

give it to the poor, and follow me." And Scrooge's behavior after he awakens from the visit of the last of the Christmas Spirits fulfills just this idea. Beginning by distributing gifts of food and money, the old man ends the day on the doorstep of his nephew's house, fearful that he may be turned away by the young man he had earlier rejected, but aware, too, that if he is really to announce the recovery of his old innocence and youth, he must be prepared, finally, to make a gift of himself.

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The Structure of *Vanity Fair*

To the Editor:

It might be worth pointing out to the general readers of Robert E. Lougy's interesting and thought-provoking article on *Vanity Fair* (*PMLA*, 90, 1975, 256–69) that the discussion of the circular structure of the book ("*Vanity Fair* ends where it begins") ignores the order in which the book was written, and even more important, the order in which it was published.

I think there is a legitimate critical point to make about the structure of the book as it now appears in most editions, including the Riverside edition that Lougy uses. It is true, after all, that Thackeray knew what the final form of the book was going to be. Thus, it is correct to say that "When we first enter the fair, Thackeray is its manager, exhibiting before us a creation of his own making, one he understands and thus is able to control" (p. 256). And it is true that "Thackeray's own title-page illustration to the novel" exhibits the tensions and anxieties of the early and middle portions of the book (p. 256).

But that is not the way Thackeray first entered the fair, nor is it the way Thackeray's first readers entered it. The title-page illustration and the preface, called "The Manager of the Performance," were drawn and written last. Furthermore, they were published last and read last by the original purchasers of *Vanity Fair* in 1848. It is no recent discovery that *Vanity Fair* was published in monthly parts beginning in January of 1847 and running through July of 1848. But readers tend to forget that all the front matter was written for and supplied with the final installment.

The significance of these facts is that *Vanity Fair* "ends where it begins" because the beginning and end were written at the same time, after Thackeray had been through all that he was to go through during the composition of the novel. It may still be true that "we are witnessing the unfolding of an artistic vision at once more profound and more frightening than even its creator may have anticipated, and consequently one that Thackeray is at times barely able either to comprehend or to control" (p. 256), but it is not legit-

imate to turn to the preface and title-page illustration for indications of what Thackeray anticipated at the outset of the book.

PETER L. SHILLINGSBURG
The Thackeray Newsletter
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Mr. Lougy replies:

I must confess that I am somewhat at a loss to understand the gist of Peter L. Shillingsburg's remarks. Surely he is not suggesting that we are to read *Vanity Fair* as it was read for approximately one year (during its serialized publication); after all, the novel has existed for almost 130 years in the same format as we read it today. The problem of serial publication of nineteenth-century novels is a continuing one toward which a good amount of scholarship has been directed. But the fact remains that the great novelists of the period—such as Thackeray, Dickens, and Hardy—continue to be great (in spite of/because of) the (limitations/true test of their genius) created by the practice of serial publication. They are read today as novelists, not as serialists who happened to put their writings between hard covers.

The Riverside edition of *Vanity Fair* requires neither apology nor defense: *Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research* (ed. Lionel Stevenson, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966) rightfully refers to it as "a magisterial text." And among the Riverside edition's many virtues, its introduction has a rather thorough discussion of the history of the novel's publication and illustrations (pp. xxxviii–xxxix). Besides, Thackeray's own comments in "Before the Curtain" make it clear when the section was written: he not only thanks his audience for its favorable response to the novel, but also specifically refers to the critical reception of Becky, Amelia, and Dobbin. It is unlikely that even Thackeray would have given such a detailed prophecy of the novel's critical reception before it was written. The title-page illustration is a visual representation emblematic of the complete novel (as opposed to the chapter illustrations, representative of particular scenes or incidents), and it was as an emblem that I referred to it.

It is important, I think, that a novel is written within time as well as read within time; and my concern was primarily with the evolution of form, style, and vision that we see as *Vanity Fair* unfolds before us. I am not nearly so certain as Shillingsburg seems to be that "Thackeray knew what the final form of the novel was going to be," unless, of course, he simply means that Thackeray knew his novel was going to be a novel as opposed to, for example, a poem, a play, or a sketch. On the contrary, the beauty and power of *Vanity Fair*