FOR HIS FIRST EXTENDED WORK OF FICTION, Thackeray turned to one of those "ephemeral repertories of sorrow and crime" much admired by a fellow Fraserian for their elementary appeal and fresh insight into human nature.¹ 

Catherine: A Story, a "horrific" account of a husband murderess and her execution drawn from the Newgate Calendar, remained a "pamphlet of the passing hour" not reprinted in Thackeray's lifetime² (owing, it appears, to both reader apathy and the author's own dissatisfaction with his story), but he humorously recalled the grisly events in an imitation folk ballad that appeared years later in his Lyra Hibernica:

In the reign of King George and Queen Anne,  
In Swift's and in Marlborough's days,  
There lived an unfortunate man,  
A man by the name of John Hayes.  

A decent respectable life,  
And rather deserving of praise,  
Lived John, but his curse was his wife  
—His horrible wife Mrs. Hayes.  

A heart more atrociously foul  
Never beat under any one's stays:  
As eager for blood as a ghoul  
Was Catherine the wife of John Hayes
By marriage and John she was bored
(He'd many ridiculous traits);
And she hated her husband and lord,
This infamous, false Mrs. Hayes.

When madness and fury begin
The senses they utterly craze;
She called two accomplices in,
And the three of 'em killed Mr. Hayes.

And when they'd completed the act,
The old Bailey Chronicle says,
In several pieces they hacked
The body of poor Mr. Hayes.

This bloody saga continues with the discovery of Hayes's remains in the Thames and the posting of his head in a churchyard, leading to the discovery and exposure of the murderers. In true ballad form, it concludes with a moral and an envoy:

And sooner or later 'tis plain
For wickedness every one pays
They hanged the accomplices twain,
And burned the foul murderess Hayes.

And a writer who scribbles in prose,
And sometimes poetical lays,
The terrible tale did compose
Of Mr. and Mrs. John Hayes.³

In this version the "terrible tale" that Thackeray took from the Newgate Calendar is reduced literally to its bare bones, and conveyed in the form of one of the cheap broadsides through which many of these real-life crime stories were popularly disseminated. Thackeray does not mention here any of the characters he added in his own retelling of the story, such as the Count von Galgenstein and Tom Billings, who thicken the plot, or the brigands Brock and Macshane, who lighten it. Neither does he introduce any of the antecedent incidents or subsidiary themes that he engrafted, for reasons of his own to be discussed later, upon the original sordid events. In these rhymes Thackeray skips lightly over the ground that he had trod upon with scorn and anger when he was out to attack the so-called Newgate novelists.

It is as an anti-Newgate novel that Catherine is chiefly remembered, and because it remains the most widely unread of Thack-
eray's stories, even historians of fiction are content to leave it at that. To be sure he continually impales on its pages such contemporary masters of literary Grand Guignol as Ainsworth, Dickens, and "Mr. Bulwig" (as Charles Yellowplush calls him). He apologizes at the outset for presuming "to take a few more pages from the Old Bailey calendar, to bless the public with one more draught from the Stone Jug" (a popular name for Newgate Prison), justifying himself only on the ground that he will exceed his predecessors in "scenes of villainy, throat-cutting, and bodily suffering in general" (p. 4). He conceived his "draught" as an emetic, relieving surfeit through excess. Quite early in the novel, the author himself confesses that he is beginning to feel queasy: "And here, though we are only in the third chapter of this history, we feel almost sick of the characters that appear in it, and the adventures they are called upon to go through. But how can we help ourselves? The public will hear of nothing but rogues; and the only way in which poor authors, who must live, can act honestly by the public and themselves, is to paint such thieves as they are; not dandy, poetical, rose-water thieves; but real downright scoundrels, leading scoundrelly lives, drunken, profligate, dissolute, low; as scoundrels will be." If readers must have criminals, then "Ikey Solomons" will oblige, but not with the literary-aesthetic kind they are accustomed to:

They don't quote Plato, like Eugene Aram; or live like gentlemen, and sing the pleasantest ballads in the world, like jolly Dick Turpin [hero of Ainsworth's *Rookwood*]; or prate eternally about το καλόν like that precious canting Maltravers, whom we all of us have read about and pitied; or die whitewashed saints, like poor "Biss Dadsy" in "Oliver Twist." No, my dear madam, you and your daughters have no right to admire and sympathise with any such persons, fictitious or real: you ought to be made cordially to detest, scorn, loathe, abhor, and abominate all peoples of this kidney. . . . Keep your sympathy for those who deserve it: don't carry it, for preference, to the old Bailey, and grow maudlin over the company assembled there. (P. 46)

And so Solomons keeps up the dosage of his "Catherine cathartic," making it more and more violent.

One motive behind Thackeray's deliberate choice of such shocking matter was obviously to ridicule his more successful rivals ("The other popular novelists of the day," he wryly refers to them at one point), but a more important one was to advance his own ideas on fiction. In one respect his first novel is a comment on, and reaction to, popular taste. His addresses to readers needle them for their low appetites fully as much as his fellow writers for catering to them:
These points being duly settled, we are now arrived, O public, at a point for which the author's soul hath been yearning ever since this history commenced. We are now come, O critic, to a stage of the work when this tale begins to assume an appearance so interestingly horrific, that you must have a heart of stone if you are not interested by it. O candid and discerning reader, who art sick of the hideous scenes of brutal bloodshed which have of late come forth from pens of certain eminent wits, if you turn away disgusted from the book, remember that this passage hath not been written for you, or such as you, who have the taste to know and hate the style in which it hath been composed; but for the public, which hath no such taste:—for the public, which can patronise four different representations of Jack Sheppard,—for the public whom its literary providers have gorged with blood and foul Newgate garbage,—and to whom we poor creatures, humbly following at the tail of the great high-priests and prophets of the press, may, as in duty bound, offer some small gift of our own: a little mite truly, but given with goodwill. Come up, then, fair Catherine and brave Count;—appear, gallant Brock, and faultless Billings;—hasten hither, honest John Hayes: the former chapters are but flowers in which we have been decking you for sacrifice. Ascend to the altar, ye innocent lambs, and prepare for the final act: lo! the knife is sharpened, and the sacrificer ready! Stretch your throats, sweet ones,—for the public is thirsty, and must have blood! (Conclusion of chap. 13)

On the continent, as we already have noticed, Thackeray was equally revolted by the "drame brutale" of Hugo and Dumas, with their "monstrosities, adulteries, murders, and executions." Also, a dosage of the novels of Sue and Soulié had led him to ask: "Was French society composed of murderers, of forgers, of children without parents ... of disguised princes, who live in the friendship of amiable cut-throats and spotless prostitutes?" From Catherine one might easily infer that English society during the Age of Anne was composed largely of outlaws, adulterers, bastards, and murderers, but the cut-throats whom Count (not Prince) Galgenstein lives among are not very amiable, and the prostitute he consorts with is far from spotless. Writing early in 1833 for the National Standard, which he edited at the time and contributed to as Paris correspondent, Thackeray complained of even lower depths of taste: "Young France requires something infinitely more piquant than an ordinary hanging matter, or a commonplace crim con. To succeed, to gain a reputation, and to satisfy La jeune France, you must accurately represent all anatomical peculiarities attending the murder, or crime in question; You must dilate on the clotted blood, rejoice over the scattered brains, particularise the sores and bruises, the quavering muscles and the gaping wounds." Thackeray seems to have learned something from the feuilletonistes as well as from the
writers for the *Newgate Calendar* about how to represent "real downright scoundrels" rather than "dandy, poetical, rose-water thieves." For the benefit of Young England, "Ikey Solomons" is lavish with details about the decapitation of John Hayes (including the collection of the blood in a bucket), the hanging of Tom Billings in chains, and the burning of Catherine (including the battering out of her brains by the executioner before the flames reach her). Furthermore, for the delectation of audiences of all ages "which can patronise four different representations of Jack Sheppard," Solomons provides this scenario:

*A Grand Tableau*

**MRS. CATHERINE CUTTING OFF HER HUSBAND'S HEAD**

1. The Carrying of the Pail.
2. The Thames at Midnight. The Emptying of the Pail.
3. The Thames at Low-Water. Discovery of the Head.
4. St. Margaret's by Moonlight. The Head on the Pole!

* * * * * * * * *

CATHERINE BURNING AT THE STAKE! BILLINGS HANGING IN THE BACKGROUND! THE THREE SCREAMS OF THE VICTIM!!!

The Executioner dashes her brains out with a billet.

* * * * * * * * *

The Curtain falls to slow Music.

God save the Queen! No money returned. Children in arms encouraged, rather than otherwise.

It appears also that Thackeray got other ideas from the Parisians. During his student days, the "famous and witty French critic" Jules Janin excoriated the popular melodramas of the day that were packing in crowds at the Porte St. Martin:

And when evening came, I used to find again a cruel pleasure; I was accustomed to go out alone, and at the door of the theatres I used to see wretched people struggling for a place to applaud a poisoner or a devil, a parricide or a leper, an incendiary or a vampire; in the theatre I saw men moving about who had nothing better to do than to become by turns brigands, gendarmes, peasants, great lords, Greeks, Turks, white bears, black bears, whatever one wanted them to become, without realizing that they exposed to these unwholesome boards their wives and small children, and their old grandparents. . . . This dramatic pleasure, stirred up by such means, repelled me; but it became my practice to watch these lowbred people amusing themselves, laughing, living, experiencing in the theatre, among comedians, comediennes, and men with a talent completely devoted to distilling vice and horror for them.
Janin sets out to compete with these masters of vice and horror in the story where these words appear, a mock sensational novel entitled *L'âne mort et la femme guillotinée* (1829). The heroine is a provincial girl who falls in with bad company, becomes a prostitute, bears an illegitimate child (the product of her seduction by her jailer), and eventually is executed for murdering her lover (a public hangman whimsically nicknamed Charlot by his intimates). In following the downward course of Henriette, we are treated not only to graphic descriptions of life in the Bastille and death by the guillotine, but to visits as well to an abattoir and to a morgue, in keeping with the author's determination to induce terror by realistic means. Janin's "heroine" is a model at once of cold-bloodedness and of warped feeling, expressing no regret for her deeds, only compassion for a pet donkey who has been cruelly slaughtered.

There are surface resemblances between her and Thackeray's Catherine—apart from their eventual fates. Both meet their lovers at country inns, are dazzled by them with false ideas of glamor, and enjoy brief entrees into high society. Thackeray was in fact acquainted with the story, and one suspects that he read Janin's tongue-in-cheek apology (in the preface) to his critics for the "fracas de style" of his ghastly joke, which he defends as "une parodie sérieuse, une parodie malgré lui" written in the cause of "la vérité dans l'art."

The specific targets of the two authors differed, but Thackeray also aimed at truth in art in his serious parody, in which, like Janin, he ridicules popular fiction and theater while he wields them to his own ends. Janin compared himself to a physician probing society with his scalpel to expose the raw nerves of human nature. Thackeray preferred to use his scalpel to dissect his characters' souls. "Criminals stand forward... on the canvass of humanity as prominent objects for our special study," a brother Fraserian had already written, leading us to expect Thackeray to begin his reconstruction of the "edifice of humanity" at "the bottom of the dried-up, weed-choked well," even if the excesses of the Newgate novelists had not provoked him to it. As is clear from the remarks on *Jack Sheppard* and *Oliver Twist* that concluded the original version of *Catherine*, his quarrel with Ainsworth and Dickens is based not so much on their making heroes of criminals, as for their failure to turn these figures into complete human beings. "As no writer can or dare tell the whole truth concerning them, and faithfully explain their vices, there is no need to give ex-parte statements of their virtues," he declares (p. 185). It is not the place of the novelist,
Solomons implies, to defend or to condemn criminals, but to represent them, like all men, as a “mixture of wisdom and folly, vice and virtue, good and evil,” as Dr. Watts put it. In other words, if one is to deal with criminals, their vices should be explained as a good biographer or historian would do, not explained away in the manner of the romancer.

This is just what Solomons attempts to do with Catherine, and, to a lesser extent, with other characters in the novel. Basically he addresses himself to the sources of moral evil in the world, the serious import behind the wry reference, early in the story, to a certain “dark angel” who seems to have the heroine in thrall, as she flees from Count Galgenstein after her unsuccessful attempt to poison him:

I do not mean to say that, in this strait, he appeared to her in the likeness of a gentleman in black, and made her sign her name in blood to a document conveying over to him her soul, in exchange for certain conditions to be performed by him. Such diabolical bargains have always appeared to me unworthy of the astute personage who is supposed to be one of the parties to them; and who would scarcely be fool enough to pay dearly for that which he can have in a few years for nothing. It is not, then, to be supposed that a demon of darkness appeared to Mrs. Cat, and led her into a flaming chariot harnessed by dragons, and careering through the air, at the rate of a thousand leagues a minute. No such thing; the vehicle that was sent to her aid was one of a much more vulgar description. (P. 53)

Thackeray’s literary allusions—the flaming chariot, the man in black, the diabolical bargain—are, presumably, to the sensationally popular Faustian tale Melmoth the Wanderer. The vehicle that carries Catherine to the Bugle Inn and to her doom in the form of John Hayes is the humdrum “Liverpool carryvan” out of Birmingham. So the author reminds his readers that in this world, unlike Maturin’s Gothic world, evil is natural, not supernatural, in origin, and that all men are accountable for their sins.

Having disposed of a romantic conception of evil, Solomons addresses himself to what he regards as another false notion about human nature, in connection with young Tom, the illegitimate son of Catherine and Count Galgenstein, who has been adopted by Goody Billings, a benevolent housewife of the village:

A celebrated philosopher—I think Miss Edgeworth—has broached the consolatory doctrine, that in intellect and disposition all human beings are entirely equal, and that circumstance and education are the causes of the distinctions and divisions which afterwards unhappily take place among them. Not to argue this question
let us simply state that Master Thomas Billings . . . was in his long-coats fearfully passionate, screaming and roaring perpetually, and showing all the ill that he could show. At the age of two, when his strength enabled him to toddle abroad, his favourite resort was the coal-hole or the dung-heap; his roarings had not diminished in the least, and he had added to his former virtues two new ones—a love of fighting and of stealing; both which amiable qualities he had many opportunities of exercising every day. (Pp. 98–99)

In probing the corrupted soul, Solomons himself rejects the sentimental theory of natural innocence reflected in Miss Edgeworth's much imitated *Moral Tales* and *Early Lessons*, where children, who are at worst unruly, are properly conditioned by exemplary tutelage and salutary environments. He seems to be more on the side of original sin: "As I have heard the author of Richelieu, Natural Odes, Siamese Twins, &c. ['Bulwig' again] say, 'Poeta nascitur non fit,' which means, that though he had tried ever so much to be a poet, it was all moonshine; in the like manner I say, 'Roagus nascitur non fit.' We have it from nature, and so a fig for Miss Edgeworth" (p. 100). Had Tom simply followed the cottage-lined walks of Miss Edgeworth's children, or Fatherless Fanny, Mrs. Holland's beggar boys—and Oliver Twist—presumably he would have been led up the path of righteousness under the guidance of amiable adopted parents. But fresh country air fails to purify Tom's bad blood. His road leads to Tyburn, like that of another apprentice fallen on evil ways, Jack Sheppard. However, unlike Ainsworth, who blames society for his hero's downfall, Solomons makes Tom fully culpable for his crimes.16

Moral responsibility, then, is the fundamental theme of *Catherine: A Story*, with the most heinous of sinners set out as prominent object lessons. However, Solomons's dedication to truth in art commits him to painting all men, not merely thieves, "as they are." His parody, therefore, is not confined to the Newgate novel, but takes in all manner of fictitious representations of life that romanticize or sentimentalize human nature. To make his point about "sham" versus "true" history, he anticipates "George de Barnwell" of the later Punch Prize Novels series: "Had we been writing novels instead of authentic histories we might have carried them [Catherine and her husband] anywhere else we chose," he declares in connection with the false threat of impressment of Hayes by the vagabonds Brock and Macshane, "and we had a great mind to make Hayes philosophising with Bolingbroke, like a certain Devereux; and Mrs. Catherine *maitresse en titre* to Mr. Alexander Pope, Dr. Sacheverel, Sir John Reade the oculist, Dean Swift, or Marshal
Tallard; as the very commonest romancer would under such circumstances. The “very commonest romancer” was Bulwer with his well-known capacity for historical name-dropping and over-coloring of the past. To be sure, with *Henry Esmond* Thackeray was to teach Bulwer how to bring this sort of thing off more convincingly, but for now he is determined to adhere closely to the line of the Newgate Calendar, and “not for the sake of the most brilliant episode—no, not for a bribe of twenty guineas per sheet, would we depart from it” (p. 79). Here too is an early swipe at glorified war heroes that Thackeray was to repeat with variations in “Phil Fogarty,” the parody of Lever that first appeared in *Punch*, and in *Barry Lyndon* and *Vanity Fair*. Brock and Macshane, the brigands of *Catherine*, deflate the pseudoepical style of the military novelists then in vogue—among whom the names chiefly remembered are Gleig, Maxwell, and Glascock. A typical figure in Gleig’s tales in particular was the peninsular miles gloriosus, and it is with one of these in mind that Ensign Macshane is best appreciated: “He was perfectly ready with his sword, and when better still, a very little tipsy, was a complete master of it; in the art of boasting and lying he had hardly any equals.” Furthermore, “it was a fact that he had been in Spain as a volunteer, where he had shown some gallantry, had had a brain fever, and was sent home to starve as before.” As to the present life of the two ex-soldiers: “[Macshane] and Brock took to their roving occupation, he cheerfully submitted to the latter as his commanding officer, called him always major, and, bating blunders and drunkenness, was perfectly true to his leader. He had a notion—and, indeed, I don’t know that it was a wrong one—that his profession was now, as before, strictly military, and according to the rules of honour. Robbing he called plundering the enemy; and hanging was, in his idea, a dastardly and cruel advantage that the latter took, and that called for the sternest reprisals” (pp. 80–81). Brock and Macshane, in other words, may have changed their uniforms, but not their way of life. The criminal code, according to Ikey Solomons, is merely the obverse side of the code of war upheld by society.

Owing to the delicious irony that the depraved Tom Billings is in fact the son of an aristocrat, the upper classes also come in for their share of the satire in the story. Before he created gentleman criminals, Bulwer created gentleman fops, for which he had already been exposed to public ridicule in *Fraser’s* pages by *Sartor Resartus*. It is not surprising, therefore, that Thackeray makes sport also of what he was to label the Silver-Fork novel. “It is not our purpose to
make a great and learned display here," he declares when he is about to describe the ball at Marylebone Gardens, where Catherine meets Galgenstein after years of separation: "otherwise the costumes of the company assembled at this fête might afford scope for at least half a dozen pages of fine writing; and we might give, if need were, specimens of the very songs and music sung on the occasion" (p. 138). Thackeray assumes that the refined readers of *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* have grown as weary as he has of *Pelham* and *Devereux* as well as of Lady Morgan's *Dramatic Scenes* and Lady Charlotte Bury's *Diary of a Lady in Waiting to the Court of George IV*.18 No matter that he was to do something like these, and more, in *Vanity Fair*. For now, "leave we these trifles to meaner souls! Our business is not with the hoops and patches, but with the divine hearts of men, and the passions which agitate them," he writes, echoing Professor Teufelsdröckh.19

In large part a pasticcio of the popular fiction of the 1830s, *Catherine* might have been subtitled "*Fraser's Prize Novelists,*" for it adds up to the same sort of farrago as the famous *Punch* series of the following decade. But beyond its topicality, the sweep of its satire—taking in a cross section of humanity, respectable citizens as well as criminals, old and young, soldiers and civilians, aristocrats and commoners—moves it in the direction of the panoramic novel of society that we associate with the mature Thackeray. Ikey Solomons's immediate intention, however, is to make his history something more than an "Old Bailey Chronicle." In carrying out this objective he seems to contradict himself. "Now if we are to be interested by rascally actions, let us have them with plain faces, and let them be performed not by virtuous philosophers, but by rascals. . . . We say let your rogues in novels act like rogues, and your honest men like honest men, don't let us have any juggling and thimblerigging with virtue and vice," he affirms early in the story, with an obvious hit at Bulwer's *Eugene Aram* and *Ernest Maltravers* (chap. 1). Yet in a later address to the reader he says: "Surely our novel-writers make a great mistake in divesting their rascals of all gentle human qualities: they have such," concluding that "the only sad point to think of is, in all private concerns of life, abstract feelings, and dealings with friends, and so on, how dreadfully like a rascal is to an honest man" (chap. 5). This last jab of course cuts two ways, and Solomons demonstrates his point quite amply in the "strange and proper jumble" that he creates, where rascals and honest people—thieves, whores, bourgeois, and nobility—are thrown together and scrambled. So we do indeed get "juggling and
thimberigging with virtue and vice" from Solomons, if in unexpected ways.

A comment on The Beggar's Opera that appeared in the serial version of Catherine helps us read between the lines of Solomons's rather cryptic pronouncements. Here he praises the "bitter wit" of Gay's comedy that "hits the great by showing their similarity with the wretches that figure in the play" (p. 187). This tradition was carried forward by "Gur"-lyle and many another contributor to Fraser's Magazine, no respecter of persons, as is well known, either in its literary or political assaults. During the year when Catherine was running, a number of poems appeared in the magazine, laden with innuendo about the character of the ruling classes. Among these were "Robyn Hode and Kynge Richarde" that implied in no uncertain terms an affinity between the two title characters, and a sonnet, "Triumph of the XXII," in which the current Whig ministry was likened to convicts awaiting hanging. Very much in line with this antiestablishment tone of the magazine in general is the belittling historical introduction to Catherine:

At that famous period in history, when the seventeenth century (after a deal of quarrelling, king-killing, reforming, republicanising, restoring, re-restoring, play-writing, sermon-writing, Oliver Cromwellising, Stuartising, and Orangising, to be sure) had sunk into its grave, giving place to the lusty eighteenth; when Mr. Isaac Newton was a tutor of Trinity, and Mr. Joseph Addison Commissioner of Appeals; when the presiding genius that watched over the destinies of the French nation had played out all the best cards in his hand, and his adversaries began to pour in their trumps; when there were two kings in Spain employed perpetually in running away from one another; when there was a queen in England, with such rogues for Ministers as have never been seen, no, not in our own day, and a General [Marlborough], of whom it may be severely argued whether he was the meanest miser or the greatest hero in the world; when Mrs. Masham had not yet put Madam Marlborough's nose out of joint; when people had their ears cut off for writing very meek political pamphlets; and very large full-bottomed wigs were just beginning to be worn with powder; and the face of Louis the Great, as his was handed in to him behind the bed-curtains, was, when issuing thence, observed to look longer, older, and more dismal daily... . . .

This burlesque version of history from the Commonwealth to Queen Anne anticipates in more scurrilous voice the iconoclasm of Henry Esmond: "Why shall history go on kneeling to the end of time? I am for having her rise up off her knees, and take a natural posture: not to be forever performing cringes and congees like a Court-chamberlain, and shuffling backwards out of doors in the
presence of the sovereign. In a word, I would have History familiar rather than heroic.” The “familiar” history that Catherine presents to us, however, serves to bring royalty uncomfortably close to ruggery—showing nobles, ministers of state, generals, and court ladies engaged in the very activities pursued so vigorously by the vagabonds and wenches of the story that follows—gambling, thievery, and murder. As we see that might makes right in high places as in low, and that intriguers and imposters prosper in both spheres, we recognize indeed “how dreadfully like a rascal is to an honest man.”

In addresses to readers between the events of the story, Solomons tends to reverse this formula by stressing how an honest man resembles a rascal. In writing about French fashionable novels, Thackeray was to express a preference for “men and women of genteel society—rascals enough, but living in no state of convulsive crimes,” but in his prankish first novel he shows us genteel society reflected as in a crazy glass in the criminal underworld. Ikey Solomons’s sermons, like his capsule history of modern Europe, enlarge the moral context of this crime story: “Who has not felt how he works, the dreadful conquering Spirit of Ill?” he asks in a particularly satiric mood. “Who cannot see in the circle of his own society, the fated and the foredoomed to woe and evil?” (chap. 7). In the midst of predicting Catherine’s doom, he admonishes us: “You call it chance; ay, and so it is chance, that when the floor gives way, and the rope stretches tight, the poor wretch before St. Sepulchre’s clock dies. Only with us, clear-sighted mortals as we are, we cannot see the rope by which we hang, and know not when or how the drop may fall” (chap. 7). By the time he has completed his bill of indictment, crime becomes, as in The Beggar’s Opera, a gross image of the evil that pervades society.

Since Solomons obviously means for us to cry for all humanity through our laughter, more attention might be given to the story he manages to tell in the midst of his various feints, false starts, and digressions. Among the ways in which this convict narrator fools us is by leading us to suppose that he is following his chronicle source slavishly. As things turn out, he introduces characters for whom he had no factual source, the most important being Count von Galgenstein, Catherine’s lover and Tom’s natural father. Others are the misguided humanitarians Dr. Dobbs, Mrs. Dobbs, and Goody Billings, and the roles of the brigands Brock and Macshane were expanded from mere allusions in the Newgate Calendar. Solomons seems then to be doing what he upbraids Ainsworth,
Bulwer, and company for doing—embroidering upon reality—but he does it with a difference. The incidents that he takes over from documentary evidence—the tumultuous marriage of Catherine and John Hayes, the murder of Hayes, and the execution of the culprits—make his point that stark fact is more stirring than romance can make it. On the other hand, the author's unique additions to the record—which precede these climactic episodes—illustrate his conception of the novelist's proper function and purpose.

Actually, the documented fact in Catherine is virtually confined to the end of the story, where the narrator reprints contemporaneous accounts from newspapers of the discovery of Hayes's head (at the time unidentified) in a churchyard, and of the execution of Catherine and Tom.28 The first of the items reads: "Yesterday morning, early, a man's head, that by the freshness of it seemed to have been newly cut off from the body, having its own hair on, was found by the river's side near Millbank, Westminster, and was afterwards exposed to public view in St. Margaret's Churchyard, where thousands of people have seen it; but none could tell who the unhappy person was, much less who committed such a horrid and barbarous action. There are various conjectures relating to the deceased; but there being nothing certain, we omit them. The head was much hacked and mangled in the cutting off."29

"Various conjectures relating to the deceased" make up the bulk of the story up to this point. Thackeray's later, and lighter (or, in his terms, "facetious"), account of these events in the form of imitation broadside verse has already been quoted. In the story itself we get a pseudo-Gothic (or "romantic") version, where the churchyard becomes the scene of a rendezvous between the heroine and her lover, Count Gustavus Adolphus Maximilian von Galgenstein. At this midnight meeting Catherine, muffled in a cloak, extending her hand "clammy and cold" to the fear-ridden libertine Galgenstein, is the mischievous author's means of injecting a strain of the schreckroman into what is supposed to be a realistic crime narrative. Catherine, the slatternly murderess, is made to speak like a tragic princess. Of course, "the wind was very cold, and the piteous howling was the only noise that broke the silence of the place." Max von Galgenstein's reaction to the head, as it is revealed in a flood of moonlight, is true to the "tale from the German": "On a sudden his face assumed a look of the most dreadful surprise and agony. He stood still, and stared with wild eyes starting from their sockets; he stared upwards at a point seemingly above Catherine's head. At last
he raised up his finger slowly, and said, 'Look, Cat,—the head!—the head!' Then, uttering a horrible laugh, he fell down grovelling among the stones, gibbering and writhing in a fit of epilepsy" (p. 174). The hapless count never regains his sanity. "He was taken up a hopeless idiot, and so lived for years and years, clanking the chain, and moaning under the lash, and howling through long nights when the moon peered through the bars of his solitary cell, and he buried his face in the straw." The reference is once more to *Melmoth the Wanderer*, this time taking the form of a travesty of Stanton's narrative of his ordeal in prison, which recalls to him the cries of maniacal prisoners clanking their chains in tune with the pitiless lashing of their sadistic guards.

At this point Ikey Solomons turns to his readers and apologizes for teasing them. "There—the murder is out!" he exclaims after the mock-Gothic graveyard episode. "And having indulged himself in a chapter of the very finest writing, the author begs the attention of the British public towards it; humbly conceiving that it possesses some of those peculiar merits which have rendered the fine writing in other chapters of the works of other authors so famous." "Fine writing" (the equivalent in fiction of the "sham sublime" in art) is actually what this author has been castigating throughout his novel-on-novels where the idiocies of popular romance are whipped like the wretched Count Galgenstein.

Against this "sham history" Ikey Solomons sets his "true history," for which we can see the way prepared in the previously mentioned review essay in *Fraser's Magazine* called "Hints for a History of Highwaymen." The book under review, a series of biographies of outlaws by a writer named Charles Whitehead, becomes the occasion for a discourse on crime, past and present. The main thesis of the reviewer is that crimes have become reduced in explosiveness since the last century, but in the process have become more sinister. "The age of highwaymen is gone—that of cheats and swindlers has succeeded," he begins, echoing Burke. "Let us with earnest solemnity ask whether the violences of the past century were productive of more misery than the frauds of the present." Although it is true that "the pistol shot no longer rings in our streets," still he asks, "has the voice of wailing ceased in the secret chamber? Blood now seldom flows openly on our highways, battered brains rarely besprinkle our pavements, castle-spectre horrors have fled away like night-walking ghosts at break of day; is the amount of silent suffering lessened?"
Relating crime to sin, and regarding both as rooted in human instincts that are sublimated but never wholly obliterated in civilized society, this anonymous reviewer expresses deep curiosity about the psychology of the renegades of society—just what he finds lacking in the biographies under review, which he considers not only cursory and superficial as narratives, but lacking as well in character analysis. To him Whitehead's histories of crimes and criminals (like the Newgate novels later denounced in Catherine) were less effective than the raw accounts to be found in newspapers and in the ballads vended in the streets. There is a job to be done:

The history of English highwaymen yet remains to be written, and in competent hands the subject would not only be striking, interesting and affecting, but convey important instruction. Man, anywhere and under any circumstances, is an object of deep and appalling interest, and from erring man examples of the highest interest have ever been drawn. "Criminals stand forward," to use the words of Burke, "on the canvass of humanity as prominent objects for our special study." The progress of civilisation and the mutations of manners may be traced by the diversities and fluctuations of crime, for crimes have their cycles. . . . Hitherto the English criminal has been exhibited amidst the incidents of a novel, or his personal beauty lauded, and his untimely fate deplored in the stanzas of a song. It would be well to have him displayed as he really is in action, and in principle; recount if you can his education and his first associates, his first temptations, and all that may palliate or aggravate his first yielding to the tempter; exclude poetic adornment and speculative reverie. The man who undertakes the truly philosophic task we assign him ought to be patient in research, cool, somewhat sceptical, calmly discriminating between individual guilt and the community of error.

A history of English highwaymen meeting with these ambitious specifications still remains to be written. Nevertheless, in Catherine Thackeray seems to be attempting the "philosophic task" projected in this review. Behind his satire there certainly lurks the serious intention to convey instruction through examples of "erring men." The capsule history that begins the story traces "the progress of civilization" through the "diversities and fluctuations of crime," placing the ugly story of Catherine in a larger tradition of iniquity. 31 Subsequently, Thackeray does all he can to point up the moral significance of the case of Catherine Hayes. His superadditions upon the Newgate Calendar are concerned precisely with the "education . . . first associates . . . first temptations" of Catherine, all the influences, that is, that led her to transgress. Her schooling in the village poorhouse and her early enforced apprenticeship are
both guaranteed to keep her in a state of semiliteracy and in a primitive stage of moral feeling. Other episodes and characters invented by Thackeray are meant to motivate further her eventual downfall. She is taken in by a relative, the coarse tavern keeper Mrs. Score, who only encourages her coquetish inclinations and generally abets her in unscrupulousness. It is Catherine's further misfortune to run in with the unprincipled derelict Corporal Brock, and the handsome but rotten Count von Galgenstein. (In the original magazine version, the first meeting with the heroine was accompanied by an illustration captioned "Mrs. Catherine's Temptation.") Galgenstein easily succeeds in seducing her, not only because of her inherent looseness of character, but also through catering to her naïve ideas of glamour and social status. John Hayes, the rustic carpenter whom Catherine is prevailed upon to marry after Count Galgenstein deserts her (and after, be it added, her attempt to poison the count), is shown up to be mean and unlovable, so that Catherine's continued longing for her first lover is made plausible. By such details Thackeray makes us understand the causes that lie behind Catherine's crime without condoning it.

In an often quoted letter to his mother, Thackeray expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which he has allowed his story to develop: "It was not made disgusting enough. . . . the triumph of it would have been to make readers so horribly horrified as to cause them to give up or rather throw up the book and all of its kind, whereas you see the author had a sneaking kindness for his heroine, and did not like to make her utterly worthless."32 It is true that, without ever going so far as to make his heroine likeable, he makes some attempt to humanize her. A certain joie de vivre draws her to Galgenstein in the first place and makes her cling to his memory. Her maternal instinct leads her to take her son home to live with her after his adoption by the Billings family,33 a decision that proves fateful, for young Billings eventually aggravates the rift between Catherine and her husband. Furthermore, one motive for her seeking out Galgenstein once more, after a separation of several years, is her ambition to make a gentleman out of Tom. A lingering fondness for Brock, her early companion in evil, leads her to take him into her home as a lodger after his return from forced labor in Virginia. This proves to be another mistake in judgment, inasmuch as Brock stirs up dissension between Catherine and her husband. As Thackeray rewrites Catherine's history, he even has her balk momentarily at the murder of Hayes, making Brock and Billings more the aggressors in the act. In her
eventual complicity in the murder, anger over Hayes's alleged infidelity (as falsely reported by Brock) is added to her original motives of lust and hate. However, if these softening touches made Catherine's story less disgusting, as Thackeray thought, they presumably enhanced its value as a cautionary tale. It fits in with his moral scheme for the novel that she should be driven by instincts that, however perverted and misdirected, are recognizable human ones. Although Catherine is depicted far too sketchily and spasmodically to affect us as either a coherent or a sympathetic character, it is clear that Thackeray intended her to be a woman sinned against as well as sinning. Her sins, though far greater in degree, are related to those that all flesh is heir to as fallible creatures exercising freedom of will and choice.

In the long run, Thackeray's probing of Catherine's past is supposed to help us in "discriminating between individual guilt and the community of error." He manages, without diminishing Catherine's culpability, to make us recognize the part that others have played in her undoing. The slatternly Mrs. Score, by her very efforts to separate the two lovers, goads Count Galgenstein into carrying off Catherine. Hayes, impelled by his passion for "Miss Cat," pursues her, even though he knows she loathes him. Brock, to further his own gain, fans up Catherine's jealousy of the count to the point where she attempts to poison him. But Thackeray's real skill in irony is employed in his exposure of the evil wrought by "do-gooders" like Doctor Dobbs, who naïvely accepts Catherine as a repentant Magdalen after her unsuccessful attempt to poison Galgenstein; Mrs. Dobbs, whose matchmaking propensity leads her to bring Catherine and John Hayes together; and Goody Billings, whose indulgence of young Tom only feeds his basically evil instincts.

The effect of all of this wisdom of Solomons is to extend the "community of error" even beyond the population of the story. "De te fabula" reads a passage in the original version. Yet along with the recognition of our own frailty we are supposed to learn to "pardon humanity." A review contributed by Thackeray to another journal a month before Catherine began its run in Fraser's contains a caveat that might have served as an epigraph to this fable:

Our purpose here is not to preach up the refinement of morality, or to exercise that cheap virtue which consists in laying bare the faults of our neighbour. To grow angry with the cant of patriotism, the thousand meannesses of party, the coarse lies with which ambition is obliged to feed the fools on whom it lives in return,—to grow
angry with these would be to pass through life in a fury; and we might as well be wroth at any other of the diseases to which Providence has subjected the children of men. Our passions, our wants, the dire struggles of necessity, the blindness of vanity, offer, if not an excuse for worldly dishonesty, at least a palliation; and a wise man will look at them not so much with anger as with humble pity, and pray that he himself may not be led into temptation.\textsuperscript{34}

The specific occasion for these remarks was the trial of Queen Caroline for adultery, with the political chicanery and moral confusion it engendered, but the application obviously was intended to be universal. Here, in the course of criticizing the statesmanship of Lord Brougham, whose speeches before Parliament, the bar, and various educational institutions he was reviewing, Thackeray seems to be charting his own literary path:

When the history of those days [the times of George IV] comes to be written, when some future Swift or Fielding shall take upon himself to describe the facts and characters which Lord Brougham has \textit{not} described—which he might describe if common honesty would allow him, and common decency would not prevent him—the tale will not be an un instructive one, and the moral wholesome, though bitter. In the annals of human folly, is there a page more strangely ludicrous and despicable? In the history of human baseness, is there a story more base? Which is the more contemptible, the immaculate accuser or the spotless accused?\textsuperscript{35}

In this light, \textit{Catherine} can be read as a kind of preface to Thackeray's "annals of human folly," in which he tries to remove human obloquy from the courts of law to the tribunal of the conscience, identifying plaintiff and defendant, judge and culprit. On its serious side, then, the effect of his parody of crime novels is to reverse their drift. The Newgate novels of Ainsworth and Bulwer were in part polemical tracts against capital punishment (an aspect of them that Ikey Solomons does not consider). Therefore it suited their purpose to \textit{elevate} the criminal by revealing his better nature, that is, his affinity with respectable citizens.\textsuperscript{36} The object of the author of \textit{Catherine}, on the contrary, was to \textit{lower} the respectable of society by exposing what they had in common with criminals. This was a strange way to "pardon humanity," but Thackeray's concern then and thereafter was not so much with unjust laws and penal institutions, as with "what is false within." Readers were expected to shudder more at the contemplation of themselves than at the deeds of murderers. No wonder that the subscribers to \textit{Fraser's} found the story repulsive.
Readers of the time undoubtedly were thrown off also by a novel without a hero—with nothing in fact but villains. Then, too, what were they to make of the pompous exhortations in the midst of farce, of the chameleonlike narrator who is successively jester, lay prophet, chronicler, and theater manager, of the kaleidoscopic movement in time and place, of the false leads, of narratives begun and dropped, of humor mixed with horror, of so much space given to how the story is to be told, but so relatively little to the telling of it? As if in apology for this chaos of narration, Solomons declares at one point: “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” (p. 149). But out of this “jumble” he was to make order. If it is a youthful perversity that asserts itself predominantly in his first novel, this perversity was to be mellowed by compassion for “erring man.”

“Hints for a History of Highwaymen,” it has already been suggested, also contains a pointer or two for the would-be novelist. Certainly Thackeray remained firm in his conviction, in kinship with the “philosophic, literary, legal observer” projected by the writer of “Hints,” that the novelist, no less than the historian, builds upon fact, not fancy, upon the world as it is, not as one would wish it to be. Consequently he always valued primary sources—records, documents, letters, memoirs—for the texture of actuality that they conveyed. At the same time he thought that their value was enhanced if interpreted by a moral philosopher with the poised attitude of the skeptic toward human character and motive. True representation of character meant “the whole truth”—vices as well as virtues—tracing the sources of both, placing blame where blame is due, while giving due attention to extenuating circumstances. And he always interested himself in the “canvass of humanity” rather than mere individuals, seeking insight into human behavior in the worst as well as in the best of men.

“That he has not altogether failed in the object he had in view, is evident from some newspaper critiques which he has had the good fortune to see; and which abuse the tale of ‘Catherine’ as one of the dullest, most vulgar, and immoral tales extant,” reads Ikey Solomons’s last address to the reader. He is, of course, rationalizing the failure of his medicinal “dose” to go down. His demonstration of how the novelist-historian-philosopher can draw instruction for
mankind from the fleeting records of the day went generally unappreciated. The public was not yet ready for his peculiar "jumble" of the sublime and the ridiculous and of "sham" history and true. Especially lost on its first readers were the intricate linking of cause and effect and painstaking psychology, particularly in the probing of the warped minds of the doomed "Mrs. Cat" and Hayes:

But no mortal is wise at all times: and the fact was, that Hayes, who cared for himself intensely, had set his heart upon winning Catherine; and loved her with a desperate greedy eagerness and desire of possession, which makes passions for women often so fierce and unreasonable among very cold and selfish men. His parents (whose frugality he had inherited) had tried in vain to wean him from this passion, and had made many fruitless attempts to engage him with women who possessed money and desired husbands; but Hayes was, for a wonder, quite proof against their attractions; and, though quite ready to acknowledge the absurdity of his love for a penniless alehouse servant-girl, nevertheless persisted in it doggedly. "I know I'm a fool," said he; "and what's more, the girl does not care for me; but marry her I must, or I think I shall just die; and marry her I will." For very much to the credit of Miss Catherine's modesty, she had declared that marriage with her was a sine qua non, and had dismissed, with the loudest scorn and indignation, all propositions of a less proper nature. (Chap. 1)

"A fool, a miser, and a coward! Why was I bound to this wretch?" thought Catherine: "I, who am high-spirited and beautiful (did not he tell me so); I who born a beggar, have raised myself to competence, and might have mounted—who knows whither?—if cursed Fortune had not balked me!"

As Mrs. Cat did not utter these sentiments, but only thought them, we have a right to clothe her thoughts in the genteelest possible language: and, to the best of our power, have done so. If the reader examines Mrs. Hayes' train of reasoning he will not, we should think, fail to perceive how ingeniously she managed to fix all the wrong upon her husband, and yet to twist out some consolatory arguments for her own vanity. This perverse argumentation we have all of us, no doubt, employed in our time. How often have we—we poets, politicians, philosophers, family-men—found charming excuses for our own rascalities in the monstrous wickedness of the world about us; how loudly have we abused the times and our neighbours! All this devil's logic did Mrs. Catherine, lying wakeful in her bed on the night of the Marylebone fête, exert in gloomy triumph. (Chap. 11)

This analysis unfortunately tends to swamp incident, and ultimately is wasted on shallow people and a repellent story.

"His poem may be dull—ay and probably is," the author is ready to concede. "Be it granted, Solomons is dull; but don't attack his morality; he humbly submits that, in his poem, no man shall mis-
take virtue for vice, no man shall allow a single sentiment of pity or admiration to enter his bosom for any character of the piece: it being, from beginning to end, a scene of unmixed rascality performed by persons who never deviate into good feeling." Subsequently he made more concession not only to "good feeling" but to the pleasure principle in general. His fictitious children after Tom Billings do not exactly trail clouds of glory, but neither do they reek so heavily of brimstone. In his novels of society he provided those "hoops and patches" he had deliberately left out of the ball at Marylebone Gardens, the ball at Gaunt House in particular showing off "the costumes of the company" and resounding with "specimens of the very songs and music sung on the occasion." Furthermore he indulged more in that "pathos" in which he thought his chief rival Dickens excelled.

Most significant for Thackeray's development after Catherine was his abandonment of "unmixed rascality." A year after the appearance of his first novel, we find him backing away from a vivid picture in the Louvre of human depravity: "Oh Eugenius Delacroix! how can you manage with a few paint-bladders, and a dirty brush, and a careless hand, to dash such savage histories as these, and fill people's minds with thoughts so dreadful." Thackeray's own "savage histories" were behind him, but they furnished him with the scaffolding for his "edifice of humanity." If Catherine represents crime and sin in their starkest forms, Thackeray's maturer works represent them in their finer mutations and subtler shadings. A Catherine toned down and endowed with charm becomes a Becky Sharp engaged in a more refined husband murder. The bastard making his way through a corrupt society becomes a hero in Henry Esmond, the high-born exchanging roles with the base-born. The antiheroic theme undergoes a variety of modulations in Barry Lyndon, Vanity Fair, Henry Esmond, and The Virginians, where too we get history from the viewpoint of the ordinary person caught up in its currents. The social climber and the parvenu, which Catherine and her son are, among other things, stalk and strut through virtually all of the novels. And with his first novel Thackeray began his exploration through fiction of the phenomenon called Snobbism, which he defined for himself as the mean aspiration after mean things. The historian of Vanity Fair is contained in the Newgate Chronicler.

Not "unmixed rascality," in low life, but, as he indicates in an essay on French satire, "the ridicules and rascalities of common life" were what really fascinated Thackeray. Ten years later, es-
established with the public, he reverts to the subject of “gallows fiction” in the preface to *Pendennis*:

Perhaps the lovers of “excitement” may care to know, that this book began with a very precise plan, which was entirely put aside. Ladies and gentlemen, you were to have been treated, and the writer’s and the publisher’s pocket benefited, by the recital of the most active horrors. What more exciting than a ruffian (with many admirable virtues) in St. Giles’s, visited constantly by a young lady from Belgravia? What more stirring than the contrasts of society the mixture of slang and fashionable language? the escapes, the battles, the murders? Nay, up to nine o’clock this very morning, my poor friend, Colonel Altamont, was doomed to execution, and the author only relented when his victim was actually at the window.

The “exciting” plan was laid aside (with a very honourable forbearance on the part of the publishers) because, on attempting it, I found that I failed from want of experience of my subject; and never having been intimate with any convict in my life, and the manners of ruffians and gaol-birds being quite unfamiliar to me, the idea of entering into competition with M. Eugène Sue was abandoned. To describe a real rascal, you must make him so horrible that he would be too hideous to show; and unless the painter paints him fairly, I hold he has no right to show him at all.

In between *Catherine* and *Pendennis* there had been Thackeray’s survey of “The Thieves’ Literature of France,” following upon Jannin’s *L’âne morte*, and his abortive translation of Sue’s *Les mystères de Paris*. These fixed him in his preference for those living “in no state of convulsive crimes.” He implies in his preface to *Pendennis* that he was more familiar with the villainy of “genteel society” than with “the manners of ruffians and gaol-birds.” After all, as Thackeray’s audience could have read in the pages of *Fraser’s Magazine* before he became a novelist, and as he had reminded them subsequently in his novels and was to continue to remind them: “Fraud is more frightful than force, to those who know the history of the past and the present centuries.”

1. See above, p. 137.

2. “Catherine: A Story,” by “Ikey Solomons, Jr. Esq.” first appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine* intermittently from May 1839 through February 1840. It did not reach book form until thirty years later, six years after Thackeray’s death, first in America (Boston: Appleton, 1869), then later the same year in England (London: Smith, Elder). Virtually all reprints follow the practice of these two first editions of cutting out the most ghastly episodes, including the murder of Hayes, the subsequent execution, the Grand Tableau, in which readers are invited to participate in a blood bath, and the graphic newspaper accounts that Thackeray drew on among his primary sources, so that modern readers may easily be left wondering why its first readers were so revolted by the story. Only in the Oxford Thackeray, vol. 3, and in
the Furniss Ed., vol. 6, can a modern reader readily get any conception of Thackeray's first novel in the form in which it originally appeared. The Oxford Thackeray reprints also the charmingly crude drawings that Thackeray made for the magazine version (presumably in reaction against the inanity of the Keepsakes that he also campaigned against in the pages of Fraser's). These are redrawn in most editions. Harry Furniss, an artist in his own right, prepared new illustrations for the edition he supervised.

3. Works, 13:107-8. This ballad is coupled in this collection with a contrasting one on the "beautiful singer" of the same name whose "voice was so sweet and so loud." In the second of these poems Thackeray recalls the trouble he got into over this coincidence of names with Irish patriots who, unaware of the notorious murderess, thought that Thackeray was slandering their countrywoman. Subsequently he got into similar difficulty when he referred to his "heroine" Catherine Hayes in Pendennis. See Anne Thackeray's introduction to Catherine in Works, 4:xxix-xxx.

4. See above, p. 119.

5. "Foreign Correspondence," 27 June 1833; rpt. in Mr. Thackeray's Writings in "The National Standard" and "Constitutional" (London, 1899), pp. 27-30. Among popular works cited is Champavert: Immoral Tales, by Petrus Borel the Lycanthrope, which abounds in rape, murder, and bloodshed of all sorts.

6. The Grand Tableau is preceded by Solomons's suggestions for equally lurid illustrations depicting the murder of Hayes in his bed. These plans do not appear to have been carried out.

7. So referred to by Thackeray years later in "Small Beer Chronicle," Roundabout Papers, Works, 12:305. Janin conducted a regular department of theater criticism in the Journal des débats for forty years, through which he became influential and widely known.

8. The quoted passage is from chap. 3 (my translation). This proved to be Janin's most popular work of fiction, reaching four editions by 1837 and fifteen over the next forty years. In 1851 it appeared in English translation as The Guillotined Woman.

9. Janin's satire was aimed mainly at the Gothic novel.

10. Janin was poking fun also at sentimental pastorals.

11. He refers to it in his article "Dickens in France," Fraser's Magazine 25 (March 1842): 349; Works (Cent. Biog. Ed.), 26:514, with a note: "Some day the writer meditates a great and splendid review of J.J.'s works." In the article Thackeray complains of Janin's prejudices against the English, but subsequently they became close friends, especially during Janin's visit to England in 1850. Other literary connections will be pointed out in later chapters.


13. Phrase used by Dickens in defense of his characterization of Nancy in his preface to Oliver Twist.


15. For reference to Thackeray's youthful reading of Melmoth, see Lewis Melville, William Makepeace Thackeray (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Doran, 1928), p. 79. Thackeray seems also to have in mind here a grotesque tale, James Dalton's The Gentleman in Black, which was illustrated by Cruikshank. See his essay "On the Genius of George Cruikshank," Westminster Review, June 1840, p. 37; Works, 13:308-9.

16. Like Ainsworth's hero, Billings is conceived as a variant of Hogarth's "idle apprentice," but, unlike Jack Sheppard, who attributes his turning to crime to maltreatment by his master's wife, Tom is pampered by Goody Billings. Thackeray also turns about another of Ainsworth's fictitious details of characterization. "The conceit of making Jack Sheppard the son of a woman of high family, and connected with a house of long descent, is rather droll," states the writer of the article "William Ainsworth and Jack Sheppard," which appeared simultaneously with the conclusion of Catherine; "Jack was a blackguard, blood, bone, and sinew; and any refining does his character perfect injustice" (Fraser's Magazine, February 1840, p. 237). Thackeray makes Tom the son of a man of noble family, but of ignoble character, thereby negating Ainsworth's sentimental fallacy.
17. Gleig was among Thackeray's fellow contributors to Fraser's.

18. These are among books reviewed by Thackeray for Fraser's or the Times during the years preceding the publication of Catherine.

19. Carlyle was one of the few of Thackeray's contemporaries to profess an unqualified admiration for Catherine (see Letters, 1:421). One can understand why in view of the unmistakable evidence of his influence. One satirical device employed in the story—the ease with which the criminal characters pass themselves off as aristocrats merely by dressing in elegant clothes—illustrates the basic idea of Sartor Resartus that "Society is founded upon Cloth." The encounter between Tom Billings and his father, Count Galgenstein, toward the end of the story also plays on the Teufelsdröckh theme. Young Tom has become a tailor's apprentice working under "one Beinkleider, a German . . . skilful in his trade (after the manner of his nation, which in breeches and metaphysics—in inexpressibles and incomprehensibles—may instruct all Europe)." Beinkleider is induced to fashion a waistcoat for Tom out of brocade furnished by Catherine, and thus accoutred, he is thought fit to go forth to meet his father (chap. 8).

20. See Miriam Thrall, Rebellious Fraser's: Not Yorke's Magazine in the Days of Maginn, Thackeray, and Carlyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934). Miss Thrall's discussion of the influence of Maginn on Thackeray (pp. 55–80) is interesting, if probably overstated. A number of her Thackeray attributions have since been seriously questioned.

21. Fraser's Magazine 19 (1839): 593–603, 638. The sonnet was composed by Maginn under the pseudonym of "Sir Morgan O'Doherty." Also related to Catherine are two articles on popular ballads attributed to Thackeray, "Half-a-Crown's Worth of Cheap Knowledge" (ibid. 17 [1838]: 275–90) and "Horae Catnachianae" (ibid. 19 [1839]: 407–24), along with one of his damming reviews of Keepsakes, "Our Annual Execution" (ibid., pp. 182–201). A kind of forerunner of Catherine is "Elizabeth Brownrigge" (ibid. 6 [1832]: 67–88, 127–48), which satirizes criminal stories by romanticizing the career of the notorious eighteenth-century exploiter of child apprentices and murderers. This tale was for a long time attributed to Thackeray, but is now believed to be the work of Maginn, possibly in collaboration with Lockhart. Edward M. White disputes this attribution as well as other traditional ones in his "Thackeray's Contributions to Fraser's Magazine," Studies in Bibliography 19 (1966): 67–78.


23. See above, p. 120.

24. Cf. the following anecdote relating to Louis Philippe, found among Thackeray's notes for a projected essay: "A woman with the aid of her daughter had killed her husband—the crime was a most monstrous and cruel one and the King was called upon to sign the death-warrant of the criminals—he would not—he could not—he had rather he said resign his crown than sign—then he asked for a week's delay, then when pressed by the Council for eight and forty hours more, then he flung himself into the arms of Lafitte [President of the Council] and bursting into tears said—'My father died on the scaffold'" ("Some Unpublished MS Notes by William Makepeace Thackeray For A Life of Prince Talleyrand" [1836?], Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Eng 951.6).

25. It is among the ironies of literary history that Thackeray did not recognize Dickens's similar satirical intention in Oliver Twist, one of the novels lampooned in Catherine (see Robert A. Colby, Fiction with a Purpose [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967], pp. 119, 326, n. 27).

26. Solomon's slyly interposes this autobiographic detail in a footnote to chap. 6 in connection with the temptations to crime induced by poverty ("The author, it must be remembered, has his lodgings and food provided for him by the government of his country"). It adds a nuance to his ultimate identification of his readers with criminals, and of course joins him with his real-life counterpart, the prototype also of Fagin in Oliver Twist. For further discussion of this point, see John Christopher Kleis, "Dramatic Irony in Thackeray's Catherine: The Function of Ikey Solomons, Esq., Jr.," Victorian Newsletter 33 (Spring 1968): 50–53.

27. His name possibly was suggested by a minor character in Jack Sheppard, the Dutch conjuror Van Galgebrok, who predicts that the hero will die by hanging.
28. In all editions I have examined except the Oxford Thackeray and the Furniss Ed., the following anonymous note is inserted before the climactic episodes: "The description of the murder and the execution of the culprits, which here follows in the original, was taken from the newspapers of the day. Coming from a source, they have, as may be imagined, no literary merit whatever. The details of the crime are simply horrible, without one touch of that sort of romance which sometimes gives a little dignity to murder. As such they precisely suited Mr. Thackeray's purpose at the time—which was to show the real manners of the Sheppards and the Turpins who were then the popular heroes of fiction. But nowadays there is no such purpose to serve, and therefore these too literal details are omitted."

This note may have been written by W. S. Williams, an editor for Smith, Elder, who prepared the first collected edition of Thackeray's works (1867-69). See introduction to Catherine, Works (Cent. Biog. Ed.), 24:xvii n.

29. Daily Post, 3 March 1726, as quoted in Fraser's Magazine, February 1840, p. 205; Oxford Thackeray, 3:175-76. The authenticity of the account was verified by C. E. Crouch, an assistant to W. S. Williams (Cent. Biog. Ed.).

30. Although it is no longer possible to attribute this article to Thackeray, it is evident that it made an impression on him, apart from its influence on Catherine. He echoes its phraseology in "Meditations at Versailles," one of the essays that went into the Paris Sketch Book, where the context is once more Edmund Burke's views on historical change: "But the age of horseflesh is gone—that of engineers, economists, and calculators has succeeded" (Works, 5:254).

31. "The opening sentences to the melancholy history of Catherine are like the chords to an overture, which tell of what is yet to come. The sordid story is lifted to its place in destiny by the irresistible order of the events thus indicated" (Anne Thackeray, introduction to Catherine, Works [Cent. Biog. Ed.], 24:xv).

32. Letters, 1:433. Janin confesses to a similar lapse in one of his digressions in L'âne mort: "J'étais plus morose que jamais; inquiet pour moi-même, je ne savais pas si, en effet, malgré tout mon mépris, je n'étais pas amoureux de cette femme" (beginning of chap. 7).

33. This part of the story is related to a polemical article, "The Custody of Infants Bill," that appeared in Fraser's earlier that year (19 [1839]: 205-14). The writer of this article protests against the tyranny of the law that permits a husband to deprive his wife of her child, whether she be innocent or guilty of any wrong. He argues that this practice, condoned by English courts, is a barbarous cruelty, for it thwarts the natural maternal instinct that God has implanted in the hearts of all women, poor and rich, savage and civilized.


36. For detailed discussion of the relation between the crime fiction of this period and developments in penal institutions and in the criminal law, see Joseph Keith Hollingsworth, The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), especially chaps. 1 and 2.

Not long after the publication of Catherine, Thackeray attended the execution of the murderer François Courvoisier. His sensitive report on this event shows strong sympathy with the condemned man as well as revulsion against capital punishment. See "Going to See a Man Hanged," Fraser's Magazine 22 (August 1840): 150-58; Works, 3:635-49, a fitting pendant to the sanguinary spectacles deplored in Catherine. For the background of this essay, see Albert I. Borowitz, "Why Thackeray Went to See a Man Hanged," Victorian Newsletter 48 (Fall 1975): 15-21.

37. Cf. the discussion of Cousin's ideas on history, pp. 44-45.

38. In some concluding critical remarks in the original version of Catherine, Thackeray betrayed a "sneaking kindness" for two of the novels he had satirized—Oliver Twist and Jack Sheppard. He confesses, for example, to having felt a vicarious excitement in reading Oliver Twist: "The power of the writer is so amazing, that the reader at once becomes his captive, and must follow him withersoever he leads" (p. 185). To this power Thackeray would join a dedication to truth. He conceded to Ainsworth a certain vigour and descriptive ability, but found the author of Jack Sheppard wanting in sophistication and the art of "banter" (p. 187)—lacking, in other words, Thackeray's skeptical mind, irony, and detachment.
39. “On Men and Pictures,” Fraser’s Magazine 24 (July 1841): 111; Works, 13:382. This painting, entitled Le naufrage de Don Juan, first shown at the Salon of 1841, is based upon an episode in Byron’s Don Juan, canto 2. It depicts a group of starving men in an open boat, survivors of a shipwreck, drawing lots to determine who shall be the first to be eaten. (For a comic treatment of this subject, see Thackeray’s ballad “Little Billie,” Works, 13:103–4.)


41. Foreign Quarterly Review 31 (April 1843): 231–45. The translation of Sue will be taken up in connection with Vanity Fair. At the end of this decade, a French critic, Philarete Chasles, referred to Thackeray’s “satirical novel for Fraser’s Magazine, directed against the extravagantly philanthropical novels then in vogue in England, and which since have been imported by ourselves; novels filled with very amiable jail birds and metaphysical hangmen” (“A Personal Sketch of Thackeray,” Literary World 4 [23 June 1849]; translated and condensed from his “Le roman de moeurs en Angleterre,” Revue des deux mondes, 6th ser., no. 1 [15 February 1849]: 537–71).