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believe that from the perspective of an ethicist or a philosopher these passages in the novel, on the contrary, present unique reflections of a philosophical, almost stoic, vision of the state of society, providing a cruel ironic and satiric picture of the Victorian morality. Thackeray's points about the morality are in no way less valid than the points of the philosophers or ethicists of his time and they may be even more accurate.

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felons with food and clothing, but debtors are fully responsible for their food and clothes while they are imprisoned (Dickens, 2000, p.565).

6. Harvey Chisick points out that Dickens's attitude to the revolution was influenced by the fact that, on the one hand, he knew what poverty meant for those who suffered it in his times, but on the other hand, he did not believe that the revolution would solve the basic problem of those people; that it would give them their daily bread. In his opinion, a way to a better future could be shown to the people only by the elites (2000, pp.649-657). Dickens's negative attitude to the revolution and any kind of violence, however justified, is reflected, in the clearest way, in his attitude to the revolt of the population of the British colonies in Jamaica and India (Scheckner, 2000, p.239; Majchrowski, 1980, p.260; Nayder, 1992, pp.691-705).

7. G. Eliot's literary works reflect her experience with philosophy. For example, she translated Feuerbach's work *The Essence of Christianity* into English and for some time she worked as an editor of the journal *Westminster Review*.

8. To me situational relativism and the situational approach do not have the negative or pejorative meanings, ascribed to these concepts by some authors. I perceive situational relativism, or the situational approach as a productive way of solving of some very concrete, serious moral problems since this approach supports a highly discriminating attitude that is just too complex moral life and can lead to a consensus. On the other hand, the principle approach supports the tendency to make yes/no judgements and thus supports disagreements (Willigenburg, 1991, pp.108-112). I believe that the behaviour of moral agent, his judgements, but also his values in many cases depend on concrete situations. I accept certain measure of relativity in the understanding and realizing values that moral agents try to achieve through their activity, if the process leads to that what should be. Every moral agent defines his own highest values, more or less independently of others, which is related to the level of his moral maturity. He also chooses the means of achieving the values. Choosing his aim, means and values, the moral agents is however limited by the fundamental principles (humanity, human dignity and moral rights) that delineate the space for his acting in accordance with these principles.

9. Judith L. Fisher writes that in Dickens's works the wrong action is defined by the whole life. The morality of the positive characters demands their passivity because if they punished their oppressors, they would destroy their own goodness. On the other hand, she believes that Thackeray presents a more modern opinion on moral action because class, sex, education and social experience motivate our desires. According to her, Thackeray was a historically-based constructivist and realist, while Dickens was a transcendentalist with an essentialist understanding of good and evil. Their attitudes to punishment and forgiveness are, according to Fisher, implacable (Fisher, 1997, pp.110-114).

10. Despite Grmela perceives Thackeray's moral reflections as spoiling the almost perfect dramatic structure of the novel's narrative (1988, p.171), I

## Endnotes

1. Among other things this is the reason why I pay attention to the study of world and Slovak literature. Collin McGinn maintains that in the present age there arises a need to incorporate new themes, methods and styles into moral philosophy. According to him, the aim of the moral philosopher is to pay equal attention to various kinds of moral experience to reflect the full breadth of moral life, which means that we need to transcend the limits of traditional approaches and methods. Moral life is much broader than the discourse of ethics can express. In belles-lettres the questions of ethics intertwine with artistic and literary questions. Literary works offer an interesting way to the essential questions of ethics and philosophers, according to McGinn, on the other hand, need to formulate a way of thinking about literary works (McGinn, 1999, pp.2-3). Jonathan Gottschall believes that literature “[I]s the most important and the most accurate source of knowledge of the human essence that exists in the world” (2003, p.264). Geneticists that have decoded genome, ‘the book of life’, do not have any better information. No discipline provides better, richer, more precise information about what human, man, woman, child is; what troubles us, what makes us happy; about our abilities of sympathy, empathy, our reasons for being cruel, etc., than we can find in literature.
2. A very good overview of the contemporary works about the position of the working class in 19<sup>th</sup> century England is presented in Marc W. Steinberg’s work *The Dialogue of Struggle: The Contests over Ideological Boundaries in the Case of London Silk Weavers in the Early Nineteenth Century* (1994, pp.505-541).
3. Zuzana Bothova claims that Dickens’s critique is not aimed at provoking the revolt of the oppressed ones, but on the contrary, it should awake the conscience of the oppressors (1967, p.472). Similarly, Peter Scheckner came to the conclusion that, according to Dickens, for the poor it is the best if they suffer passively and wait. Scheckner believes that Dickens’s main moral message for workers and women is that they should not rebel and remain dependent on the leadership of the right men (2000, pp.243-245). On the other hand, it is true that Dickens himself did everything that he could to improve the position of the poor, which is illustrated by the fact that Dickens actively helped to establish *Urania Cottage*, the home for fallen women and women released from prison, which was open in November 1847 (Majchrowski, 1980, p.158).
4. Thomas Fleming calls this behaviour telescopic philanthropy because Mrs Jellyby does not care about anything that is closer than Africa. Ultimately, the author does not believe that such ‘philanthropy’ can be seen as an act of real charity (2004, pp.87; 97).
5. In a certain sense, the peak of Dickens’s irony and his critique of the penitentiary system is presented the novel *The Pickwick Papers* when Mr Pickwick points out the huge paradox that law obliges the state to provide

What can I add to this? Everything related to man, his ways of life, experience, his morality, etc., has already been here in one way or another. What changes is time and place, characters, but the essence is still the same. If we are allowed the simplification, we can call it the permanent conflict between good and evil. Because of the permanency of the conflict between good and evil, appearing throughout the history of humankind, we can say that people's nature condemns them to this conflict, which is a conflict between us, originating from us and happening above all inside of us. This conflict cannot be solved while humankind exists; whether we want it or not this conflict is what forces us to be better, to fight with ourselves, overcome ourselves, whether as individuals or as humankind. As the development of science and technology brings new forms and expressions of evil, humankind is permanently forced to search for new answers, new ways of solving of eternal moral problems. These answers however have no chance of becoming the definitive solutions. With a bit of exaggeration we can say that from the perspective of the whole history of humankind these solutions will be forgotten as insufficient, not responding to the new needs and demands of the era, sooner than they could be rooted in the consciousness of several generations of individuals or humankind. Humankind should realize that history or daily life bring only new forms of the eternal moral problems that must be tackled in the context of the historical moral experience of humankind, but it also should realize that for us it is a new challenge, in new time and space that does not have to be repeated in our lifetime in the same form. That is why we have to lead responsible lives and make such decisions that will allow us to say, after some time, that in our case we solved the eternal moral problem of humanity better than our predecessors. This can be seen as the implicit moral message of the past times of Victorian England or Balzac's France. We should learn from the past to be able to solve in a better way our own moral problems that are in their essence similar to those of the past, but they are not identical due to the scientific, technical but also social development, ever more influencing our behaviour and acts.<sup>11</sup>

brings the means, and the gentleman avails himself of them. My boy's wife brings the horse, and begad, Pen goes in and wins the plate. That's what I call a sensible union. A couple like that have something to talk to each other about when they come together" (2005, p.209). Also in the novel *The Newcomes* one of the main plot lines focuses on the ways marriages are formed on the basis of rational reasons, such as the amount of money that can be gained the union. Especially, Ethel Newcome plays an important role in the presentation of the author's critique of the social mechanism, typical not only of the Victorian age, that puts women into the position of full dependence on the will of their parents, or rich relatives. A similar motif, reflecting the real life in the Slovak village in the 1920s appears in Martin Razuš's novel *Svety [Worlds]* and in many other works of Slovak or world literature. It again proves the fact that this phenomenon was not typical only of Victorian England and did not disappear together with the era that we deal with in these pages. The 'sensible unions' in marriage can be found throughout the history of humankind, in the deep past as well as in the present times.

I think that Thackeray reflects the essence of the life circle and the history of humankind, including its moral life, when he writes in *The Newcomes*:

All types of all characters march through all fables: tremblers and boasters; victims and bullies; dupes and knaves; long-eared Neddies, giving themselves leonine airs; Tartuffes wearing virtuous clothing; lovers and their trials, their blindness, their folly and constancy. With the very first page of the human story do not love and lies too begin? So the tales were told ages before Aesop; and asses under lions' manes roared in Hebrew; and sly foxes flattered in Etruscan; and wolves in sheep's clothing gnashed their teeth in Sanskrit, no doubt. The sun shines to-day as he did when he first began shining; and the birds in the tree overhead, while I am writing, sing very much the same note they have sung ever since there were finches. Nay, since last he besought good-natured friends to listen once a month to his talking, a friend of the writer has seen the New World, and found the (featherless) birds there exceedingly like their brethren of Europe. There may be nothing new under and including the sun; but it looks fresh every morning, and we rise with it to toil, hope, scheme, laugh, struggle, love, suffer, until the night comes and quiet. And then will wake Morrow and the eyes that look on it; and so da capo. (2004, p.11)



wrapping of the 'goods' sold in the 'Vanity Fair' are not coaches but Mercedeses, Audis, BMWs, etc., balls, banquets, receptions, etc. Holidays are spent in the Maldives, Thailand, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, etc. Said simply, the 'Vanity Fair' is still open. It has only modernized its forms, which is reflected also in the fact that what is perceived as trendy also depends on the scientific and technological progress of the given era.

Of course, Thackeray reminds the reader that the very important agent in the 'Vanity Fair' is money. The rich ones are naturally 'courted' and worshipped by those who do not have money but would like to have it. According to him,

People in *Vanity Fair* fasten on to rich folks quite naturally. If the simplest people are disposed to look not a little kindly on great Prosperity (for I defy any member of the British public to say that the notion of Wealth has not something awful and pleasing to him; and you, if you are told that the man next you at dinner has got half a million, not to look at him with a certain interest) - if the simple look benevolently on money, how much more do your old worldlings regard it! Their affections rush out to meet and welcome money. Their kind sentiments awaken spontaneously towards the interesting possessors of it. I know some respectable people who don't consider themselves at liberty to indulge in friendship for any individual who has not a certain competency, or place in society" (pp.231-232).<sup>10</sup>

According to Thackeray, there are extremely many ways how to become rich. Some want to improve their position in the 'Vanity Fair' through marriage, as for example the mentioned Becky Sharp searching for a husband who would be wealthy enough to give her the dream life created by her fiery fantasy, i.e. the life of high aristocracy, or wanting to have at least a husband that will become rich in a short time. When she is not lucky in finding the right husband, she uses other means to gain money, including deception and adultery. In the novel *The History of Pendennis*, Miss Fotheringay together with her father use similar means and ultimately they are successful because Miss Fotheringay becomes Lady Mirabel and Blanca Amory also becomes a French aristocrat. But these ways of becoming rich are not typical only for the female sex since major Pendennis also wants to find the right match for his son. In his opinion "The great point in marriage is for people to agree to be useful to one another. The lady



Thackeray's 'Vanity Fair' is most of all a place where everybody who has some important position or would like to have an important position in society shows or offers for sale their goods, i.e. themselves. In reality what is offered is junk presented in a nice wrapping, such as carriage's door emblazoned with aristocratic coat-of arms, splendid balls and parties, seats in Parliament, lunches or dinners with the people belonging to contemporary notables, summers spent in baths in Germany or summer stays in Italy, especially Naples or Roma, or Brussels or Paris, etc. Once again I have to pose the suggestive question that I have already asked at a different place: Does this behaviour of Thackeray's characters remind you of something; something that is only too contemporary for us? I remind you that Thackeray wrote his masterpiece *Vanity Fair* in 1848, almost 160 years ago. As it appears nothing significant has changed in the human behaviour since we still enter the 'Vanity Fair' as sellers, buyers, or just as observers. The 'Vanity Fair' is as old as the history of the human race itself, at least the one revealed through the scientific discoveries, historical records, or the artefacts that in various ways prove the long-term existence of the 'Vanity Fair'.

Thackeray describes the 'Vanity Fair' using, among others, also this example:

Here was a man, who could not spell, and did not care to read - who had the habits and the cunning of a boor: whose aim in life was pettifogging: who never had a taste, or emotion, or enjoyment, but what was sordid and foul; and yet he had rank, and honours, and power, somehow: and was a dignitary of the land, and a pillar of the state. He was High Sheriff, and rode in a golden coach. Great ministers and statesmen courted him; and in *Vanity Fair* he had a higher place than the most brilliant genius or spotless virtue. (2003, p.98)

This description reminds me of the main protagonists of many TV reality shows, who also do not have any special abilities, but a significant part of the population watches their narcissism, many envying them their a bit prolonged Warholian 15 minutes of fame. These cases represent just the most extreme examples of the narcissism in the contemporary 'Vanity Fair' because certainly any of us could find a lot of other examples in their neighbourhood, even more suitable ones for the illustration of the fact that the 'Vanity Fair' is eternal and that its essence remains the same over the passing centuries. Only nowadays the

the Victorian morality was not as perfect and ideal as some authors try to claim. On the other hand, it is necessary to admit that Thackeray yielded, though to a smaller extent than Dickens, to the taste of the readers, or to the dominant idea of what was expected, and the life stories of his heroes conclude in a relatively positive way. The goodness of the main characters is justly rewarded, but not all the important characters enjoy such an ending of their stories. In the novel *The Newcomes* the author presents the end of the novel in a fairy-tale-like manner, as if he wanted to point out that in the real life such happy endings usually did not appear. On the other hand, evil is not justly punished in his works. In most cases the evil ones are punished to certain extent but they never lose so badly as in the novels by Dickens. Also in Thackeray's books we can find the models of female ideal behaviour, represented in *The History of Pendennis* by Helen Pendennis and her stepdaughter Laura Bell, who appears in *The Newcomes* as Laura Pendennis, and also by Amalia Sedly-Osborn Dobin in *Vanity Fair*.<sup>9</sup>

In Thackeray's novels the theme of marriage also plays an important role, but not as important as in the works by Eliot or Hardy and it also does not take so tragic form. Thackeray treats the problem of marriage from the perspective that was criticized in the works of Mill, Eliot, and Hardy, i.e. which due to the upbringing received and the fact that they are influenced by the traditional understanding of this social institution, some women perceive marriage as the dream haven that provides full care. The clearest employment of the theme of the unhappy marriage that has the form of a rational contract, motivated by the need to gain money or property, appears in the novel *The Newcomes*. The author uses the story of Clive Newcome to show how unhappy marriage can be for the people who choose their partner according to the will of their parents. Such a situation is also illustrated through the story of Clive's cousin Ethel Newcome. On the one hand, she realizes the danger resulting from this kind of marriage, but on the other, due to her upbringing, she perceives such a marriage as something natural. This vision of marriage was generally accepted among women, regardless the fact whether the woman was of the working class origin (Jude's first wife in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*), or belonging to a higher class (Becky Sharp from Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*), or to the highest aristocratic circles, as Ethel Newcome. All of them entered the 'Vanity Fair' with their understanding of the world, their own interests and aims.

*Obscure* or *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. These endings are in a sharp contrast with Dickens's optimistic and positive endings of his novels. Also, Tess presents a strong contrast to Dickens's female characters, being more lifelike, more realistic. She tries to do well, but sometimes, without any intention, she fails tragically, just like Jude together with Su do in the novel *Jude the Obscure*. The same can be stated about Angel, who like Su is different from others due to his intellectual capacities, but not even these prevent him from acting wrongly. If in the previous novel the author uses Su's voice to present a sharp critique of the Victorian idea of marriage, in this one he uses Angel's voice to make sharp comments about the whole Victorian society and its morality. His deep knowledge of the hypocrisy and reality of the given era, on the one hand, and the human nature, on the other, is reflected in the following words:

education had as yet but little affected the beats of emotion and impulse on which domestic happiness depends. It was probable that, in the lapse of ages, improved systems of moral and intellectual training would appreciably, perhaps considerably, elevate the involuntary and even the unconscious instincts of human nature; but up to the present day, culture, as far as he could see, might be said to have affected only the mental epiderm of those lives which had been brought under its influence. This belief was confirmed by his (Angel Clare's – note author) experience of women, which, having latterly been extended from the cultivated middle-class into the rural community, had taught him how much less was the intrinsic difference between the good and wise woman of one social stratum and the good and wise woman of another social stratum, than between the good and bad, the wise and the foolish, of the same stratum or class. (Hardy, 2005, p.183)

The same was even truer about aristocracy and upper middle class that are attacked by the superb irony of William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863). Especially *Vanity Fair* is a genial work, revealing the true face of morality and moral opinions of these social classes living in 19th century England, mainly in London. Also in other works, e.g. *The Book of Snobs* or *The History of Pendennis* or *The Newcomes*, he presents an ironic picture of moral or immoral thinking, behaviour and actions of the 'top representatives' of the given society. On the basis of these works we can clearly understand that in reality

characterize the Victorian marriage as a barbarous custom for which the members of his generation will be put to shame by the future generations. He also quotes J.S. Mill's words about the possibility of voluntary separation of husband and wife, which was a very untraditional and progressive idea for those times (pp.224-225).

Just like in the novels by Eliot, also in Hardy's work a very important role is played by the public opinion constantly persecuting the main characters that do not live in accordance with the traditional beliefs of the public since they are not married. Ultimately this pushes them towards their separation and the tragic end of the story of their love that has never been fully enjoyed, being constantly under the pressure of the public opinion. In respect to Thomas Hardy's work, it can be also mentioned that in his novels *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *The Return of the Native* (1878) he almost does not deal at all with social and moral issues. From this perspective the novel *Jude the Obscure* can be seen as an exception and an interesting fact is that the author expresses in this novel such opinions on marriage that are similar to J. S. Mill's beliefs.

In the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) Hardy presents the tragic story of a young woman Tess of the D'Urbervilles, who becomes the victim of a young rich seducer Alec, for what she earns criticism and hostility of the public opinion. She suffers from the constant feeling of guilt for her weakness and this prevents her from showing her love for Angel Clare, who falls in love with her and wants to marry her against the will of his parents. Angel learns the whole truth about Tess only after their wedding and then feels betrayed and deceived. He cannot forgive her and decides to leave her. Alec misuses the situation and tricks Tess into believing him again. When Angel comes back and Tess finds out that Alec has deceived her once again, she kills him and runs away with Angel. After a week she is imprisoned, tried for murder and sentenced to death.

This novel is more readable than other novels, such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* or *The Return of the Native*. This is also true in respect to Hardy's reflections on morality, or the moral issues and problems of the life of the English rural society at the end of the 19th century. While in the novel *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy treats the problem of marriage and the position of woman in society in a bit narrow context, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* he deals with wider moral and social contexts of the position of woman. Tragic endings of his stories are typical of Hardy's novels, whether it is *The Return of the Native*, *Jude the*

happiness just to comply with the social conventions, though at the price of living unhappy lives. The most important is that morality remains 'unstained'. Just like in the previous novel, she ironies the public opinion, in *Middlemarch*, because its main role was "to make a neighbour unhappy for her good" (Eliot, 2003a, p.741).

Eliot characterizes her heroine in the following way: "Her (Dorothea Casaubon – note author) blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books..." (p.274). On the other hand, it is necessary to state that Dorothea herself, freely, willingly and, to certain extent, against the will of her relatives, has chosen this imprisonment in the marriage with a much older man. The decision certainly reflects her carelessness, but also the power of the convention and the degradation of woman to the position of the subordinate being in relation to man, his visions, or life tasks pursued regardless whether they are meaningful or unfruitful, such as the aims and activities of Dorothea's husband Mr Casaubon.

Expressing the same beliefs as J.S. Mill, who criticizes the Victorian institution of marriage, Eliot sees the problem in a wider context and points out that, on the one hand, it is society that educates young women to believe that it is something automatic and natural that their main role is to guarantee the happiness and comfort of their husbands. On the other hand, she reminds the reader that the same society must be blamed for never making "the preposterous demand that a man should think as much about his own qualifications for making a charming girl happy as he thinks of hers for making himself happy" (p.279).

Similarly, Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) in *Jude the Obscure* comes to the conclusion that in the case of an unhappy marriage that originated from a misunderstanding, or the marriage from which all love disappeared, there should be the possibility of divorce because such marriages cannot result in anything good. Hardy presents the most radical opinions on marriage through the voice of the character Sue Bridehead. According to her, marriage is "only a sordid contract, based on material convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known... why surely a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her?" (Hardy, 1999, p.210). Hardy does not even hesitate to

truth to which eyes and hearts are too often fatally sealed,- the truth, that moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot. All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality, - without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human. (pp.517-518)

These words can be seen as timeless because although she used them to reflect upon the morality and people of her age, they can be used when talking about morals of the contemporary times. I suppose that in the Victorian age there was no one that would characterize her words as situational relativism or the situational approach.<sup>8</sup> I think that from the perspective of the present day knowledge, we can perceive Eliot's words as her rejection of morality understood as a pre-given system of fixed moral principles with timeless, supra-individual and transcultural universal validity. The author herself in her personal life and in her literary works rebelled against the ossified Victorian morality and pointed out the tragic fate of many people, especially women that were victimized by the prejudices and opinions, often also supported by contemporary literary works, as we could see in the case of Charles Dickens.

Eliot develops her opinions in the novel *Middlemarch* in which she concentrates on the story of two unhappy marriages, based not on love, but rather contracted as a result of social conventions. It is the marriage of Dorothea Casaubon and the marriage of doctor Mr Lydgate. The author points to the social conventions, often preventing people from the enjoyment of true love, as it is in the case of Dorothea and Will Ladislaw. These are forced, in the name of morality, tradition, customs, or even religion, to give up their



always of the feminine gender,- not the world, but the world's wife; and she would have seen that two handsome young people - the gentleman of quite the first family in St. Ogg's - having found themselves in a false position, had been led into a course which, to say the least of it, was highly injudicious... (p.509),

but it all could be accepted because such things can happen even in good families...

But the results, we know, were not of a kind to warrant this extenuation of the past. Maggie had returned without a 'trousseau', without a husband,- in that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead; and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of Society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind. Could anything be more detestable? (p.510)

Maggie becomes an outcast from the 'proper' society, who must be avoided by all who do not want to fall into the suspicion that they are the same as her.

The public opinion, the guardian of the social morality in the countryside, comes to a clear conclusion:

It was to be hoped that she would go out of the neighbourhood, - to America, or anywhere, - so as to purify the air of St. Ogg's from the stain of her presence, extremely dangerous to daughters there! No good could happen to her; it was only to be hoped she would repent, and that God would have mercy on her: He had not the care of society on His hands, as the world's wife had. (p.511)

Whatever happens, the good of society is the most important thing. To preserve the good is the task of the public opinion. Without it the society would be threatened by moral decadence or anarchy.

A real philosophical perspective on this moral problem is presented by George Eliot when, creating a contrast with the whole Victorian morality and maybe even philosophy or ethics of the given era, she points out:

The casuists have become a byword of reproach; but their perverted spirit of minute discrimination was the shadow of a



Christian creed. Their belief in the Unseen, so far as it manifests itself at all, seems to be rather a pagan kind; their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom. You could not live among such people; you are stifled for want of an outlet toward something beautiful, great, or noble; you are irritated with these dull men and women, as a kind of population out of keeping with the earth on which they live,-with this rich plain where the great river flows forever onward, and links the small pulse of the old English town with the beatings of the world's mighty heart. (Eliot, 2003b, pp.283-284)

The most important novels by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy are characteristic of strong criticism of the Victorian marriage and morals, or of the public opinion that preserves in the society the idea of duty and subordination of the married woman to her husband. According to this public opinion, woman's role is to get married, have children, and take care of the family. Anything that belied this idea was seen by the public opinion representing the rural morality as the utmost immorality. So, Eliot's Maggie Tulliver from *Mill on the Floss*, Dorothea Casaubon from *Middlemarch*, but also Hardy's characters Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead from *Jude the Obscure* or Tess from the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* become victims of this public opinion.

*Mill on the Floss* presents the story of Maggie Tulliver and her closest relatives: father, mother and brother. Unlike Dickens's novels, Eliot's novel ends tragically with the death of Maggie and her brother. The author characterizes the hypocrisy of the morality of those times and of the small English town St. Ogg that perceives Maggie as a fallen woman, threatening the good morals in the town, because she supposedly ran away with Stephen Guest, the fiancé of her cousin Lucy Dean, and then returned without being married to him. The public opinion excluded her from society, but it was not equally strict in the case of Stephen who was actually responsible for the escape or, better said, Maggie's kidnapping.

The public opinion almost unanimously agrees that:

If Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs. Stephen Guest, with a post-marital 'trousseau', and all the advantages possessed even by the most unwelcome wife of an only son, public opinion, which at St. Ogg's, as else where, always knew what to think, would have judged in strict consistency with those results. Public opinion, in these cases, is

the former novel the main hero Pip ends badly because his patron and benefactor Provis is captured when trying to escape abroad. He is sentenced to death but avoids the sentence by dying in prison. Pip does not get anything of his fortune. Estella marries Pip's personal enemy and Biddy marries Pip's brother-in-law Joe. Similarly, *The Old Curiosity Shop* ends with the death of one of the main heroines Nell Trent and her grand father dies too. But despite the tragedies or failures of the main characters, the fates of other characters are designed according to the Dickensian-Victorian scheme. The good are justly rewarded and the evil justly punished.

The theme of life in the English countryside, including the life of workers and rural aristocracy, is at the centre of the attention in the literary works of George Elliot and Thomas Hardy. In the works of George Elliot (1819-1880), unlike in the works of Dickens and Thomas Hardy, we can find interesting philosophical or ethical reflections, which, in Josef Grmela's opinion, present new formulations of the questions of ethics because Eliot "has realized that morality is not a result of the influence of religion, but on the contrary, any effort aimed at moral perfection...is a fruit of natural ethical inclinations of man..." (Grmela, 1988, p.177). I believe that her opinions transcend the limits of literature, as she presents wider social, philosophical, or ethical opinions on the given age and its morality. This, in my opinion, is the contribution that her literary works make outside literature itself.<sup>7</sup> A contrast between Dickens's works, on the one hand, and the works of Eliot and Hardy, on the other, can be also seen in the fact that the works of the latter do not have a fairy-tale-like happy ending. Especially Hardy's novels are famous of presenting tragic stories of the main heroes and all his literary work has a tragic or pessimistic tone. In his novels good is not justly rewarded and evil punished. Rather the contrary is true.

Eliot does not present a very attractive picture of the English countryside, when she writes about the people living there in the novel *Mill on the Floss*:

Here (in the countryside –note author) one has conventional worldly notions and habits without instruction and without polish, surely the most prosaic form of human life; proud respectability in a gig of unfashionable build; worldliness without side-dishes. Observing these people narrowly, even when the iron hand of misfortune has shaken them from their unquestioning hold on the world, one sees little trace of religion, still less of a distinctively

All men are fortune-hunters, are they not? The law, the church, the court, the camp-see how they are all crowded with fortune-hunters, jostling each other in the pursuit. The stock-exchange, the pulpit, the counting-house, the royal drawing-room, the senate, - what but fortune-hunters are they filled with? If you are squeamish and moral..., console yourself with the reflection that at the very worst your fortune-hunting can make but one person miserable or unhappy. How many people do you suppose these other kinds of huntsmen crush in following their sport - hundreds at a step? Or thousands? (2003, p. 131)

Do you also believe that Dickens's words could be used as an accurate characterization of our age as well? Then I am not alone. We can console ourselves by the fact that in the last 160 years nothing essential has changed in the human nature and morality. Also in the novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840) money plays a very important role, but in a different way. The novel presents the story of the owner of the shop whose passion for gaming leads him to borrowing money from a usurer. As a result he is ruined, losing all his property together with the house in which he lives with his granddaughter. He lies to her and regularly steals from her the little money that they have for daily living, in a blind and limitless hope that once fortune must smile at him in the card game. He is capable of stealing to satisfy his urge to gamble. Thus, the man of the past was no better than a present day gambler. The desire to play and win the game is still the same, only the form, time and sums played for change. Gamblers appear in the works by Balzac, Dickens, or Dostoyevsky, but also in the works of other authors writing in the past or contemporary times. In one form or another, this passion appears to belong, to a greater or lesser extent, to the human nature. What changes are the games, players, winnings, but the essence remains the same.

As I have already mentioned, Dickens creates certain female characters that have the qualities of unrealistic, saint-like women. They reflect the Victorian ideal of the female virtues, so in this respect Dickens's novels do not achieve the same level of realism as he presents when describing the social situation of the lowest ranks of the English population, or workers in London or England in general. Also, in all Dickens's books, despite all what happens in the course of the story, good finally wins and evil is justly punished. A happy, almost fairy-tale-like ending appears almost in all his novels, with the exception of *Great Expectations* (1861) and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In

to make these procedures as complicated as possible. The unhappy fate of the Dorrits family in the prison for debtors is to a great extent complicated by the institution that Dickens calls the Circumlocution Office, as it follows the principle of 'how not to do it' (1998, p.101). The evidence that the situation in the English judicial system was worse than bad can be also found in J.S. Mill's words, who states that the whole procedure in court suit was a series of inventions favouring the lawyers and that the suitors were in the position of prey (Mill, 2003, p.75), and the legal practice resembled the Augean stables (p.73). So Dickens presents in his novels no fiction but the cruel reality experienced by many people involved in the court suits and inheritance procedures lasting for long years.

In his works Dickens does not avoid such problems of the 19th century English society as money and property hunting at the price of awful scams, including bank frauds. Especially in the novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) Dickens pays attention to these problems and presents the story of Martin Chuzzlewit and his family who try to seize the property of their old, ill, but most of all, rich relative. This old man, unlike Balzac's character Ponse, is not so naive and knows what his relatives are after and that is why he tries to prevent them from inheriting his money. An additional plot line of the 2nd volume of the novel is focused on the activities of The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company, founded by several crooks who hoped to make profit from other people's money, offering them ever rising profit from the sale of fictive bills of exchange, assets, etc. The whole sham was based on the advertising and creating a very good impression by showing off the apparent wealth of the company, reflected in the appearance of the offices, furniture, but also the appearance of the clerks (Dickens, 1999a, pp.410-411). An analogy can be also found in Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, in which a bank fraud resulted in the bankruptcy of the *Bundelcund Bank* and also in another work by Thackeray, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*. Similarly, the already mentioned novel *Nicholas Nickleby* presents a strong social and latently also moral critique of the spirit of the Victorian capitalism, dominated by the fortune hunters who were ready to use any means to gain what they wanted. The era and its practices suppressed emotions, love, and virtues in general. The materialistic spirit of the era is described by Dickens through the voice of Mr Chester in the novel *Barnaby Rudge*. Mr Chester instructs his son Edward:

etc. A married woman is seen as a useful member of society, although reality is often to the contrary. A single woman has to create her own individual aspiration (1970, pp.72-73).

Unlike Mill, Dickens does not present such a negative opinion on marriage. Through the voice of Mrs Merdle in *Little Dorrit* or Mr Chester in the novel *Barnaby Rudge* he states that "marriage is a civil contract; people marry to better their worldly condition and improve appearances; it is an affair of house and furniture, of liveries, servants, equipage, and so forth" (Dickens, 2003, p.260). This vision of marriage also influenced his opinion on the position of woman in society. A typical feature of almost all his novels is a female 'fairy-tale-like' good 'fairy' that represents all virtues of the Victorian morality, as, for example, Agnes Wickfield in *David Copperfield*, Amy Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*, Esther Summers in *Bleak House*, Sissy Jupp in *Hard Times*, etc. The presence of these 'angelic' women in Dickens's texts undermines the realistic character of his descriptions, or rather critiques of the morality of the English Victorian society. Rather than being realistic characters, these women are the embodiments of Victorian moral ideals, especially of the idea of an ideal woman. Dickens himself contributed to the creation of the ideal and supported its existence in the consciousness of the Victorian society by his literary works. For example, Esther Summers from *Bleak House* is a model of virtue and help for all those who need help and she is the last one to ask the help of anyone else. Her whole life she is accustomed to self-sacrifice. She sacrifices her happiness to Mr. John Jarndyce, who asks her to marry him, and she agrees even though she does not love him: "I felt that I had but one thing to do. To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly...how often had I considered within myself that the deep traces of my illness and the circumstances of my birth were only new reasons why I should be busy, busy, busy – useful, amiable, serviceable, in all honest, unpretending ways" (1993, pp.520-521).

In *Bleak House* Dickens presents the strongest critique of the bureaucracy of British judicial system. For example, one character, Richard Carstone is completely ruined in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit (a suit about inheritance that lasted for decades) and there are many other characters in the novel that suffer a similar fate. Just like in some other novels, Dickens presents his strong accusation levelled at the English judicial system, this time especially the Chancery. In *David Copperfield* Dickens points to the ossification of Doctors' Commons, an institution responsible for inheritance procedures, that does everything

(1997b, p.18). In many respects this situation resembles the life story of J.S. Mill till the moment when young Mill suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of his father's methods of education. Mill's fate also differs in the fact that later in his life he found love and the huge world of emotions, while Louisa could not find the love of her life and she devoted her emotional life to the children of her stepsister Sissy. Another illustration of the product of the utilitarian education that Dickens uses in the novel is the bank clerk Bitzer, described in this way: "His mind was so exactly regulated, that he had no affections or passions. All his proceedings were the result of the nicest and coldest calculation" (p.120). Martha Nussbaum reflecting upon the character poses the question what the purpose of his life is. In her opinion, the character reminds the reader rather of a machine than a human being whose acts could be motivated, for example, by beauty or enthusiasm for beauty (Nussbaum, 1995, p.380).

Despite the fact that many of Dickens's contemporaries (e.g. J. S. Mill, Thackeray, Eliot or Hardy) strongly criticized the Victorian institution of marriage, Dickens does not provide such clear condemnation of the Victorian marriage, which was characterized by J. S. Mill as an institution in which "the wife's position under the common law of England is worse than that of slaves in the laws of many countries". Mill writes that wives are treated worse than slaves.

Hardly any slave, except one immediately attached to the master's person, is a slave at all hours and all minutes; in general he has, like a soldier, his fixed task, and when it is done, or when he is off duty, he disposes, within certain limits, of his own time... Not so the wife: however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to - though she may know that he hates her, though it may be his daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him- he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations. (1975, pp.462-463)

Mill sees the source of this situation in the education that creates such an understanding of woman's position. Women are perceived as not capable of living without men's protection, incapable of protecting themselves against injustice. Marriage is the only solution of their situation. Unmarried woman perceives herself, just like others perceive her, as something useless on the earth, without a function, a meaning,



A similar system that tyrannized children rather than educated them was, according to Dickens, the school system, to which he pays attention, for example, in the novel *David Copperfield* (1850) or the novel *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839). In the Preface to the latter novel Dickens describes the situation that made him write the novel. The main reason was the neglect of education by the State, because anyone who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school. The schoolmasters were often "ignorant, sordid, brutal men to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog", but this situation was the result of the unchecked freedom of these people" (1999b, p.5). In those times the well-known saying, perceived nowadays as just a bad joke, that the 'good-for-nothings' become teachers was apparently reality. In *David Copperfield* Dickens very clearly describes a typical situation in the schools of his times, in which pupils were beaten brutally by their teachers. The ways of the schoolmaster in a 19th century English school are characterized by Dickens in this way:

[A] large majority boys (especially the smaller ones) were visited with similar instances of notice (getting the cane – note author), as Mr. Creakle made the round of the schoolroom. Half the establishment was writhing and crying, before the day's work began; and how much of it had writhed and cried before the day's work was over, I am really afraid to recollect, lest I should seem to exaggerate. (1997a, p.91)

A school was a place where people of lower middle classes (traders or craftsmen) could place the unwanted children who received just a little or no attention from their parents or stepparents (in that era).

Besides attacking the unjust and cruel school system, Dickens in his novels also creates a sharp critique of the education system based on Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principles, popular in England in the first half of the 19th century. In the novel *Hard Times* (1854), the story of Thomas Gradgrind's daughter Louisa is a female version of the life story of John Stuart Mill, who was probably brought up in the same way as the young Gradgrinds. Mr. Gradgrind had five children and "they had been lectured at, from their tenderest years; coursed, like little hares". The first object, of which they had a remembrance, was a large black board with a dry teacher chalking white figures on it. Feelings, passions and similar things were excluded from the process of their education as useless



before the outbreak of the French revolution. The author describes the historical situation leading to the beginning of the revolution, but also violence, which is often absurd and emerging from the desire to shed blood. Dickens appears as a humanist criticizing the violence organized by the state and governmental power, but on the other hand also denouncing the violence of the oppressed. In both cases he points out that the absurd and cruel violence often affects the innocent.<sup>6</sup> A separate chapter of Dickens's work is formed by his devastating criticism of American slavery that he encountered during his visit to the USA in 1842. In a travel book, *American Notes* (1842), he presents numerous illustrations from the period newspapers in America, in which the owners used adverts searching for their run away slaves. The characteristics of the slaves included such things as a ring of iron on the neck or feet, iron marking, a chain dog-collar round the neck, marks of lashing, shot marks, scars from a dirk, no toes on the foot, an ear cut off, one eye lost, broken jaw, etc. (2001, pp.252-257). One must be horrified by the ways people treated other people only a relatively short time ago. The slaveholders certainly had mouths full of God, or human dignity. If humanity disposed of such terrible moral shame, we can ask ourselves whether we should perceive present day moral mistakes and shortcomings of our human nature as the signs of some terrible moral decline and moral ruin.

In the novel *Oliver Twist* (1838), Dickens presents a sharp critique of the Victorian institution of the workhouse in which bad treatment of orphaned boys resulted their animal obstinacy and emotional stupor (1999c, p.29). Among other things, it was common that children living in the workhouses were shamelessly deprived of the money that the parish authorities provided. The situation in the workhouse in which Oliver Twist is brought up is well illustrated by the immoral behaviour of the female superintendent parasitically living off the orphans' allowance:

Sevenpence-halfpenny's worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them. (p.4)

one of the novel's characters Mr. Meagles, who after her death describes the heroine in the following way:

If she had constantly thought of herself, and settled with herself that everybody visited this place upon her, turned it against her, and cast it at her (the fact that she was born in the Marshalsea prison for debtors – note author), she would have led an irritable and probably an useless existence. Yet I have heard tell...that her young life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service. Shall I tell you what I consider those eyes of hers that were here just now, to have always looked at, to get that expression? ...Duty... Begin it early, and do it well; and there is no antecedent to it, in any origin or station, that will tell against us with the Almighty, or with ourselves! (Dickens, 1998, p.767)

This is one of the numerous examples that illustrate the difference between Dickens and Balzac who in his literary works urges society to adopt social or political reforms. On the contrary, Dickens limits himself just to the stating of cruel facts, advocating everyday diligent work, the fulfilment of one's duties and in this way he tries to alert the social or moral conscience of society to make it more sensitive to these social phenomena or infirmity. It appears as if Dickens was afraid that his more radical opinions could lead to social conflicts, the violence that he rejects in his literary works, as, for example, in *Barnaby Rudge* or *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* is set at the beginning of the 19th century in London. It focuses on the rebellion against the preparation of the law that was to reduce restrictions on Roman Catholics and which was aimed against the plundering and destruction of Roman Catholic churches and houses in London and its close surroundings. This novel by Dickens among other things offers excellent descriptions of primitive passions of the crowd that can be easily used by various people for their own ends. Also, thanks to this novel, I have a better understanding of what happened in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, how it was possible that the people that had lived together for years without any big problems could fight against each other believing that those on the other side were evil and deserved to die. Dickens's novel offers only one of numerous illustrations of the fact that human history is filled with various cases of absurd inflaming of primitive passions and tragic violence of the crowd. The story of the second novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, is set at the end of the 18th century in Paris and London, shortly

impeded by the bad, confused method of building of the whole quarter, and since many human beings here live crowded into a small space, the atmosphere that prevails in these working-men's quarters may readily be imagined... Here live the poorest of the poor, the worst paid workers with thieves and the victims of prostitution indiscriminately huddled together, the majority Irish, or of Irish extraction, and those who have not yet sunk in the whirlpool of moral ruin which surrounds them, sinking daily deeper, losing daily more and more of their power to resist the demoralising influence of want, filth, and evil surroundings. (1987, p.71)

Dickens's harsh critique was also aimed at various kinds of philanthropists, including the Christian ones, because cruel reality was in a sharp contrast with their talks about happiness and the self-respect that is, according to them, innate to every one. According to Dickens, while these philanthropists speak of happiness and self-respect, thousands of people are "breathing thick with painful toil, which in that high respect have never lived at all, nor had a chance of life!" In Dickens's opinion, Christianity speaks of the human nature, but it is questionable whether in these cases it is still the human nature and whether it has not been transformed into the nature of the beast (1999a, p.221).

He also objects to the philanthropy aimed at the support of education, economy and life of the population in English colonies. His negative attitude arises, on the one hand, from his belief that such philanthropy supports the policy of English colonialism and, on the other, from his realization of the existence of a huge number of social problems in England. For example, in his novel *Bleak House* he describes with great irony the work of Mrs Jellyby, who does not care about her own children, running barefoot, dirty, hungry and wearing rags, but concentrates all her energy on helping the black people in Africa. Christina Hoff Sommers calls this absurd realization of the principle of impartiality the 'Jellyby's Fallacy' (Sommers, 1986, p.442).<sup>4</sup>

For example, in the novel *Little Dorrit* Dickens presents long descriptions of the condition of the people who are imprisoned for debts, spending, together with their families, a considerable part of their life in prison, where their children are born and where many of them die.<sup>5</sup> Amy Dorrit (the *Little Dorrit* of the novel's title) is a child of such a prison for debtors and she presents an ideal of behaviour that people should try to aspire to also when experiencing difficult life situations, whether long-termed or short-termed. Dickens presents the characterization of Little Dorrit's ideal behaviour through the voice of

death alone can enter. (2002, p.700)

He continues:

Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of Man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the moral pestilence that rises with them, and in the eternal laws of our Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation! Then should we see depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder, and a long train of nameless sins against the natural affections and repulsions of mankind, overhanging the devoted spots, and creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure. Then should we see how the same poisoned fountains that flow into our hospitals and lazar-houses, inundate the jails, and make the convict-ships swim deep, and roll across the seas, and over-run vast continents with crime. Then should we stand appalled to know, that where we generate disease to strike our children down and entail itself on unborn generations, there also we breed, by the same certain process, infancy that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or shame, maturity that is mature in nothing but in suffering and guilt, blasted old age that is a scandal on the form we bear. Unnatural humanity! (p.701)

I suppose that this extensive quotation creates a sufficient illustration of the position of working man in Victorian England, his social, moral and ultimately also human status, as well as of the character of the morality that was dominant in the given era. Stefan Zweig, reflecting upon the 19th century morality maintains that this morality was not ruled by Kant but cant –hypocrisy because this century did not demand real virtues, real moral life, but only the making of a pretence of virtuous behaviour, when everybody was to behave ‘as if’ (Zweig, 1932, p.254).

Friedrich Engels, when describing the condition of working classes in 19th century England (especially those of the workers from the East End), writes:

The streets are generally unpaved, rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters, but supplied with foul, stagnant pools instead. Moreover, ventilation is

more about the position of the working classes in 19th century England from Dickens's novels than from the technical and financial documents produced in that period (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993, pp.1-2). David Wilson expresses a similar opinion, stating that Dickens can be seen as an early ethnographer documenting everyday life of the London poor (2002, pp.366-367). Dickens presents a very colourful picture of the essence of the social phenomena related to the difficult position of working people, their exploitation, vilifying, degradation, for example, through the characters Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Nell Trent, Amy Dorrit, etc. Evidence of this can be also found in Friedrich Engels's work *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, but also in the works of many other authors dealing with the same problem.<sup>2</sup>

Charles Dickens's social critique of the English society of the given age is much stronger than, for example, Balzac's criticism of French society, but Dickens's criticism of morality, or better said, his reflections on the morality of his times are present in his works only latently. Almost in no Dickens's work we can find such open philosophical, ethical, political, economic, sociological or theological reflections as presented in Balzac's novels. Dickens's literary works are strong social critiques of the British legal, penitentiary, school and political system, the difficult position of the poorest strata of population, fortune and property hunting of the middle classes, the arduous work of children, etc. His critique however included only relatively few impulses towards some reforms. Dickens focuses on the revealing of misery, famine, injustice, poverty, scams, and the general immorality of the society that, on the one hand, preaches high moral ideals, but, on the other, treats the weakest or the poorest ones in a most immoral way.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the fact that his open criticism of social conditions in England  
۱۶۷ sent in probably all Dickens's works (his criticism of morality is not  
as evident, but certainly in all cases latently present), Dickens  
expresses his most direct and open social and moral critique in the novel  
*Dombey and Son*, in which he writes:

Look round upon the world of odious sights -millions of  
immortal creatures have no other world on earth- at the lightest  
mention of which humanity revolts, and dainty delicacy living in  
the next street, stops her ears... Breathe the polluted air, foul with  
every impurity that is poisonous to health and life; and have every  
sense, conferred upon race for its delight and happiness, offended,  
sickened and disgusted and made a channel by which misery and

times, social, political, economic, and undoubtedly also moral. Literature has always tended to express the spirit of the age, create a mosaic picture of the age through individual stories and characters. Literary characters express their author's opinions, but also the public opinion on the problems current in the given society and age. Marta C. Nussbaum believes that if great literature has inspired interest and moved the hearts and minds of its readers, than it must be approached as a serious alternative that deserves to be described and explored by ethicists (Nussbaum, 1992, p.191).<sup>1</sup>

This certainly applies to 19th century English literature and especially to the works of the mentioned authors because their works offer a complex picture of Victorian England from the 1830s, but especially 1840s, almost till the end of the century. Charles Dickens's novels present descriptions of the community of working classes, including the lower middle class, and they are usually set in London. George Eliot and Thomas Hardy deal mainly with rural society, especially through the characters, events or actions placed in the context of the life of working and lower middle classes (Eliot, and especially Hardy), or upper middle classes living in rural areas (Eliot). Thackeray's literary works deal exclusively with upper middle classes and aristocracy, living mainly in London. Their works provide a possible basis for the creation of a mosaic of morality of Victorian England. The Victorian period of English history is in general associated with economic and political prosperity (Szanto, 1996, p.200), virtuous morals and puritan morality. The picture of morality emerging from its characteristics in the Victorian literature is however very different from the puritan ideal of virtue, generosity, self-sacrifice, etc. I place my opinion in a direct opposition to the opinion of Stephen Jay Gould, who writes that if we fully believed that what many Victorian writers wrote about their times was true, than we had to believe that the life in the Victorian age was filled with real moral values (Gould, 1980). This ideal remains only an ideal appearing to various extents in Dickens's or Thackeray's texts. It is represented by extraordinary, almost unreal female characters that embody all noble moral virtues and appear in the context of the given age and society as angels on earth.

What is then the real picture of morality of the English society of that time? We can start with the lowest classes, i.e. the working people whose position in the society was described in the best way by Charles Dickens (1812-1870), seen as the strongest critic of the social system in Victorian England. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen state that we can learn



## Morality and Literature (Charles Dickens and his English Contemporaries)

Vasil Gluchman\*

### Abstract

*Examining the literary works of Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Elliot and Thomas Hardy, the author produces a mosaic of the Victorian morality in 19th century England. The author comes to the conclusion that the Victorian age was not as puritan as it is usually imagined and that the moral problems that humankind deals with in the course of its development are in their essence universal, though not identical. They differ in their individual forms produced by the individual periods of human history.*

**Keywords:** *morality, literature, England, 19th century, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Hardy.*

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Similarly to 19th century French literature, produced by such distinguished authors as Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Stendhal, Emile Zola, Gustav Flaubert and others, the English literature of this century was also created by important writers belonging to the history of world literature, whether it is Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Elliot, or Thomas Hardy. Just like in the French literature, in the English literature of the given period we find the echo of the times that produced it and also of the typical problems of those

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