

19th Century Realism



Jane Austen

Sense and Sensibility (1811)

Pride and Prejudice (1813)

Emma (1816)

Northanger Abbey (1818,
posthum.)

image: British Library, bl.uk

Pride and Prejudice

opening

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

characters:

Elizabeth Bennet, Fitzwilliam Darcy

Jane Bennet, Charles Bingley

Lydia Bennet, Wickham

Pride and Prejudice

Elizabeth refuses Darcy's first proposal

(...) to her utter amazement, she saw Mr. Darcy walk into the room. In a hurried manner he immediately began an inquiry after her health, imputing his visit to a wish of hearing that she were better. She answered him with cold civility. He sat down for a few moments, and then getting up walked about the room. Elizabeth was surprised, but said not a word. After a silence of several minutes, he came towards her in an agitated manner, and thus began:—

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This he considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her immediately followed.

He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority, of its being a degradation, of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. (...) He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which in spite of all his endeavours he had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing his hope that it would now be rewarded by her acceptance of his hand.

As he said this she could easily see that he had no doubt of a favourable answer. He *spoke* of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther; and when he ceased the colour rose into her cheeks and she said,—

“In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could *feel* gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned pain to anyone. It has been most unconsciously done, however, and I hope will be of short duration. The feelings which you tell me have long prevented the acknowledgment of your regard can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation.”

Pride and Prejudice

Elizabeth realizes she misjudged Darcy

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

“How despicably have I acted!” she cried. “I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameless distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.

Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.”



George Eliot

Adam Bede (1859)

The Mill on the Floss (1860)

Silas Marner (1861)

Middlemarch (1871-72)

Middlemarch characters:

Dorothea Brooke

Edward Casaubon

Will Ladislaw

Tertius Lydgate

Rosamund Vincy

image: National Portrait Gallery



Charles Dickens

The Pickwick Papers (1836-7)

Oliver Twist (1837-9)

David Copperfield (1849-50)

Little Dorrit (1855-7)

Great Expectations (1860-1)

image: wikipedia

Great Expectations

characters:

Pip (Philip Pirrit)

Estella

Magwitch

Miss Havisham

Great Expectations

Pip meets Miss Havisham in her house for the first time

I entered and found myself in a pretty large room, well lighted with wax candles. No glimpse of daylight was to be seen in it. It was a dressing-room, as I gathered from the furniture, though much of it was old-fashioned. But prominent in it was a draped table with a gilded looking-glass, and that I made out at first sight to be a fine lady's dressing-table.

Whether I should have made out this object so soon, if there had been no fine lady sitting at it, I cannot say. In an arm-chair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see.

She was dressed in rich materials - satins, and lace, and silks - all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. (...)

I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its brightness, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress she wore, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone.

Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, that skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could.

William Makepeace Thackeray

The Book of Snobs (1848)
Vanity Fair (1847/8)

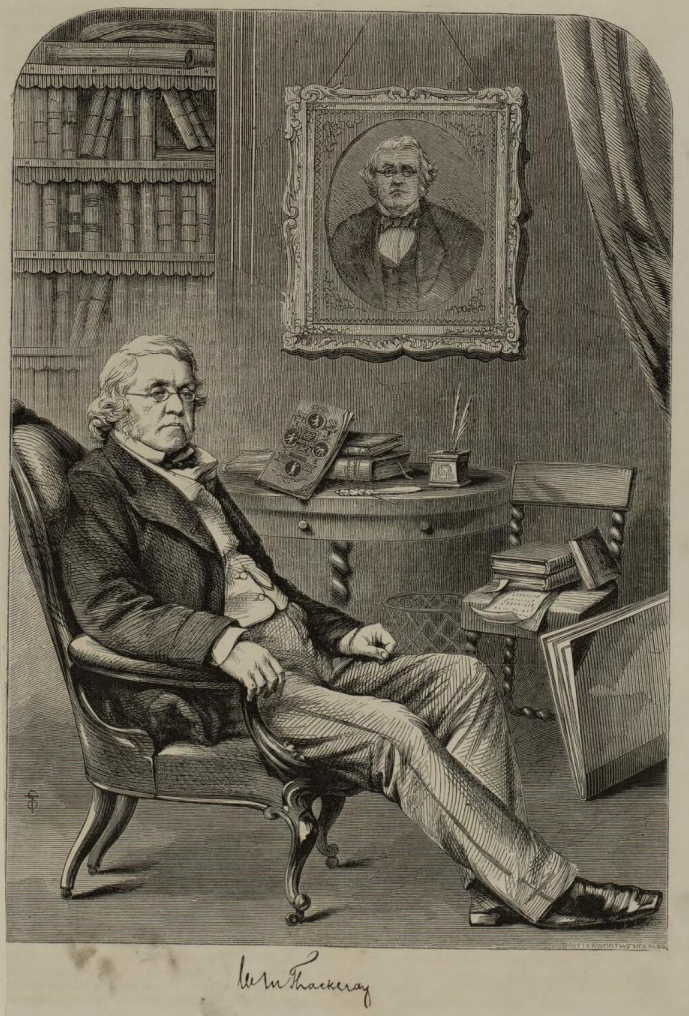


image: wikipedia

Vanity Fair

characters:

Amelia Sedley

Rebecca Sharp

George Osborne, Amelia's first husband

Rawdon Crawley, Becky's husband

Colonel Dobbin, Amelia's second husband

Vanity Fair

Contrast between the characters of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley

[Becky:] “For two years I have only had insults and outrage from [Miss Pinkerton, the teacher]. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen. I have never had a friend or a kind word, except from you. I have been made to tend the little girls in the lower schoolroom, and to talk French to the Misses, until I grew sick of my mother tongue. But that talking French to Miss Pinkerton was capital fun, wasn't it? She doesn't know a word of French, and was too proud to confess it. I believe it was that which made her part with me; and so thank Heaven for French. Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!”

"O Rebecca, Rebecca, for shame!" cried Miss Sedley; for this was the greatest blasphemy Rebecca had as yet uttered; and in those days, in England, to say, "Long live Bonaparte!" was as much as to say, "Long live Lucifer!" "How can you—how dare you have such wicked, revengeful thoughts?"

"Revenge may be wicked, but it's natural," answered Miss Rebecca. "I'm no angel." And, to say the truth, she certainly was not.

Vanity Fair

ending

(...) Rebecca, Lady Crawley [as she styles herself], chiefly hangs about Bath and Cheltenham, where a very strong party of excellent people consider her to be a most injured woman. She has her enemies. Who has not? Her life is her answer to them. She busies herself in works of piety. She goes to church, and never without a footman. Her name is in all the Charity Lists. The destitute orange-girl, the neglected washerwoman, the distressed muffin-man find in her a fast and generous friend. She is always having stalls at Fancy Fairs for the benefit of these hapless beings. Emmy [Amelia], her children, and the Colonel, coming to London some time back, found themselves suddenly before her at one of these fairs.

She cast down her eyes demurely and smiled as they started away from her; Emmy scurrying off on the arm of George [her son] (now grown a dashing young gentleman) and the Colonel seizing up his little Janey, of whom he is fonder than of anything in the world—fonder even than of his History of the Punjaub.

"Fonder than he is of me," Emmy thinks with a sigh. But he never said a word to Amelia that was not kind and gentle, or thought of a want of hers that he did not try to gratify.

Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?—come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.



image: Harvard Magazine

Thackeray's self-portrait
in *Vanity Fair* (1848)