanged tone, cutting his jokes upon the passing occurrences of the day. In this light walk of the drama M. Scribe could not do much harm.  

"Better dost thou think it to serve at the feet of Molière's statue, than to reign in a paradise of repartee and chansonette?" he queries Scribe, subtly deviating the dilemma of Milton's Satan to express the plight of the public entertainer torn between intellectual pride and the need to court the populace. Since Thackeray himself never quite deserted the "paradise of repartee and chansonette" even in his most serious novels, he proved that he was really posing a false dilemma, that it is in fact possible to move through the "light walk of drama" without a light head. As he later wrote, in tribute, to the editor of Punch, the "fun" magazine that provided him with the framework for Vanity Fair: "When the future inquirer shall take up your volumes, or a bundle of French plays, and contrast the performance of your booth with that of the Parisian theatre, he won't fail to remark how different they are, and what different objects we admire or satirise."  

Actually, for the "performance" of his own booth, Thackeray, much as he emulated the serious comedy of Molière and Congreve, was not above borrowing some of the "personages" that he had picked out as Scribe's stock-in-trade. Certainly the "old colonel of the empire" turns up in Thackeray's own writings with variations, gay (Major Gahagan, Major Pendennis, Colonel O'Dowd) and grave (Colonel Newcome, the elderly Colonel Esmond); as do "smart widows," if not always rich ones (Mrs. Ensign Macarty, later Mrs. Gann of A Shabby Genteel Story, Aunt Hoggarty of The Great Hoggarty Diamond, and, of course, Mrs. Rawdon Crawley); the banker appears in various moral shadings from the swindling Mr. Brough to the "respectable" Brian and Hobson Newcome; Blanche Amory, with her diary called Mes larmes and her suicide complex, is a more than "half-sentimental" heiress; Ensign Dobbin comes close to the figure of the "gallant sea-lieutenant," and Denis Duval actually seeks his career in the Navy, though that is as far as we are able to follow him. The "puppets" in the booths of Vanity Fair are "shifted about at his pleasure" by the "Manager of the Performance" here no less than are the "marionettes" of M. Scribe,
though this puppet master, to be sure, gives more "character, colour [and] physiognomy" to his dolls. Moreover, even before *Vanity Fair*, we get much of "the author's voice . . . cutting his jokes upon the passing occurrences of the day."\(^{33}\)

Thackeray cast himself in the role of dramatist as early as his study year in Germany. In a letter to Frau von Goethe written in Weimar, he tells her of a German book he was than translating, and admits, " . . . but the Theatre is still my rage (don't think me conceited or say anything about it). I intend fully to try my hand at farce, tragedy or comedy. w\(^{h}\) I cannot yet say, all three perhaps."\(^{34}\)

On his travels the world seems naturally to assemble for him into what Victor Cousin called a "theatre of humanity."\(^{35}\) In the port of Valetta, "The streets are thronged with a lively, comfortable looking population . . . and the effect of the group of multitudinous actors in this busy cheerful drama is heightened as it were by the decorations of the stage."\(^{36}\) The soldiers of the town square of a Spanish port appear " . . . ludicrously young and diminutive for the most part, in a uniform at once cheap and tawdry,—like those supplied to the warriors at Astley's, or from still humbler theatrical wardrobes: indeed the whole scene was just like that of a little theatre; the houses curiously small, with arcades and balconies."\(^{37}\)

The port of Constantinople calls to mind "Drury Lane, such as we used to see it in our youth, when to our sight the grand last pictures of the melodrama or pantomime were so magnificent as any objects of nature we have seen with maturer eyes. Well, the view of Constantinople is as fine as any of Stanfield's best theatrical pictures, seen at the best period of youth, when fancy had all the bloom on her."\(^{38}\)

So far as the professional theater was concerned, Thackeray was destined for even less success than Henry Esmond, whose comedy runs but three nights and sells all of nine copies. The only performance that Thackeray achieved for his one comedy, *The Wolves and the Lamb*, was a private one for a home theatrical. Not surprisingly, *Lovel the Widower*, the novel that Thackeray retrieved from this failure, retains the proscenium frame of its origins, from the narrator who announces himself as "The Chorus of the Play" to the stagy entrances and exits, props, dialogue, even to the concluding "*Valete and plaudite*, you good people, who have witnessed the little comedy. Down with the curtain; cover up the boxes; pop out the gas lights." *Lovel the Widower* is the most sustainedly dramatic of Thackeray's novels, but the author as impresario apppears as early as his first novel, *Catherine*, with its bloody Grand Tableau, and Ikey
Solomons’s valedictory address: “Ring ding ding! the gloomy green curtain drops, the *dramatis personae* are disposed of, the nimble-candle snuffers put out the lights, and the audience goeth pondering home.” In more than one of the early stories his fictitious people are treated as stage figures. Part of *A Shabby Genteel Story* is written in play form, and in its magazine version, one installment ends: “To sum up, in six short weeks after the appearance of the two gentlemen we find our chief *dramatis personae* as follows: Caroline, an innocent young women in love with Brandon. Fitch, a celebrated painter, almost in love with Caroline. Brandon, a young gentleman in love with himself.”

Andreas Fitch, the impecunious young painter of this tale, is characterized at one point as “a fantastic youth, who lived but for his art; to whom the world was like the Coburg Theatre, and he in a magnificent costume acting the principal part.” The theatricality of *The Bedford-Roy Conspiracy*, another early magazine farce, is established by its chapter headings (“Shows How The Plot Began To Thicken In Or About Bedford Row,” “Behind The Scenes”) and is sustained by such devices as soliloquies and overheard private conversations. The “Speech Before the Curtain” that opens *Vanity Fair* in its first edition in book form, along with the assumption of the role of “Manager of the Performance,” came quite naturally to its author, and was familiar to the fit though few readers who knew his earlier work.

Theater conventions remain prominent in Thackeray’s work even after *Vanity Fair*, though after this point they tend to be subsumed more into the narrative. The narrator of *Pendennis* refers intermittently to his “sentimental scenes,” and some chapter headings read like stage directions: “In Which Pen Is Kept Waiting At The Door, While The Reader Is Informed Who Little Laura Was”; “In Or Near The Temple Garden”; “In Which The Decks Begin To Clear”; “Exeunt Omnes.” One chapter heading echoes a drama by Victor Hugo (“Monsieur s’amuse”); another is taken from Congreve (“The Way Of The World”). In a late episode, Blanche Amory and Arthur Pendennis parry with each other in mock stage dialogue, well befitting a young man who has been infatuated with an actress and a young lady who has made a pageant of her “sham enthusiasm, sham hatred, sham love.” *The Newcomes*, too, is redundant of the performing arts, with its opening chapter entitled “The Overture—After Which The Curtain Rises Upon A Drinking Chorus,” followed by others like “In Which Thomas Newcome Sings His Last Song” and “In Which We Hear a Soprano And A Contralto.” The chapter entitled “Two Or Three Acts Of A Little
Comedy” is made up of a series of “conversations” set off as scenes in a play with assigned speeches. The decorated initial to the chapter entitled “Family Secrets” depicts Barnes Newcome as Macbeth visiting Lady Kew got up as Hecate. In The Virginians, Colonel and Mrs. Lambert enact a scene from Tartuffe.

Children’s theater, as we know from Vanity Fair, also furnishes a backdrop to Thackeray’s fiction. Two years before Vanity Fair was published, Thackeray, in reviewing Dickens’s The Cricket on the Hearth, likened this tale to a “Christmas frolic,” and “As a Christmas pageant which you witness in the armchair—your private box by the fireside—the piece is excellent, incomparably brilliant, and dexterous. It opens with broad pantomime, but the interest deepens as it proceeds. The little rural scenery is delightfully painted. Each pretty, pleasant, impossible character has his entrée and his pas. The music is gay or plaintive, always fresh and agreeable. The piece ends with a grand pas d’ensemble, where the whole dramatis personae figure high and low, toe and heel, to a full orchestra crash, and a brilliant illumination of blue and pink fire.”

The Rose and the Ring, his “Fireside Pantomime for Great and Small Children,” is derived from the plot and characters of the traditional Christmas fairy play. He returns to this setting at the end of The Adventures of Philip to prepare his readers for the happy turn in the hero’s fortunes after his tribulations: “You know—all good boys and girls at Christmas know—that before the last scene of the pantomime, when the Good Fairy ascends in a blaze of glory, and Harlequin and Columbine take hands, having danced through all their tricks and troubles and tumbles, there is a dark brief, seemingly meaningless, penultimate scene, in which the performers appear to group about perplexed, while the music of bassoons and trombones, and the like, groans tragically.” At times he is in the position of “grumbler” Warrington in Pendennis, who vicariously enjoys the gay spirits of his young friend Arthur “as a man who has long since left off being amused with clown and harlequin, still gets a pleasure in watching a child at a pantomime” (chap. 37).

Thackeray liked not only to frame scenes of his novels as stage settings, but also to surround the stories themselves in a theatrical ambience. More specifically, the deftness of his characterization surely owes something to his sense of theatre, and the raciness of the speech he puts into the mouths of his men and women indicates that his ear was fully as sensitive as his eye. The opening of Pendennis, which introduces Major Pendennis during a typical morning in his club, is a playlet in itself, though a silent one: “The major sate
down at his accustomed table then, and while the waiters went to bring him his toast and his hot newspaper, he surveyed his letters through his gold double eye-glass, and examined one pretty note after another, and laid them by in order . . . all of which letters Pendennis read gracefully, and with the more satisfaction, because Glowry, the Scotch surgeon, breakfasting opposite to him, was looking on, and hating him for having so many invitations, which nobody ever sent to Glowry." In a later episode of this same novel, the hand of a theatrical director seems to impart a gathering momentum to a crowd scene:

"The consequences are, that I will fling you out of the window, you—impudent scoundrel," bawled out Mr. Pen; and darting upon the Frenchman, he would very likely have put his threat into execution, for the window was at hand, and the artist by no means a match for the gentleman—had not Captain Broadfoot and another heavy officer flung themselves between the combatants,—had not the ladies begun to scream,—had not the fiddles stopped,—had not the crowd of people come running in that direction,—had not Laura, with a face of great alarm, looked over their heads and asked for Heaven's sake what was wrong,—had not the opportune Strong made his appearance from the refreshment-room, and found Alcide grinding his teeth, and jabbering oaths in his Gascon French, and Pen looking uncommonly wicked, although trying to appear as calm as possible, when the ladies and the crowd came up. (Chap. 27).

In *The Virginians* the worldly society of Castlewood presents itself simultaneously to us and to the young Virginian Harry Warrington in a living tableau:

Parson Sampson formed the delight of the entertainment, and amused the ladies, with a hundred agreeable stories. . . . My Lord's chaplain poured out all this intelligence to the amused ladies and the delighted young provincial, seasoning his conversation with such plain terms and lively jokes as made Harry stare, who was newly arrived from the colonies and unused to the elegancies of London life. The ladies, old and young, laughed quite cheerfully at the lively jokes. . . . 'tis certain that their Ladyships at Castlewood never once thought of being shocked, but sat listening to the parson's funny tales until the chapel bell, clinking for afternoon service, summoned his reverence away for half-an-hour. There was no sermon. He would be back in the drinking of a bottle of Burgundy. Mr. Will called a fresh one, and the chaplain tossed off a glass ere he ran out. (Chap. 15)

Thackeray's dramatic portraits are vocal as well as kinetic. With an ability at impersonation outdoing that of Becky Sharp, he can make a wide range of characters come to life merely by speaking for themselves. Be it a cockney footman:
"The less I say about my parent the better, for the dear old creature was very good to me, and, I fear, had very little other goodness in her. . . . We led a strange life; sometimes ma was dressed in sattin and rooge, and sometimes in rags and dutt; sometimes I got kisses and sometimes kix; sometimes gin, and sometimes shampang.""41

Or a parvenu banker:

"I'm a plain man . . . and eat a plain dinner. I hate your kickshaws, though I keep a French cook for those who are not of my way of thinking. I'm no egotist look you; I've no prejudices and Miss there has her bechamels and her fallals according to her taste. Captain, try the volly-vong.""42

Or, up the social ladder, a country baronet:

"Come as Lady Crawley, if you like. . . . There will that zatusfy you? Come back and be my wife. Your vit vor't. Birth be hanged. Your as good a lady as ever I see. You've got more brains in your little vinger than any baronet's wife in the country. Will you come? Yes or no?" . . .

"Say yes, Becky. . . . I'm an old man, but a good'n. I'm good for twenty years. I'll make you happy, zee if I don't. You shall do what you like; spend what you like; and av it all your own way. I'll make you a zettlement, I'll do everything reglar. Look year!""43

His phonographic ear for dialect reproduces an Irish captain's bluster:

"Your hand, young man! for ye speak from your heart. . . . Thank ye, sir, and old soldier and a fond father thanks ye. She is the finest actress in the world. I've seen the Siddons, sir, and the O'Nale—They were great, but what were they compared to Miss Fotheringay? I do not wish she should assume her own name while on the stage. Me family, sir, are proud people; and the Costigans of Costiganstown think that an honest man, who has borne Her Majesty's colours in the Hundred and Third, would demean himself by permitting his daughter to earn her old father's bread.""44

as easily as the Franglais of an expatriate:

"En Angleterre je m'e fais Anglais, vois-tu, mon ami. . . . Demain c'est Sunday, et tu vas voir! I hear the bell, dress thyself for the dinner—my friend! . . . It do good to my 'art to 'ave you in my 'ouse! Heuh!" . . .

"Il est vrai . . . I comprehend neither the suicide nor the chaise-de-poste. What will you? I am not yet enough English, my friend. We made marriages of convenance in our country, que diable, and what follows follows; but no scandal afterwards.""45

More remarkable is his accuracy in rendering the speech of women of all ranks and ages. A match for Mrs. Barbara, waitress at
Morland's Hotel, whom we heard from at the beginning of the previous chapter, is Firkin, maid to Miss Crawley:

"Miss [riggs], they are all infatyated about that young woman. . . . Sir Pitt wouldn't have let her go, but he daren't refuse Miss Crawley anything. Mrs. Bute at the Rectory jist as bad—never happy out of her sight. The Capting quite wild about her. Mr. Crawley mortal jealous. Since Miss C. was took ill, she wouldn't have nobody near her but Miss Sharp, I can't tell for where nor for why; and I think somethink has bewidged everybody."46

Equally spontaneous is the voice of a "bewidge"-ing lady from the teens of the previous century:

"Who are you? I shall go my own way, sirrah, and that way is towards a husband, and I don't want you on the way. I am for your betters, Colonel, for your betters: do you hear that? You might do if you had an estate and were younger; only eight years older than I, you say! pish you are a hundred years older. You are an old, old Graveairs, and I should make you miserable, that would be the only comfort I should have in marrying you." . . .

"Yes . . . I solemnly vow, own, and confess, that I want a good husband. Where's the harm of one? My face is my fortune. Who'll come—buy! buy! buy! I cannot toil, neither can I spin, but I can play twenty-three games on the cards. I can dance the last dance. I can hunt the stag, and think I could shoot flying. I can talk as wicked as any woman of my years, and I know enough stories to amuse a sulky husband for at least one thousand and one nights. I have a pretty taste for dress, diamonds, gambling, and old china. I love sugar plums, Malines lace (that you bought me, cousin, is very pretty), the opera, and everything that is useless and costly. I have got a monkey and a little black boy—Pompey, sir, go and give a dish of chocolate to Colonel Graveairs,—and a parrot and a spaniel, and I must have a husband, Cupid, you hear?"

"Iss, Missis!" says Pompey, a little grinning negro Lord Peterborough gave her, with a bird of paradise in his turbant, and a collar with his mistress's name on it.

"Iss, Missis . . . And if husband not come, Pompey must go fetch one."47

We hear from her again, grown old and stout, trying to forestall time and death:

"Ha! . . . Did not Adam live near a thousand years, and was not Eve beautiful all the time? I used to perplex Mr. Tusher with that—poor creature! What have we done since, that our lives are so much lessened, I say?" . . .

. . . "Who loves me in heaven? I am quite alone, child—that is why I had rather stay here. . . . You are kind to me, God bless your sweet face! Though I scold, and have a frightful temper, my servants will do anything to make me comfortable, and get up at any hour of
the night, and never say a cross word in answer. I like my cards still. Indeed life would be a blank without 'em. Almost everything is gone except that. I can't eat my dinner now, since I lost those last two teeth. Everything goes away from us in old age. But I still have my cards—thank Heaven, I still have my cards! . . . Don't go away, I can't bear to be alone. I don't want you to talk. But I like to see your face, my dear! It is much pleasanter than that horrid old Brett's [her servant], that I have had scowling about my bedroom these ever so long years."

The autumn of life is contrasted with its spring more movingly in the faltering but firm voice of Lady Kew:

"Stay a little, Ethel . . . I am older than your father, and you owe me a little obedience, that is if children do owe any obedience to their parents nowadays. I don't know. I am an old woman—the world perhaps has changed since my time; and it is you who ought to command, I daresay, and we to follow. Perhaps I have been wrong all through life, and in trying to teach my children to do as I was made to do. God knows I had very little comfort from them: whether they did or whether they didn't. You and Frank I had set my heart on; I loved you out of all my grandchildren—was it very unnatural that I should want to see you together? For that boy I have been saving money these years past. He flies back to the arms of his mother, who has been pleased to hate me as only such virtuous people can; who took away my own son from me; and now his son—towards whom the only fault I ever committed was to spoil him and be too fond of him. Don't leave me too, my child. Let me have something that I can like at my years. And I like your pride, Ethel, and your beauty, my dear; and I am not angry with your hard words; and if I wish to see you in the place in life which becomes you—do I do wrong? No. Silly girl! There—give me the little hand. How hot it is! Mine is as cold as a stone—and shakes, doesn't it?—Eh! It was a pretty hand once!"

"In fact, what is that philosophy that I teach, but respect for all the elements of humanity and for all things. . . . It is a philosophy . . . whose only end is to comprehend all, and which, therefore, accepts and reconciles all," young Thackeray had read in Victor Cousin's *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie* during his student days in Paris. One way to understand humanity for Cousin, it will be recalled, is to enter into the consciousness of men: "When that is done . . . whosoever of your fellow creatures may present himself to you . . . you will sympathise with him; for the idea that subdues him, will not be wanting in you; you will therefore in him pardon humanity; for you will comprehend it, because you will possess it entirely." As the examples above attest, along with numerous others that could be added, Thackeray was uniquely equipped to
"possess" humanity through his dramatic ability to speak for men and women of various ages, degrees of education, and cast of mind.

Thackeray's sense of theater is displayed more amply in dramatic scenes that could serve as episodes in a play. An outstanding one occurs in *Pendennis*, when Blanche Amory learns that the man she has known as Colonel Altamont is really her father, heretofore supposed dead:

Bonner [Blanche's maid] still looked quite puzzled at the sound of the voice which she had heard.

The bedroom door here opened, and the individual who had called out "Grady, my coat," appeared without the garment in question.

He nodded to the women, and walked across the room. "I beg your pardon, ladies. Grady bring my coat down, sir! Well, my dears, it's a fine day, and we'll have a jolly lark at ________ ."

He said no more; for here Mrs. Bonner, who had been looking at him with scared eyes, suddenly shrieked out, "Amory! Amory!" and fell back screaming and fainting in her chair.

The man so apostrophised looked at the woman in an instant, and, rushing up to Blanche, seized her and kissed her. "Yes, Betsy," he said, "by G — it is me. Mary Bonner knew me. What a fine gal we've grown! But it's a secret, mind. I'm dead, though I'm your father. Your mother don't know it. What a pretty gal we've grown! Kiss me — kiss me close, my Betsy! D — it, I love you: I'm your old father."

Betsy or Blanche looked quite bewildered, and began to scream too — once, twice, thrice; and it was her piercing shrieks which Captain Costigan heard as he walked the court below.

At the sound of these shrieks the perplexed parent clasped his hands (his wristbands were open, and on one brawny arm you could see letters tattooed in blue), and, rushing to his apartment, came back with the eau-de-Cologne bottle from his grand silver dressing case, with the fragrant contents of which he began to sprinkle Bonner and Blanche.

The screams of these women brought the other occupants of the chambers into the room: Grady from his kitchen, and Strong from his apartment in the upper story. The other at once saw from the aspect of the two women what had occurred.

"Grady, go and wait in the court," he said, "and if anybody comes — you understand me."

"Is it the play-actress and her mother?" said Grady.

"Yes — confound you — say that there's nobody in chambers, and the party's off for to-day."

"Shall I say that, sir? and after I bought them bokays?" asked Grady of the master.

"Yes," said Amory, with a stamp of his foot; and Strong going to the door, too, reached it just in time to prevent the entrance of Captain Costigan, who had mounted the stair. (Conclusion of chap. 65)
This dramatic impulse Thackeray retained down to his last works when, by his own admission, his powers of invention and character creation were on the wane. In *The Adventures of Philip*, the most saintly of his characters, the Little Sister, confronts one of his most deep-dyed villains, the blackmailing Reverend Tufton Hunt, in a suspenseful scene that Sardou might have envied:

The wretch was suit ing actions to his words, and rose once more advancing towards his hostess, who shrank back, laughing half-hysterically, and retreating as the other neared her. Behind her was that cupboard which had contained her poor little treasure and other stores, and appended to the lock of which her keys were still hanging. As the brute approached her, she flung back the cupboard-door smartly upon him. The keys struck him on the head; and bleeding, and with a little curse and cry, he fell back on his chair.

In the cupboard was that bottle which she had received from America not long since; and about which she had talked with [Doctor] Goodenough on that very day. It had been used twice or thrice by his direction, by hospital surgeons, and under her eye. She suddenly seized this bottle. As the ruffian before her uttered his imprecations of wrath, she poured out a quantity of the contents of the bottle on her handkerchief. She said, “Oh, Mr. Hunt, have I hurt you? I didn’t mean it. But you shouldn’t—you shouldn’t frighten a lonely woman so! Here, let me bathe you! Smell this! It will—it will do you—good—it will—it will, indeed.” The handkerchief was over his face. Bewildered by drink before, the fumes of the liquor which he was absorbing served almost instantly to overcome him. He struggled for a moment or two. “Stop—stop! you’ll be better in a moment,” she whispered. “Oh, yes! better, quite better!” She squeezed more of the liquor from the bottle on to the handkerchief. In a minute Hunt was quite inanimate. (Chap. 38)

Consistent with the biblical imagery that pervades this novel, the illustration to this incident of the chloroforming of the Reverend Hunt, in order to retrieve a document that might incriminate Philip’s father, is entitled “Judith and Holofernes.” However, by his method of relating it—pantomime, monologue, brief narrative details that read like stage directions in a promptbook—Thackeray reveals a flair for melodrama equal to his more celebrated finesse in high comedy.

As late as *Denis Duval*, the novel Thackeray was working on at his death, of which only a few chapters were completed, one finds his dramatic power fully engaged. In one episode in particular, where Denis recollects the funeral of the Comtesse de Saverne attended by, among others, her lover, who had previously murdered her husband, setting, character, gesture, and speech fuse into a memorable stage picture:
I imagine the scene before me now—the tramp of the people, the flicker of a torch or two; and then we go in at the gate of the Priory ground into the old graveyard of the monastery, where a grave had been dug, on which the stone still tells that Clarissa, born De Vio-nesnil, and widow of Francis Stanislas, Count of Saverne and Barr in Lorraine, lies buried beneath.

When the service was ended, the Chevalier de la Motte (by whose side I stood, holding by his cloak) came up to the Doctor. "Monsieur le Docteur," says he, "you have acted like a gallant man; you have prevented bloodshed—"

"I am fortunate, sir," says the Doctor.

"You have saved the lives of these two worthy ecclesiastics, and rescued from insults the remains of one—"

"Of whom I know the sad history," says the Doctor, very gravely.

"I am not rich, but will you permit me to give this purse for your poor?"

"Sir, it is my duty to accept it," replied the Doctor. The purse contained a few hundred louis, as he afterwards told me.

"And may I ask to take your hand, sir?" cries the poor Chevalier, clasping his own together.

"No, sir!" said the Doctor putting his own hands behind his back. "Your hands have that on them which the gift of a few guineas cannot wash away." The Doctor spoke very good French. "My child, good-night; and the best thing I can wish thee is to wish thee out of the hands of that man."

"Monsieur!" says the Chevalier, laying his hand on his sword mechanically.

"I think, sir, the last time it was with the pistol that you showed your skill!" says Doctor Barnard, and went in at his own wicket as he spoke, leaving poor La Motte like a man who has just been struck with a blow; and then he fell to weeping and crying that the curse—the curse of Cain was upon him. (Chap. 4)

It is significant that this episode almost tells itself, with but a minimum of narration by Denis. We feel cheated by the accident of fate that leaves us deprived of the outcome.51

When he wrote to Frau Goethe, during his youthful cultural fling in Weimar, that he did not know whether he would write farce, tragedy, or comedy, Thackeray's most premonitory words were, "all three perhaps."52 He might have added that he would write all three not just intermittently, but sometimes simultaneously—with the addition of melodrama. It may seem incongruous that Thackeray's most solemn hero, Henry Esmond, writes a comedy (though its title, "The Faithful Fool," has an ironical appropriateness to Henry's situation), whereas his gentle, retiring grandson George Warrington writes the "terrible and pathetic" Carpezan, and the poetic tragedy Pocahantans; but both reflect from different an-
gles their creator's divergent temperament. In Thackeray's one overt play, *The Wolves and the Lamb*, Captain Touchit, discovering Lady Kicklebury and Mrs. Bonnington on their knees before the eligible widower Horace Milliken, asks: "What is this comedy going on, ladies and gentlemen? The ladies on their elderly knees—Miss Prior with her hair down her back. Is it tragedy or comedy—is it a rehearsal for a charade?" (act 2). Mr. Batchelor, Captain Touchit's counterpart in *Lovel the Widower*, the novel derived from the play, significantly a writer, observes: "What a queer little drama was unfolding itself before me! What struggles and passions were going on here—what certamina and motus animorum!" He displays a certain psychological amphibiousness in his debate with himself whether or not to leave Lovel's house, where he is a weekend guest: "I could finish a scene or two of my tragedy at my leisure; besides there were one or two little comedies going on in the house which inspired me with no little curiosity" (chap 3). These two "stage managers" reflect not only Thackeray's mercurial moods but his disposition also to see the same human situations under shifting emotional lights.

Thackeray would have agreed with T. S. Eliot that "drama is a mixed form; pure magnificence will not carry it through." But with Thackeray the mixtures vary in their contents and proportions, from the "comic and sentimental" *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, to the farcical "romance" of *Barry Lyndon* (one chapter of which, nevertheless, "Contains The Tragical History Of The Princess of X——"), to the "sentimental and cynical" *Vanity Fair* (also called in places a "comic history"), to *Pendennis*, a comedy of manners "in the pathetic key," to the "melancholic" *Henry Esmond*, which, however, intercalates a comic paper from the *Spectator* and is brought to its climax by a cloak-and-dagger escapade imitative of a Dumas-Scribe melodrama. The chapter in *The Newcomes* entitled "Contains Two Or Three Acts Of A Little Comedy" is balanced by one entitled "Has A Tragical Ending," indicative of the oscillations of mood in that predominantly tragic tale. One of Pendennis's addresses to the readers of this family chronicle indeed compares this fictitious world to "a fair, where time is short and pleasures numerous [and so] the master of the theatrical booth shows you a tragedy, a farce, and a pantomime, all in a quarter of an hour, having a dozen new audiences to witness his entertainments in the course of the forenoon" (chap. 34). Furthermore, observes the narrator of *The Virginians*: "Why, what tragedies, comedies, interludes, intrigues, farces, are going on under our noses in friends' drawing
rooms where we visit everyday, and we remain utterly ignorant, self-satisfied, and blind!” (chap. 23).

Literary forms were scrambled by Thackeray as readily as virtue and vice were mixed in his heroes and villains. He felt, for one thing, the need of the impresario to provide “something for everyone.” But there is a more serious intent behind his pasticcios. “My Dear—, It is no easy task in this world to distinguish between what is great in it, and what is mean,” begins one of his iconoclastic essays. Ikey Solomons, the narrator and producer of the Grand Tableau in Catherine, expresses a similar sense of resignation: “My dear sir, when you have well studied the world—how supremely great the meanest thing in the world is, and how infinitely mean the greatest, I am mistaken if you do not make a strange and proper jumble of the sublime and the ridiculous, the lofty and the low.” The Preacher of Cornhill phrases it more sententiously in “Vanitas Vanitatum”:

How low men were, and how they rise!
   How high they were, and how they tumble!
O vanity of vanities
O laughable, pathetic jumble!

For Thackeray such seeming incompatibles as farcical melodrama (Catherine), melodramatic farce (Barry Lyndon), children’s pantomime fused with high comedy and history (Vanity Fair), and domestic tragedy with an admixture of bacchanalia (The Newcomes) were the “strange and proper” means of imitating the “laughable, pathetic jumble” that is the human comedy.

Past as well as present took on for Thackeray the aspect of the theater, and for him its glamor too was soon dispelled:

In our orthodox history-books [he writes in a review] the characters move on as a gaudy play-house procession, a glittering pageant of kings and warriors, and stately ladies, appearing and passing away. Only he who sits very near to the stage can discover of what stuff the spectacle is made. The kings are poor creatures, taken from the dregs of the company; the noble knights are dirty dwarfs in tin foil; the fair ladies are painted hags with cracked feathers and soiled trains. One wonders how gas and distance could ever have rendered them so bewitching.

Thackeray’s own quite unorthodox histories, of his own times as well as of times gone by, were at this time still in the offing. In them we are in effect brought “near to the stage,” the better to see the actors on it at close range, but with “gas and distance” both re-
moved. We can agree with an admirer of Thackeray who remarked late in the century that “the theatre, indeed occupies an important part in his writings,” adding that “while his literary manner was wholly untheatrical, owned no odour of the stage lamps, his stories are often found to be rich in dramatic qualities.”

This critic confirms one’s general impression that what Thackeray chiefly emulated from the theater was its vigor and liveliness, rather than its histrionics. For him a representation of life, like a painted picture, “should have its parts, characters, varieties, and climax like a drama.” In a “sham history,” just as in a sketch, a portrait, or a painting, people, so far as Thackeray was concerned, should appear au naturel, not in greasepaint, and not posed or grouped in tableaux, but “busied, and perfectly naturally, with the scene at which the spectator is admitted to look.”

Thackeray’s lifelong devotion to the theater was attended from time to time with twinges of conscience inevitable to one of evangelical upbringing. A dip into Restoration comedy, in preparation for his lecture series on the eighteenth-century wits, alternately fascinates and repels him: “Congreve’s comic feast flares with lights, and, round the tables, emptying their flaming bowls of drink, and exchanging the wildest jokes and ribaldry, sit men and women, waited on by rascally attendants and valets as dissolute as their mistresses—perhaps the very worst company in the world. There doesn’t seem to be a pretence of morals.” His excursion into this roisterous, bawdy world of rakish Mirabels and Belmours, of ravishing Millamants, of nubile young wives easily won away from their gouty old husbands, leaves him quickly sated: “All this pretty morality you have in the comedies of William Congreve, Esquire. They are full of wit. Such manners as he observes, he observes with great humor: but ah! it’s a weary feast, that banquet of wit where no love is.”

Even ridicule, Thackeray believed, should have “a certain lurking kindness behind it.” “It was his wont to laugh at the stage,” a commentator on Thackeray has observed, but his laughter was very kindly, and but thinly disguised his love.” Whatever compunction he may occasionally have had about utilizing the amusements of the populace to transmit his wisdom, Eugène Scribe, vaudevilliste turned professor of history at the Académie française, the Guizot of the Gymnase, as Thackeray styled him, had, among others, shown the way to capture both the Chausée d’Antin and “commonplace men.” Moreover, his studies of predecessors of the eighteenth century taught Thackeray that “pleasure is always warring against self-restraint. . . . A man in life, a
humourist, in writing about life, sways over to one principle or the other, and laughs with the reverence for right and the love of truth in his heart, or laughs at these from the other side. Didn't I tell you that dancing was a serious business to Harlequin?"  

Transmitting his enthusiasm and mingled emotions for the performing arts to his audiences, Thackeray assumes a position toward them comparable to that of Dobbin with relation to Amelia as he accompanies her to the opera in Germany:

Here [at the Pumpernickel Staats-Theatre] it was that Emmy found her delight, and was introduced for the first time to the wonders of Mozart and Cimarosa. . . . A new world of love and beauty broke upon her when she was introduced to those divine compositions: this lady had the keenest and finest sensibility and how could she be indifferent when she heard Mozart? The tender parts of Don Juan awakened in her raptures so exquisite that she would ask herself when she went to say her prayers of a night, whether it was not wicked to feel so much delight as that which "Vedrai Carino" and "Batti Batti" filled her gentle little bosom? But the Major, whom she consulted upon this head, as her theological advisor (and who himself had a pious and reverent soul) said that, for his part, every beauty of art and nature made him thankful as well as happy; and that the pleasure to be had in listening to fine music, as in looking at the stars in the sky, or at a beautiful landscape or picture, was a benefit, for which we might thank Heaven as sincerely as for any other worldly blessing.

Thackeray was reliving here the thrill of soul he had enjoyed during his lehrjahr in the Weimar theater, by this time elevated into a form of worship. He was now teaching his readers how to turn delight into a sacrifice.

In his next novel, Pendennis, where the hero becomes absorbed early in life by the theater of his provincial village, one suspects that Thackeray sees himself not only in young Pen but also in Mr. Bingley, the stage manager of Miss Fotheringay’s company, "... reading out of the stage-book—that wonderful stage-book—which is not bound like any other stage-book in the world, but is rouged and tawdry like the hero or heroine who holds it; and who holds it as people never do hold books: and points with his finger to a passage, and wags his head ominously to the audience, and then lifts up his eyes and finger to the ceiling professing to derive some intense consolation for the work between which and heaven there is a strong affinity" (chap. 4). The role of the theater manager as surrogate for God came as naturally to Thackeray as did his vision of the creation as the "theatre of humanity," all the men and women in it merely players, performing a variety of parts, deceiv-
ing themselves and each other sometimes, but not their Maker. His stage was not confined to the proscenium, nor was its action confined to Time the Present. As he wrote once, in reviewing a work of history for one of the numerous papers he served as “cricket”: “We instinctively ran over in our minds the principal salient periods of history, which—most dramatic in themselves—have been of most notable influence over posterity, the early acts as it were of the great drama of the world, of which the succeeding scenes are yet passing before us.”

For this harlequin the comedy was never finished.


2. See letter of 4–8 February 1828 to his mother, Letters, 1:16.

3. 1 November 1829 to his mother, Letters, 1:106. Ray identifies the master referred to as “Probably the Rev. George Britton Jermyns of Trinity Hall, Cambridge.”


6. 28 April 1863, Letters, 4:411. The plays referred to were dramatizations of M. E. Braddon’s sensational novel and of Scott’s Heart of Midlothian.

7. 26–28 March 1829, Letters, 1:48; 18? July 1829, ibid., p. 88; 20–28 August 1829, ibid., pp. 92–93. In Pendennis Harry Foker tells his credulous mother, Lady Agnes Foker, that “he went to the French play because he wanted to perfect himself in the language, and there was no such good lesson as a comedy or vaudeville” (chap. 40).


11. 28 September 1830, Letters, 1:127; 18 January 1831, ibid., p. 142; additional details from “Goethe in His Old Age.” Some sketches from a Weimar playbill, including Devrient as Shylock and Franz Moor, are reproduced in Works (Cent. Biog. Ed.), 24:iii–xxvi.


15. Thackeray’s acquaintance with French drama seems to have begun with his student days at Charterhouse. The Fales Library, New York University, owns a
wrapper from an edition of *Athalie* dated 1825, with the signature “W. Thackeray, Esq” on the back. This was one of a series edited by A. Gombert entitled *The French Drama Illustrated By Arguments In English At The Head Of Each Scene, With Notes, Critical And Explanatory For The Use Of Schools.*

17. Ibid., facing p. 244.
23. “French Dramas and Melodramas,” *Works*, 5:245–46. Thackeray reverts to these dramas in *Vanity Fair* during a discourse to his readers on villainy: “At the little Paris theatres . . . you will not only hear the people yelling out ‘Ah gredin! Ah monstref and cursing the tyrant of the play from the boxes; but the actors themselves refuse to play the wicked parts, such as those of the infames Anglais, brutal Cossacks, and what not, and prefer to appear at a smaller salary, in their real characters as loyal Frenchmen” (chap 8).
24. “French Dramas and Melodramas,” *Works*, 5:245–46. On one of the plays cited as an example of popular taste, *Hermann I’ivrogne*, by J. Bouchardy and E. Deligny, in which the villains are aristocratic libertines, Titmarsh comments: “Vulgar prejudice against the great . . . is only a rude expression of sympathy with the poor.”
29. “English History and Character on the French Stage,” p. 140; *New Sketch Book*, p. 139. One of Scribe’s historical dramas unfavorably reviewed here, *Le verre d’eau*, which deals with the downfall of the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, bears a devious relationship to *Henry Esmond*, as will be brought out in a later chapter.
31. For example, the Cave of Harmony episode that opens the most tragic of his novels, *The Newcomes*.
33. In later years a French admirer, Amédée Pichot, conjectured that Thackeray’s “types comiques” owed something to Scribe. See his introduction to *La diamant de famille et la jeunesse de Pendennis* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1835), p. vi.
35. See above, p. 37.
38. “Constantinople,” *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, *Works*, 5:636. A few years later Thackeray paid tribute to Clarkson Stanfield in his friend Louis Marvy’s *English Landscape Painters*, referring to him as an artist who “for many years taught the public from the stage—taught the pit and gallery to admire landscape art and the boxes to become connoisseurs.” For a number of years, Stanfield was chief of the Drury Lane scene room.
39. Cf. the end of the opening paragraph of *Vanity Fair*, chap. 6: “The argument stands thus—Osborne, in love with Amelia, has asked an old friend to dinner and to Vauxhall—Jos Sedley is in love with Rebecca. Will he marry her? That is the great subject now in hand.”
12. THACKERAY'S CANVASS OF HUMANITY

40. Morning Chronicle, 24 December 1845; rpt. in Contributions, pp. 90-91.
41. The Memoirs of Mr. C. J. Yellowplush, chap. 1.
42. The Great Hoggarty Diamond, chap. 7 (Mr. Brough as host).
43. Vanity Fair, chap. 14 (Sir Pitt Crawley's proposal to Becky).
44. Pendennis, chap. 5 (Captain Costigan introducing himself to Arthur).
45. The Newcomes, chap. 57 (M. Florac on Lady Clara's elopement).
47. Henry Esmond, bk. 3, chap. 3 (Beatrix to Henry; Beatrix to her servant, as recalled by Henry).
48. The Virginians, chap. 83 (the Baroness Bernstein to George Warrington and his wife, Theô).
49. The Newcomes, chap. 38.
50. See above, pp. 50-51.
51. This incident foreshadows de la Motte's eventual execution for treason and other crimes. Denis, it appears from notes Thackeray left behind, develops an admiration and compassion for this culprit, despite what he suffers through de la Motte's intrigues (see "Notes on Denis Duval," Works, 12:565).
52. See above, p. 96.
55. Works, 4:642.
57. Review of The Private Correspondence of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, Times, 6 January 1838; rpt. in Works (Furniss Ed.), 12:49-57.
60. “The Exhibition of the Royal Academy,” Morning Chronicle, 5 May 1846. See above, p. 69.
62. See above, p. 81, in connection with his essay on Cruikshank.
65. Vanity Fair, chap. 62.
66. Review of Historic Fancies, by the Honorable George Sidney Smythe, M. P., Morning Chronicle, 2 August 1844; Contributions, p. 47.