

Thackeray's Early London Fictions, 1837-41: Cockneys, Entrepreneurs and Merchants

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1. Introduction

In 1837, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63) settled with his newly-wed wife in London after his bohemian years in Paris. He then launched his literary career as a hack writer for magazines and newspapers and wrote fictions as well as nonfictional reports, reviews and essays. His earliest fictions in the late 1830s were often set in France and especially in Paris which he knew well and later collected along with his other writings on French themes in *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840). It was natural, however, that his focus should shift to London as he became familiar with the people and manners there. This shift of focus occurred from the late 1830s to the early 1840s while he had a hard life in London's literary bohemia and with his ill wife to support. Although he did not always focus on contemporary London, it was his acute observation of London life in particular that earned him the fame of the rising novelist to rival Charles Dickens. By the end of the decade, he was a literary lion with the enormous success of *Vanity Fair* (1847-8), which was highly acclaimed as the vast chronicle of Regency London.

It is tempting to observe how Thackeray developed during the decade from a hack writer to the leading novelist of the day.⁽¹⁾ His first successful

ficition of substantial length was *The Memoirs of Mr. Charles J. Yellowplush* (hereafter *The Yellowplush Papers*), a comic tale serialized intermittently in *Fraser's Magazine* from 1837 to 1840. Although it is only partly set in London, it features a characteristic Cockney hero and narrator. The comic tone of this debut fiction was sustained in his subsequent works, among which *Stubbs's Calendar; or, the Fatal Boots* (1839) stood out for its depiction of London's merchant class in the recent past. This was followed the next year by its sister piece, *Barber Cox and the Cutting of His Comb* (1840), a satire on London's high life from an upstart's point of view.⁽²⁾ Between these almanac tales, Thackeray serialized *Catherine*, a historical novel set in Augustan London, in *Fraser's Magazine* from 1839 to 40, which was followed by *A Shabby Genteel Story* in 1840 and *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond* (hereafter *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*) in 1841, both living up to the standard of the shorter novel about contemporary life. His collaboration with *Fraser's* continued, producing *The Fitz-Boodle Papers* (1842-3), *Men's Wives* (1843) and *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* (1844), though the last was a historical novel about mid-eighteenth-century Ireland and Germany. Prior to this work, Thackeray had made a tour around Ireland in 1842 as well as paid occasional visits to European countries, and while it was serialized, he set

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- (1) The following studies pay critical attention to Thackeray's early career up to *Vanity Fair* in particular: James H. Wheatley, *Patterns in Thackeray's Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1969); John Carey, *Thackeray: Prodigal Genius* (London: Faber, 1977); Robert A. Colby, *Thackeray's Canvass of Humanity: An Author and His Public* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1979); Edgar F. Harden, *Thackeray the Writer: From Journalism to Vanity Fair* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996); and Richard Pearson, *W. M. Thackeray and the Mediated Text: Writing for Periodicals in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).
- (2) Both *Stubbs's Calendar* and *Barber Cox* were written for George Cruikshank's *Comic Almanack* of 1839 and 1840 respectively.

out on a long journey to the Mediterranean. These travels resulted not only in *Barry Lyndon* but also in his travel books and foreign tales such as *The Irish Sketch Book* (1843), *A Legend of the Rhine* (1845) and *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1846). On the other hand, he joined the *Punch* set in the mid-1840s and became a regular contributor to the magazine, producing more London tales and essays such as *The Fat Contributor Papers* (1844-7), *The Diary of C. Jeames de la Pluche, Esq., with His Letters* (1845-50) and *The Snobs of England* (1846-7; later retitled *The Book of Snobs*). It was still during the serial publication of *The Snobs of England* that Thackeray took up another series, *Vanity Fair*, which began to appear from the *Punch* publishing house in January 1847.

To follow the writer's progress through all these stages would demand a volume, so let it suffice in the present paper to focus on three pivotal works in the early phase of the decade, namely *The Yellowplush Papers*, *Stubbs's Calendar* and *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*. In the following argument, I shall look closely into each work and reveal how they present London's lower- to middle-class types differently and increasingly in the realistic mode. While *The Yellowplush Papers* remains much of a burlesque on its comic characters, *Stubbs's Calendar* sets out to test its hero's entrepreneurial ethics, and *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* attempts to explore the urban experience of London merchants. Curiously, Thackeray explores London's humbler population through these works than his mature fictions prefer to portray; by so doing, he seems to aim at the sort of middle-class realism that was inaugurated by Daniel Defoe.

2. *The Yellowplush Papers* and the creation of a Cockney hero

Thackeray's first successful fiction, *The Yellowplush Papers*, originally

started as a book review in *Fraser's Magazine* in November 1837, not long after he settled in London in March the same year. Preceding it, he had only contributed single articles to *The Times* and *Bentley's Miscellanies*, and neither secured him a future career. When he was then assigned to write a book review for *Fraser's*, he did not miss the chance: by expanding the review into a series of comic tales of his own accord, he managed to win the position of a regular contributor to the magazine.⁽³⁾

Much of this success apparently came from the Cockney persona who wrote the review and then the series of narrative in peculiarly broken English, and in creating that persona Thackeray was no doubt indebted to Dickens, whose Cockney character in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7) enjoyed enormous popularity then. As Dickens wrote the adventures of a good-natured old master and his bright young servant, made particularly impressive by the latter's Cockney accent and inventive phrases, Thackeray related the narrative of a sly young servant and his evil masters in the voice of the former's dense Cockney English. In Mark Cronin's words, 'Thackeray rewrites the Pickwickian myth of innocence, goodness, and benevolence by parodying Dickens's depiction of the loyal servant, by rejecting the Dickensian vision of class harmony, and by substituting for Dickens's idyllic English countryside the alien shores of France'.⁽⁴⁾ Thackeray's dark comedy of intrigue and betrayal is quite different from Dickens's optimistic melodrama of faith and love, but it is worth special notice that

(3) I discussed Thackeray's strategies in developing the book review into a serial narrative in 'Plotting, Counterplotting, and Underplotting in *The Yellowplush Correspondence*: Reading Thackeray's Early Burlesque', *Journal of the Society of English and American Literature* 85 (2016), 39-59.

(4) Mark Cronin, 'Thackeray's First Fashioned Response to Dickens: *The Yellowplush Papers* Cast a Cynical Eye on the "Admiral Boz's" *Pickwick Papers*', *Dickens Quarterly* 10 (1993), 191.

both the writers had recourse to the same means of vitalizing their fiction: the effective use of Cockney English in the voice of a young servant, which is also a sort of verbal experiment comparable to James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939).⁽⁵⁾ By introducing their vigorous Cockney heroes, Dickens and Thackeray suggested where the new fiction would derive its humour in the aftermath of aristocratic silver-fork fiction.

It is questionable, however, how far Thackeray was successful or serious in the creation of his Cockney hero. His representation of Cockney English is highly praised on one hand: in his extensive study of Thackeray's language K. C. Phillipps states that 'There is no doubt that Thackeray records the language of valets, footmen and butlers with telling accuracy'.⁽⁶⁾ Jerry White, renowned historian of London, also acclaims Thackeray's merit as 'a fine observer of London life', and citing from *The Newcomes* adds that 'his reflections on the intellectual property of the London poor compared with that of other classes rings entirely true'.⁽⁷⁾ Cronin even suggests that Thackeray 'meant to offer a more realistic correction to Dickens's romantic portrayal of the noble servant'.⁽⁸⁾ But it is hard to take these praises immediately at face value when we ask ourselves where Thackeray could have acquired the knowledge about real London Cockneys. In terms of biographical backgrounds, Dickens should have a better claim than Thackeray to the knowledge of real Cockneys since he grew up in town and mixed with local children and people while the latter only

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- (5) This point is stressed in Gordon N. Ray, *Thackeray: The Use of Adversity 1811-1846* (New York: Octagon, 1972), 229-30.
- (6) K. C. Phillipps, *The Language of Thackeray* (London: André Deutsch, 1978), 137.
- (7) Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: Vintage, 2008), 114.
- (8) Cronin, 'Thackeray's First Fashionable Response to Dickens', 193.

boarded near Charterhouse where he took his first formal education. Of course, Thackeray's intermittent, if not perpetual, residence in London from childhood onwards could have given him some chance to observe Londoners of various ranks and possibly learn the vulgar tongue spoken among servants and hostlers. But it is one thing to observe London's low life and it is quite another to live the life of a Cockney character from within, especially for such a snob as him who takes pride in his own class and education. P. J. Keating is acute enough to see Thackeray's derogatory intention in mocking a vulgar-tongued footman, not without extending his criticism to Dickens as well:

When, for instance, Thackeray has a character say 'I bloo the bellus of the horigin', then he is making no attempt to present the actual sound of an actual voice, but is adopting a special form of phonetics for the purpose of class caricature. Likewise when Charles Yellowplush says, 'Let us draw a vail ver the seen', or speaks of his 'selly-brated' employers, then there is an attempt at phonetic representation only in order to indicate the speaker's inferior social status. While both Dickens and Thackeray use Cockney as a class dialect, in the one it leads to the creation of predominantly eccentric characters, in the other to mockery of lower-class vulgarity.⁽⁹⁾

Harsh as it may sound, Keating's criticism strikes to the point: both Dickens and Thackeray seem to aim not so much to represent the true manners of Cockney footmen as to produce pure comic effects in one way or another; in Thackeray's case in particular, the narrator-hero's idiosyn-

(9) P. J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1971), 254.

cratic spellings are unlikely happenings as far as he is supposed to be writing the narrative, not telling it.

After surveying the opposing views of Thackeray's Cockney writing, one might conclude that Charles Yellowplush is most likely an amalgamation of fictional precedents rather than a first-hand creation from nature. Particularly suggestive in this respect is the fact that despite its initial focus on London's native hero the narrative of *The Yellowplush Papers* soon abandons its London stage and jumps to Paris, where the rest of the action takes place. This attests to Thackeray's lingering familiarity with Paris and its literary culture that informs *The Paris Sketch Book* rather than his sincere interest in real London life. Besides the examples of Dickens's fiction and British comedies, the effective use of heroic servants can be found in French theatres as well, represented by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais's Figaro trilogy, in which the bright valet plays wise tricks for or against his master.⁽¹⁰⁾ On the other hand, if we focus on Mr Yellowplush's master, Mr Deuceace who plots to swindle a simpleton and capture a rich bride, we can assume that the narrative follows the tradition of rogue narratives.⁽¹¹⁾ From post-Medieval Spanish romans of Picares to their modern descendants in Alain-René Le Sage and Henry Fielding, the genre thrived across west European nations prior to Thack-

(10) Thackeray was an ardent theatre-goer during his stay in Paris, as I argued in 'Thackeray in Paris, 1829-37: The Bohemian Years', *Jinbun Ronkyu* 67/4 (2018), 80 and 86. His earliest mention of Figaro appears in *The Paris Sketch Book*. Thackeray, *The Paris Sketch Book and Art Criticisms*, ed. George Saintsbury, Oxford Thackeray (London: Oxford UP, 1908), ii, 189. All references to Thackeray's text hereafter are to the Oxford Thackeray edition, and each reference is followed by the abbreviated title of the edition (OT) and volume and page numbers in parentheses.

(11) About the tradition of rogue narratives, see Robert Alter, *Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965).

eray's generation, and Thackeray himself succeeded to the French tradition when he wrote 'Cartouche' (1839), a short story based on the legendary criminal (finally collected in *The Paris Sketch Book*). One feature of this genre is the frequent use of first-person narrative, in which the rogue-hero relates his own feats and failures and, as he is often lowly-bred and associated with low company, naturally tends to use low language. The peculiar narrative style of *The Yellowplush Papers* is most likely the culminated form of this tendency. In sum, Thackeray's Cockney hero seems to belong more to the literary tradition than to London's social reality.

3. *Stubbs's Calendar* and the trial of entrepreneurial morality

The picaresque strand of *The Yellowplush Papers* was developed in Thackeray's subsequent works until it found its way into *Barry Lyndon* and the Becky part of *Vanity Fair*. *Stubbs's Calendar*, which he wrote for George Cruikshank's *Comic Almanack* of 1839, was the immediate successor to *The Yellowplush Papers* which was once completed in August 1838. The eponymous rogue hero of the narrative, Bob Stubbs, is a son of a formerly wealthy gentleman who degraded himself by marrying a tradesman's daughter while Mr Yellowplush boasted of his ambiguous origin as 'a footman by both' and 'illygitmit [. . .] of a genlmnly origum' (OT i, 168).⁽¹²⁾ Both the heroes take pride in their genteel origin and yet presently suffer from their reduced conditions; hence their fervent aspiration for a better life and status. While Mr Yellowplush lives in the pre-industrial world of rogues and idle suitors, however, Bob lives in the modern world of various trades. Although he declares himself to be born 'a

(12) Thackeray, *The Yellowplush Papers and Early Miscellanies*, ed. George Saintsbury, Oxford Thackeray (London: Oxford UP, 1908), i.

gentleman and not a tradesman' (OT i, 432) and joins army, his ill-advised marriage brings him into prison and forces him to earn his living as a shoe-black and as a postman. Other characters around him also show a variety of social backgrounds: Mr Stiffelkind is a shoemaker, Mr Dobbie a tailor's son, Miss Crutty a shoemaker's niece, Miss Waters a doctor's niece, Miss Brisket a butcher's daughter, Miss Clopper a navy-contractor's daughter, Mrs Manasseh a tobacco-merchant's widow and so on. *Stubbs's Calendar*, though set in the historical time of the French Revolution and War, apparently captures the texture of the middle-class society its author knew, and, coupled with its sister piece, *Barber Cox*, explores real London life in the burlesque mode.

Besides its realistic scope of middle-class society, what attracts attention is that *Stubbs's Calendar* surreptitiously brings into focus the moral issues that confronted the middle-class tradespeople of the time. The moral theme of this story is tactfully disguised in the concluding passage, whose message could reach the reader but in triple irony. At the end of the narrative, Bob meets a gentleman who turns out to be a literary man. On learning Bob's story about himself, the gentleman offers to make a book of his adventures, saying 'they're *moral*' (OT i, 484), though Bob remains in doubt: 'I'm blest if *I* can see anything moral in them' (OT i, 484). This is how, as we are led to believe, Bob's life history has come to appear in public form. It takes some effort, however, to grasp the full implication of this passage. The gentleman finds moral lessons in Bob's life history while Bob himself denies them. On the first and basic level, the gentleman is wrong and Bob is right, for Bob is a moral degenerate and far from being capable of offering moral lessons. This is the first irony. On the second level, however, the gentleman may be right and Bob wrong, for Bob's life history can offer a *negative* example. This is the second irony, and

these two ironies are, I presume, likely to reach every reader. But I claim there should be a third level, on which the gentleman is still right and Bob wrong, not so much because Bob's life offers a *negative* example as because it offers a *positive* example. I mean to say that Bob's conduct is not only defensible but also commendable from a certain point of view. This is the third irony which might have eluded many readers and critics, yet which reflects some moral debates at the time of the work's publication.

The moral paradox I call into question will be most easily seen in the last scene of the February section. In this section, focus is on Bob's early education at Dr Swishtail's academy, and Bob's ill conduct against his classmates is described in detail. One day, everything is known to the headmaster, and Bob is called forth to receive punishment. What then becomes of him is described by Bob himself with a fine illustration by Cruikshank as follows:

The tyrant took the thirty shilings that my dear parents had given me, and said he should put them into the poor-box at church; and, after having made a long discourse to the boys about meanness and usury, he said, 'Take off your coat, Mr. Stubbs, and restore Bunting his waistcoat.' I did, and stood without coat and waistcoat in the midst of the nasty grinning boys. I was going to put on my coat, -

'Stop,' says he, 'TAKE DOWN HIS BREECHES!'

Ruthless, brutal villain! Sam Hopkins, the biggest boy, took them down – horsed me – and *I was flogged, sir*; yes, flogged! Oh, revenge! I, Robert Stubbs, who had done nothing but what was right, was brutally flogged at ten years of age! (OT i, 426)



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This is indeed a moral scene, in which Bob is applied to punishment by the authority of the academy for his bad conduct; the lesson is clearly provided by the headmaster's discourse on *meanness* and *usury*. Yes, Bob is guilty of these vices and naturally deserves remedy and punishment. But this interpretation would be hardy satisfactory. The whole events are narrated in Bob's perspective, in which the headmaster is a 'tyrant' and 'Ruthless, brutal villain' who disgraces Bob 'in the midst of the nasty grinning boys' and 'brutally flog[s]' him, so that the reader is more likely to sympathize with Bob in humiliation and indignation than with Dr Swishtail. This view is clearly endorsed by Cruikshank's illustration: Bob's helpless countenance, Dr Swishtail's sadistic passion, Sam's triumphant expression, and the other boys' enjoying faces never fail to convey the impression that Bob is the victim in this scene. In addition, he is claiming that he 'had done nothing but what was right.'

What, then, is Bob's supposed sin? Dr Swishtail discovers that Bob has unjustly made money by swindling his schoolmates out of their personal

belongings and monthly allowances; he then accuses Bob of *meanness* and *usury*. But when we trace the process of his pecuniary success from the start, we can hardly find any serious transgressions on his part. When starting school life, he was allowed eighteen pence from his mother and saved it with his 'small capital' (OT i, 423). On arriving at the academy, he began his business by saving his monthly allowances and lending the saved money to other boys at high interest. He says, 'I'd no need to spend my own money, for they would insist upon treating me' (OT i, 423). In exchange for his daily misery, he gained power and never spared his friends the debt they owed him. Thus with his genius and perseverance, he piled up in half a year the money amounting to three guineas and fifteen shillings as well as some seized properties. Throughout the whole process, he has just acted on the logic of capitalism and committed no crimes.

The moral censure Bob meets in his conduct of financial business could precisely reflect the moral conditions of the time when Thackeray was writing this tale. Following the pivotal passage of Reform Act, the early Victorian era saw the restructuring of the bourgeois ideology that increasingly dominated British society. The traditional historians like Walter E. Houghton and Harold Perkin saw the 'overbalance' of 'the commercial spirit' (Houghton) or 'the triumph of the entrepreneurial ideal' (Perkin),⁽¹³⁾ but the matter was not so simple. As the aristocratic ascendancy still maintained their authority and the growing middle classes aspired to merge with them, the latter were led to hold an ideal that sometimes contradicted their own interest. While they naturally pursued to expand their wealth with the entrepreneurial spirit, their unlimited expansion was

(13) Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985), 183; and Harold Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society* (London: Routledge, 1972), 271-339.

checked by their own ideal of gentlemanliness which forbade mean money-grubbing. Similarly, the moral virtues of sympathy and benevolence not only encouraged their social reform and charity but also discouraged their egoistic pursuit of wealth. Houghton holds that these virtues deteriorated into maudlin passion and sentimentality in early industrial England, and Stefan Collini diagnoses the obsessive culture of altruism and morbid antipathy to egoism in the Victorian age.⁽¹⁴⁾ G. R. Searle explores this moral dilemma further and examines in detail the moral discourses that often collided with the mandate of economic pursuit to earn more. This collision took various forms in public debates – as that between utilitarianism and evangelism, slave trade and humanitarianism, free trade and patriotism, entrepreneurialism and sound finance, self-help and philanthropy, capitalism and altruism, bad habits and moral reforms and so on – and in many cases, moral principles served to check the expansion of bourgeois desire and wealth.⁽¹⁵⁾

Not surprisingly, fiction through the Victorian era repeatedly addressed this issue and helped to spread what Houghton calls maudlin passion and sentimentality in the reading public. On one hand, by focusing on modest and moral heroes and heroines, the novelists advocated the middle-class values of earnestness and moral refinement against the lazy and sometimes cruel upper classes. On the other hand, they created and criticized the avatars of mammonism in whom the economic excluded the moral virtue. Without doubt, Ebenezer Scrooge and Heathcliff are of this type, and they were followed by Josiah Bounderby, Nicholas Bustrade, Augustus

(14) Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 60-90.

(15) G. R. Searle, *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

Melmotte, George Ponderevo, Soames Forsite and so on. These servants to Mammon are more or less successful businessmen and as such do not escape moral censures in the novels: some are denounced as enemies to the poor and innocent heroes and heroines and others are made guilty of speculation and gambling.⁽¹⁶⁾ Tamara S. Wagner, in her study of financial plots in Victorian fiction, labels the speculator figures as 'stock-market villains' and argues their increasing importance in the plots of financial fluctuation.⁽¹⁷⁾ By condemning or satirizing these social climbers, the Victorian authors imposed moral restraint on the entrepreneurial spirit of the time.

Against the backdrop of this general tendency in Victorian fiction, Thackeray's treatment of Bob stands out as oppositional or at least ambiguous towards the dominant ideology of anti-mammonism. If the reader is led to sympathize with Bob's humiliation and indignation at his unjust punishment and back up his indomitable spirit in fighting through the adverse world, Thackeray holds the rare position as a genuine champion of the rising bourgeois against the morbid morality of self-restraint. His positive approval of individual force would continue through his subsequent works, notably in *Barry Lyndon* and *Vanity Fair*. Of course, the enterprising characters in these works are no less immune from satire and ridicule, but Becky Sharp, for example, is not merely an abhorrent slut but a winning heroine, whose social success the reader cannot help enjoying. Perhaps, Thackeray's humour arouses sympathy for vulgar upstarts where his satire invites scorn. Bob thus became the first of Thackeray's enter-

(16) Some of these mercenary characters are the subjects in Norman Russell, *The Novelist and Mammon: Literary Responses to the World of Commerce in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

(17) Tamara S. Wagner, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815-1901* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010), 2.

prising heroes to be admired and despised at once. Although his adventures through the hostile world are still rendered in a burlesque mode, consisting of swindling simpletons and courting rich brides, the spirit of genuine entrepreneurialism that underlay his adventures paved the path to his mature fiction of middle-class realism.

4. *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* and the urban experience of merchants

If *Stubb's Calendar* was a fable on the entrepreneurial ethics against the backdrop of moral reform, its sister piece, *Barber Cox*, was a satire on London's high life. Around that time, Thackeray began to dwell on London's specific areas rather than its abstract whole in his fictions. The short story 'The Bedford-Row Conspiracy' (1840), for example, was ostensibly concerned with a particular street in Holborn, while *Men's Wives* set its actions in various areas in London. His longer fictions, on the other hand, tended to look towards other areas and times than contemporary London: Indian battlefields (*The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, 1838-9), Augustan London (*Catherine*), a local port-town (*A Shabby-Genteel Story*) and so on. It was not until *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* that London's contemporary middle-class life came to draw the author's serious attention. This work became the first of his realist novels as well as of his city novels – if we assume some of his subsequent works to fall into these categories – into which he poured everything he had experienced so far during his settled life in London.

What distinguishes this realistic narrative from his preceding burlesques and satires is, first of all, the choice of a sober middle-class businessman as narrator and hero; unlike Charles Yellowplush with his heavy

class dialect or Bob Stubbs with his peculiarly vengeful character, Samuel Titmarsh writes plain English and behaves naturally. Only, he also undergoes a rapid uprise in fortune and status for some unaccountable reasons like the other two. The plot of his enormous success on inheriting a curious diamond and his subsequent collapse recalls typical nineteenth-century realistic narratives such as Honoré de Balzac's *Peau de chagrin* (1831) and Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861).⁽¹⁸⁾ No doubt, financial instability was a common theme in nineteenth-century realistic fiction, as Tamara S. Wagner claims.⁽¹⁹⁾ Robert A. Colby suggests that there were several other fictions of a similar plot within Thackeray's reach prior to his composition of the novel, such as Samuel Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year* (1841), Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832) and Theodore Hook's *Sayings and Doings* (1824).⁽²⁰⁾ Colby also points out the appropriate dating of the novel around 1822 to 1825 that saw a great financial crisis in actual London, to which Sam the narrator refers: 'The circumstances recorded in his story took place some score of years ago, when, as the reader may remember, there was a great mania in the city of London for establishing companies of all sorts, by which many people made pretty fortunes' (OT iv, 13).⁽²¹⁾ Colby identifies this 'mania' as 'the wild wave of speculation' that subsequently caused 'the panic of 1825'.⁽²²⁾ By looking into this real-life phenomenon that took place some fifteen years earlier, Thackeray afforded to provide an appropriate setting for his

(18) Significantly, Thackeray had read Balzac's first contemporary novel on its publication while he stayed in Paris.

(19) Wagner, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction*, 1.

(20) Colby, *Thackeray's Canvass of Humanity*, 173-200.

(21) Thackeray, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, *Fitz-Boodle Papers, Men's Wives etc.*, ed. George Saintsbury, Oxford Thackeray (London: Oxford UP, 1908), iv.

(22) Colby, *Thackeray's Canvass of Humanity*, 178-9.

story of financial fluctuation and a realistic background for his narrator and hero.⁽²³⁾ Sam is not a Cockney pretending a 'gentlman' or a rogue claiming a lost fortune but a common employee of an insurance company in the City – more precisely, 'thirteenth clerk of twenty-four young gents' at the Independent West Diddlesex Fire and Life Insurance Company (OT iv, 13). The number 'thirteenth' exactly indicates the *mediocre* position he occupies in the company and the *mediocre* society in which the whole action takes place.

In presenting Sam's adventures thus in an realistic format, Thackeray goes on to focus not so much on the hero's bourgeois mentality, as he did in *Stubbs's Calendar*, as on his material environment. What Thackeray aims to achieve in this work is a sort of material realism, and it is achieved firstly through the proper arrangement of minor characters. Sam is not a solitary hero in an uninhabited wasteland or a realm of romance, but involved in a network of human relationship stretching over his private and public spheres. As 'thirteenth clerk of twenty-four young gents', he is daily surrounded by other clerks. Mr. Brough, chairman of the directors for the insurance company, is described as 'a great man' (OT iv, 13) in religious and economic life in London and a sort of tyrant in his own company until he is finally exposed to be a hypocrite and imposter; he favours Sam on learning his assumed connection with aristocracy and backs up his promotion before he finally betrays him. Bob Sweeney, twelfth clerk, is a merry theatre-goer and opposes Mr Brough by accusing him of embezzlement; he surprises Sam by holding a drinking party on the night he is

(23) Norman Russell also details the social background of *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, though his focus is rather on the impact of 'the real-life West Middlesex, which had crashed some two years before the serial appeared'. Russell, *The Novelist and Mammon*, 90-3.

discharged from the company. Mr Roundhand is a reliable actuary and a kind friend of Sam's, but he seems to be outtalked by his snobbish wife at home. Mr Abednego, third clerk, is a hanger-on attending Mr Brough and it is he who informs against Bob Sweeny. Gus Hoskins, eleventh clerk, is a closest friend of Sam's in the company and shares with him the rooms in Fleet Street. In the company of these bosses and fellow workers, Sam is aware of his better social standing than others: 'I was rather respected among our gents at the West Diddlesex, because I came of a better family than most of them; had received a classical education; and especially because I had a rich aunt, Mrs. Hoggarty' (OT iv, 21). Curiously, this feeling is somehow close to Thackeray's own in the company of *Fraser's Magazine* for which he regularly worked in the late 1830s and early 1840s.⁽²⁴⁾ Considering his social position in the literary world of the time, we might safely suppose that Mr Brough and perhaps Bob Sweeny are at least partly based on William Maginn, editor of *Fraser's* and generous supporter of young Thackeray's career. In this biographical context, the populous world of the West Diddlesex Company can be seen as a satirical reflection of its author's real-life experience in London's literary bohemia.

Another factor to which the novel owes a great deal for its material realism is the accurate and richly nuanced representation of London's urban space. Although a few steps behind Dickens's kinetic and sometimes grotesque descriptions of early Victorian London, Thackeray's static yet natural allusions to London's diverse aspects characterize not merely one of the first Victorian city novels but even one of London's first flaneur novels. The area covered by *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* ranges from Aldgate to Fulham, from the City and West End to northern and western

(24) I have discussed this point in my 'Thackeray in London, 1837-47: From Bohemian to Gentleman', *Jimbun Ronkyu* 68/3 (2018), 58.

suburbs. First of all, the West Diddlesex Fire and Life Insurance Company is located in Cornhill Street while Mr Brough's other base, the house of Brough and Hoff, Turkey Merchants, is located in Crutched Friars, near Tower Hill. Sam and Gus live in 'No. 3, Bell Lane, Salisbury Square, near St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street' (OT iv, 27), a middle point between their workplace in Cornhill and their entertainment spot in Covent Garden, both within a walking distance. Mr Brough lives in a villa called the Rookery in Fulham, west of Chelsea and 'a first-rate *rus in urbe*' (OT iv, 62) at that time, where he holds a grand ball once a year. Mr Roundhand lives in Myddelton Square, Pentonville, and once entertains Sam and Gus for dinner in his home. Gus, who presently shares rooms with Sam in Fleet Street, is originally from Skinner Street, Snow Hill, where his father works as a leather-seller.⁽²⁵⁾ This indicates, and Lord Tiptoff's mention of some of Gus's family living in St. Mary Axe (OT iv, 51), near Aldgate, supports, that he is of humbler origin than Sam, while Lord Tiptoff himself lives in the Albany, Fitzrovia (OT iv, 52). As Sam gets married and promoted in the company, he seeks a better residence for his family and Mrs Hoggarty, and finds 'a very snug cottage' (OT iv, 78) in Camden Town; though they once move into this suburb cottage, Mrs Hoggarty complains of country life and persuades the family to return to town. They then take their lodgings in Lamb's Conduit Street near Russell Square, and move into 'a genteel house in Bernard Street, Russell Square' (OT iv, 92), from which Mrs Hoggarty takes pleasure in walking to St. Pancras Church 'then just built' (OT iv, 95), undoubtedly the new church built in 1819-22 in Bloomsbury. Sam's fortune, however, soon changes for the worse as Mr

(25) Gus's address, 'Skinner Street, Snow Hill' (OT iv, 29), sounds a little strange, for Skinner Street is located in Clerkenwell while Snow Hill is just outside the City, near Smithfield Market.

Brough runs away with money, and he is arrested for debt and taken to Cursitor Street, near Chancery Lane, where he is imprisoned in a sponging-house. He then moves into the Fleet Prison, from which he goes to the Bankruptcy Court in Basinghall Street, near Guild Hall.

Sam as narrator, and Thackeray behind that persona of course, gives up the task of describing his prison life, as the inimitable Dickens did the work much better in *The Pickwick Papers* (OT iv, 132), and just deplures that honest men are deprived of the means of labour when they need it most. 'What could I do?' asks he, and continues:

There were one or two gents in the prison who could work (literary gents, – one wrote his *Travels in Mesopotamia*, and the other his *Sketches at Almack's*, in the place); but all the occupation I could find was walking down Bridge Street, and then up Bridge Street, and staring at Alderman Waithman's windows, and then at the black man who swept the crossing. (OT iv, 132-5)

Curiously, Thackeray grants his hero the sole leisure of walking up and down the street instead of – and in contrast to – the comfort of writing and taking an imaginative or recollective trip to the Orient or the clubland, to which Thackeray himself would devote his life. Compared with the literary men's exploration of the east or high society, Sam's monotonous walk up and down the same street looks unproductive, only resulting in occasional observations of a streetscape whose inhabitants range from the lord of mayor to a sweeper. Sam's idle observation of these city residents, however, implies a potential which Thackeray could take full advantage of. Thackeray would grow to be the novelist whose resources came abundantly from his keen observation of townspeople, notably in *Vanity Fair*,

and *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* is the first significant step towards it.

His partiality for town walking is evident from the earlier part of the story. On the night when Bob Sweeney offended Mr Brough, Sam and Gus 'found our flute duet rather tiresome that evening, and as it was a very fine night, strolled out for a walk West End way' (OT iv, 20). They come up to Covent Garden and decide on visiting Globe Tavern nearby where Bob is supposed to be holding a party. On another day, Sam and Gus ask leave from Mr Roundhand to go out to have Sam's diamond reframed at a jeweller's. 'When we reached St. Martin's Lane, Gus got a cigar, to give himself as it were a *distingué* air, and puffed at it all the way up the Lane, and through the alleys into Coventry Street, where Mr. Polonius's shop is, as everybody knows' (OT iv, 22). Gus's rites of passage serve to cut his private hours in the pleasure spot from his public hours at the office, or simply West End from the City. Sam and Gus still prefer 'enjoying ourselves, half-price, at Sadler's Wells' (OT iv, 44), not at the fashionable Covent Garden Theatre, but they are more often led to West End for shopping, as Sam's diamond bring him into high society. After they dine at Mr Roundhand's, for example, they find Sam's diamond wanting a 'black satin stock to set it off' (OT iv, 45) so that Sam buys one at 'Ludlam's in Piccadilly' (OT iv, 45). He cannot help regretting afterwards, however, that he followed Gus's advice to 'go to the best place, to be sure, and have none of our cheap and common East End stuff' (OT iv, 45); he could have had one, he thinks, 'for sixteen and six in Cheapside, every whit as good' (OT iv, 45). When he is invited to Mr Brough's grand ball at Fulham, he is driven by Mr Brough to his tailor, Mr Von Stiltz in Clifford Street, who sends him afterwards 'two of the finest coats ever seen, a dress coat and a frock, a velvet waistcoat, a silk ditto, and three pairs of pantaloons, of the most beautiful make' (OT iv, 60-1). Clifford Street is a short street connecting

Savile Row and New Bond Street in Mayfair, and undoubtedly houses the best and expensive tailors in London.

These place-names are just blank signs if the reader is not familiar with London's topography, but for the informed reader the accurate constellation of streets and districts forms a delicate map of real London life. Part of the novel's vivid reality stems from the abundant yet natural allusions to London's topography. Indeed, Thackeray tends to lack – though the description of the sponging-house in Cursitor Street proves that he does not entirely lack – the visual and vivid evocation of London's urban space that characterizes Dickens's realism, yet he leads us to share the conceptual map of London by embedding real place-names throughout the text and reproducing the network of meanings that actually forms our experience of the city. What strikes us in addition is that he presents a well-balanced map of middle-class London that ranges from the City to West End and to the rural and wealthy suburb in the west and the newly-built middle-class towns in the north, without limiting our scope to any one particular area. By thus setting the well-grounded stage of middle-class London as well as populating the fiction with persuasive minor characters, he gives firm reality to the story of a common businessman undergoing the ups and downs of fortune in the precarious mood of economic mania. By achieving solid realism in presenting middle-class London, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* can be considered to be the apex of Thackeray's progress so far in narrative art during his early London years.

5. Conclusion

A few words will suffice as a concluding remark. The three fictions discussed above indicate as many significant steps in Thackeray's career

growing from a burlesque writer to the novelist. For the writer who aimed at middle-class realism, London provided a rich and appropriate background. His early attempts at London themes undoubtedly paved the path to his maturer fictions based on bourgeois realism and perhaps pointing beyond it towards bohemian fantasy.

——文学部教授——