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The Criticism of the English Novel from 1836 to 1870 in Eight Leading British Literary Periodicals

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THE CRITICISM OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL FROM 1836 TO 1870 IN EIGHT LEADING BRITISH LITERARY PERIODICALS

by

Stanley Thomas Ptak

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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LIFE

Stanley Thomas Ptak was born in Chicago, Illinois, January 3, 1928. He was graduated from St. Rita High School, Chicago, Illinois, February, 1946, and from Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, February, 1951, with the degree of Bachelor of Science. He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in February, 1951.

Since February, 1951 the author has taught in the Chicago public schools.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIST OF TABLES</strong></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of reviewing—The link between the periodical and the novel—Statement of the problem—History of the problem—Questions to be considered—Methods employed—History of the eight periodicals used as sources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. NOVEL CRITICISM IN THE PERIODICALS: METHOD AND FORM.</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctions between nineteenth century and current novel criticism—General methods and forms of novel reviewing—Specific methods of reviewing in each periodical.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. NOVEL CRITICISM IN THE PERIODICALS: CONTENT.</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three critical standards—The artistic standard—The moral standard—The socio-political standard.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IV. THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THREE LEADING NOVELISTS.</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reception of Dickens's novels—The reception of Thackeray's novels—The reception of George Eliot's novels—Interpretative analysis of findings—Tabular summaries.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>V. CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of findings—Significance of results.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF DICKENS'S NOVELS IN EIGHT LEADING</td>
<td>89-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRITISH PERIODICALS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THACKERAY'S NOVELS IN EIGHT LEADING</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRITISH PERIODICALS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELS IN EIGHT LEA-</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DING BRITISH PERIODICALS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A KEY TO THE ABBREVIATIONS
USED IN THE THESIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Athanaeum</td>
<td>Athanaeum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine</td>
<td>Blackwood's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin University Magazine</td>
<td>DUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh Review</td>
<td>ER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country</td>
<td>Fraser's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly Review</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday Review</td>
<td>SR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster Review</td>
<td>WR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Two of the outstanding developments in English literary history during the nineteenth century were the rapid growth of periodicals and the equally rapid development and the eventual ascendancy of the novel as a literary type. Arising primarily from the increase in the reading public which resulted from the change in the structure of English society, these two developments advanced simultaneously and were in a number of respects interdependent.

With the increase in the publication of all types of books, the opportunities for periodicals which reviewed and passed judgment on these new works were continually growing. Many of the Reviews which had their beginning in the eighteenth century, like the Monthly Review (1749-1829) and the Critical Review (1756-1817), presented their readers with a wide coverage of new books, for it was their policy to attempt to review, in some manner, all of the publications which appeared each month.\(^1\) However, it was not until the nineteenth century, with the rise of the two great quarterlies, the Edinburgh Review (1802-1929) and the Quarterly Review (1809- ) and their many imitators, that the book-reviewing publications attained true importance. Several changes occurred with the publication of the new Reviews. First, they made no attempt to review all books, as their predecessors had done; second, the reviewing was comparatively free from the bookseller's influence which had plagued the ear-

\(^1\) Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals*, New York, 1930, 211.
lier Reviews; and third, the reviewing was affected more than ever before by political partisanship. 2

The magazines of the nineteenth century also differed from their predecessors in several ways. The earlier magazines, like the Gentleman's Magazine which began publication in 1731, were chiefly storehouses of miscellaneous information and were not literary in nature. These early magazines contained entertainment features such as mathematical problems, conundrums, dances and songs, and also lists of deaths, births, marriages, and sailings of vessels. 3

The appearance of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in 1817 and of its leading competitor, Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country in 1830, led the way in the drastic changes in the content of the magazines. Although in its early years Blackwood's retained some of the miscellaneous features, they gradually disappeared from its pages and the new magazines were now composed chiefly of original stories, poetry, and book reviews.

The demand for shorter and more prompt reviews led to the growth of such weekly publications as the Spectator and the Athenaeum, both of which first appeared in 1828, and the Saturday Review which first appeared in 1855.

It is in the monthly magazines that the link between the novel and the periodical is best illustrated, for unlike the Reviews and the weekly journals, the monthlies not only noticed and criticized novels, but they also printed them in installment form. New novelists were given an opportunity to bring their works before the public without the hardship of financing the publication of a book or pamphlets. The cheap publications such as Ainsworth's Magazine (1842-

2 Ibid., 227.
3 Ibid.
1854) and Dickens's two miscellanies, Household Words (1850-1859) and All the Year Round (1859-1895), which were primarily concerned with the publication of fiction, furnished additional impetus to the serial publication of novels.

Thus, by publishing novels in their pages and by reviewing new works as they appeared, the periodicals played a vital part in the development of the English novel during the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the novel proved the raison d'être of many publications of the period; therefore, the two were mutually dependent. One of the factors of this interdependence, the criticism of the novel in periodicals, will be considered in this thesis.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the form and content of the novel criticism in eight leading British literary periodicals during the years from 1836 to 1870. The eight periodicals selected are: the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly Review, the Westminster Review, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, the Dublin University Magazine, The Athanaeum, and the Saturday Review. Through the examination and analysis of the forms, methods, and critical standards utilized by the critics and by singling out those aspects of novel composition which most frequently received their attention, an effort will be made to ascertain the state of periodical novel criticism; to determine the critical status of the novel as a genre; and to gain a deeper insight into the spirit of the age.

The terminal dates chosen for this study, 1836 and 1870, mark the active writing career of Charles Dickens, the most representative of the mid-nineteenth century novelists. The earlier date is the year of publication of

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his first success, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club; the latter marks the year in which The Mystery of Edwin Drood, his last novel, appeared. The major works of all other leading mid-nineteenth century novelists were also written during this period. The criticism of notable exceptions such as George Eliot's Middlemarch (1872) and Daniel Deronda (1876) will be considered when it in some manner contributes to the study.

The problem of the critical reception of the novel in the periodicals, especially of the mid-nineteenth century novel, has not, thus far, received very considerable attention. The novel criticism prior to 1800 has been studied by Professor J.B. Heidler; and Dr. B. H. Gibson's unpublished thesis considers novel criticism from 1800 to 1832, but the periodical criticism receives only slight attention. The critical reception of the Waverley Novels as studied by Professor J.T. Hillhouse gives some insight into the periodical criticism of the nineteenth century. A number of the special studies of periodicals consider the criticism of novels in those publications with varying emphasis. Professor M.M. Bevington's study of the Saturday Review contains an excellent section on Novels and Light Literature; Professor L.


7 James T. Hillhouse, The Waverley Novels and Their Critics, Minneapolis, 1936.


Marchand's study of the *Athanaeum*\(^{10}\) considers the reception of Dickens and Thackeray in that journal;\(^ {11}\) and Sir William Thomas's work on the *Spectator*\(^ {12}\) treats novel criticism very briefly.\(^ {13}\) Professor J. D. Jump briefly discusses the reviewing done in three weeklies, the *Athanaeum*, the *Saturday Review*, and the *Spectator*, but the novel criticism receives only part of his attention.\(^ {14}\) Except for Professor Bevington's study of the *Saturday Review*, the works listed above fail to emphasize the question of novel criticism to any degree. The novel criticism in the remaining periodicals, in the *Quarterly Review*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *Westminster Review*, in *Fraser's*, *Blackwood's*, and the *Dublin University Magazine* has been entirely neglected. This thesis attempts to fill, in part, this need for a more thorough study of the periodical criticism of the novel during the nineteenth century.

This introductory chapter presents the history, background, and general nature of the content of each of the eight periodicals used as sources, as an aid to the reader in noting any significant relationships between the critical remarks and the policies of the publications. The second chapter considers the various forms of novel criticism and the methods employed by critics. Chapters three and four are both concerned with the content of the novel criticism. The first of the two chapters is a general outline of those issues and problems

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11 Ibid., 298-322.


13 Ibid., 204-230.

in novel writing which most frequently received the attention of contemporary novel critics, and is based on the reviews of both major and minor novelists. The fourth chapter is a survey of the criticism of the novels of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot. It illustrates more specifically the reviewing practices of individual periodicals, the quality of their reviews, and the relationship of the policy of the periodicals to the reviews. Although the primary interest in the study is not in specific authors or books, either major or minor, nor in specific reviews, but rather in the broad aspects and trends, nevertheless, the three-author survey helps to further the purpose of the thesis. The authors were chosen because their position of importance during the period assured their works of the most extensive as well as the most intensive criticism, and because their works manifest, in varying degrees and in various ways, all of the outstanding characteristics of the Victorian novel. Thus they are truly representative novelists of the period, and the criticism of their novels is representative criticism. A tabular summary and an interpretative analysis of the data will be presented at the conclusion of the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter consists of a summary of all of the information presented in the earlier chapters.

The eight periodicals used as sources for the reviews and articles presented in this thesis were chosen because the group includes those periodicals in which literary criticism, and novel criticism in particular, received notable attention; because it includes the most important and influential publications of various types, that is, quarterlies, monthlies, and weeklies; and because it represents various political, social, and intellectual viewpoints, as well as various sectional differences.

The Edinburgh Review, the first of the great critical periodicals of the nineteenth century, was founded in Edinburgh in 1802 by a group of young
Whigs: Sydney Smith, Francis Jeffrey (who was also the editor until 1829), Francis Horner, and Henry Brougham. Although not established as a party organ, the Whiggish tendencies soon overshadowed the wit and fun which at the outset were the primary considerations. In matters of political, ecclesiastical and religious interest, the tendency of the Edinburgh was in favor of broad and liberal views. The writings of Jeffrey, Macaulay, and Thomas Arnold represent the thought of the Edinburgh. Although liberal in politics, the literary policy set by editor Jeffrey was very conservative, as reflected in the famous attacks on the Lake School of poets. The novelty of a periodical which possessed an air of omniscience, the brilliance of the writing, and the keenness of much of the criticism, led to the growth of the Edinburgh from the initial printing of 750 to nearly 14,000 copies of each issue in 1818. After the first quarter of the century, the importance of the Edinburgh as a literary organ decreased because of the growth of competing quarterlies and because of the rise of the more popular magazines. However, it remained an influential organ until it ceased publication in 1929.

The Quarterly Review was founded in 1809 by a group of Tories led by Sir Walter Scott in order to counteract the influence of the Whig Edinburgh. It was enthusiastically received by the Tories, and by 1819 its circulation reached a high point of 14,000 copies, a number equal to that attained by its competitor. The Quarterly became the champion of the Established Church and

15 Graham, Periodicals, 233.
defender of the privileged aristocracy. Whatever tended to decrease respect for the established order, the Church, the monarchy, the laws, and the landed aristocracy, was considered evil. This strong partisan bias led to the violent attacks on Keats, Hunt, Shelley, and others, and earned for the Quarterly a reputation for unfairness. Among the distinguished contributors to the Quarterly during the second half of the century were: Mark Pattison, Bulwer-Lytton, John Forster, Thackeray, and Harriet Martineau. The Quarterly is currently being published.

The two leading Reviews were joined in 1824 by the Westminster Review. Founded by James Mill, the utilitarian philosopher and disciple of Jeremy Bentham, the publication was in its early years a truly Benthamite organ. Inspired by the practices of the Whig and Tory Reviews, the Westminster attempted to employ literary criticism in the service of utilitarian doctrine. However, in 1836, when the Westminster was amalgamated with John Stuart Mill's London Review, the partisan propaganda of the publication came to an end. During this period after 1836 and through the editorship of the new owner, John Chapman, which began in 1851, the Westminster became an organ for advanced thought and advocated reforms within the church, state, and society. When Chapman became editor and proprietor, Mary Ann Evans became his assistant and also a contributor. She remained as his assistant until September, 1853. Other distinguished contributors to the Westminster were George Lewes, Thackeray,

19 Graham, Periodicals, 245.

20 Ibid., 247.


22 Graham, Periodicals, 253.

In the advertisement of the first issue of the Edinburgh Review, the pattern which was to be followed by other quarterlies was set forth by the editors. They wrote:

It will be easily perceived that it forms no part of their object, to take notice of every production that issues from the Press: and that they wish their Journal to be distinguished, rather for the selection, than for the number, of its articles. 23

The editors continued by saying that since the lowest order of publications were rejected by all journals, they proposed to carry the selectivity still further. They intended to decline any attempt at exhibiting a complete view of modern literature; and to confine their notice, in a degree, to works that either have attained, or deserve, a certain portion of celebrity. 24

This selectivity was an important factor in the plan of the Reviews. Although the early numbers of the Edinburgh contained as many as thirty articles, the practice later was to limit the number to about eight or ten long articles in each issue. The Reviews did not publish original matter, but confined themselves to commenting upon or criticizing the works or activities of others. One or more books, pamphlets, or reports were chosen for each article, and these generally served as a springboard for a discussion of some important topic of the day.

A typical issue of the Edinburgh in 185025 is 316 pages long and contains eight articles. The table of contents of this issue indicates the length

23 "Advertisement," ER, I, October, 1802, i.
24 Ibid.
25 ER, IC, January, 1854.
of the articles and the subjects chosen for consideration.

Article I Lord John Russell's Memorials of Mr. Fox and the Buckingham Papers

II The Blind, Their Works and Ways

III Ecclesiastical Economy

IV Public Works in the Presidency of Madras

V Government, Education Measures for Poor and Rich

VI Thackeray's Works

VII The Machinery of Parliamentary Legislation

VIII The Ottoman Empire

In general, the same pattern was followed by the Quarterly and the Westminster. The articles were printed in a single column with a list of books, reports, pamphlets, etc. which were utilized in a particular article preceding the body of the paper.

In addition to the long articles, the Westminster printed a section of fifty to eighty pages called "Contemporary Literature" which was composed of short reviews of new books. The reviews were classified into sections on Theology and Philosophy; Politics, Sociology, Voyages and Travels; Science; History and Biography; and Belles Lettres. The length of the reviews in this section varied with the contemporary importance of the book noticed.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, or "Maga" as it was called, was founded in Edinburgh in 1817 as a lighter Tory organ, to give opposition to the Edinburgh Review. Before its founding, periodical literature in Edinburgh was dominated by the Whigs. William Blackwood was assisted in the early years by John Gibson Lockhart, James Hogg, John Wilson, and the witty Irishman, William Maginn, who was later to be a founder of Fraser's Magazine. The extravagant literary criticism of the early years of Blackwood's with its attacks on the
"Cockney School," Coleridge, Hunt, Hazlitt, and others, became tempered after a time. The introduction of original criticism as a more important element than it had been previously may be credited to Blackwood's. 26

Among the novelists whose works appeared in Blackwood's was Bulwer-Lytton whose The Caxton's (1849), My Novel (1853), and What will he do with it? (1858) appeared serially. George Eliot's first work of fiction, Scenes of Clerical Life, appeared serially in Blackwood's in 1857.

A typical issue of Blackwood's in the 1850's 27 is 122 pages long and contains seven articles ranging from ten to twenty-five pages in length. This issue includes a part of a romance, twenty-five pages long, and an eleven-page review of Thackeray's works. The remainder of the issue is composed of miscellaneous articles on subjects such as the Crimean War and the Rural Economy of Great Britain and Ireland.

Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country (1830-1882), another Tory publication, and an avowed imitator of Blackwood's, was founded by two bohemians of the day, William Maginn and Hugh Fraser. The brashness and rebellious spirit of the founders is reflected in their spirited drives against publishers' puffery of their novels, against the novels of fashionable life, and in the publication of such Thackeray satires as Catherine, and Rebecca and Rowena. Thrall writes that Fraser's was "one of the most important organs of progressive thought and open revolt in the Victorian Age." 28 After the death of Maginn and Fraser, the magazine was taken over in 1847 by leaders of the Broad Church

26 Graham, Periodicals, 276.
movement and the rebellion against doctrines and traditions grew stronger.\textsuperscript{29} The spirit of the periodical is indicated by the works which were printed in its pages. These included: Kingsley's Yeast (1848) and Hypatia (1853); John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism (1863); and several numbers of Ruskin's Munera Pulveris (1862-1863).

Thackeray was associated with Fraser's during his early career and much of his writing during those years appeared serially in the magazine. Among the works presented there were: the Memoirs of Mr. C. J. Yellowplush (1837-1838), Catherine (1839-1840), The Shabby Genteel Story (1840), the History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond (1841), the Fitz-Boodle Papers (1842-1843), The Luck of Barry Lyndon (1844), and Rebecca and Rowena (1846).

A typical issue of Fraser's in the 1850's\textsuperscript{30} is in double-column form, 124 pages in length, and contains thirteen short articles and reviews ranging from four to eighteen pages. Eighteen pages are devoted to new fiction; thirty-two pages to reviewing poetry; and the remainder of the issue consists of miscellaneous articles ranging from "Foreign and Domestic Policy" to a discussion on "Rings."

The first number of the Dublin University Magazine appeared in January, 1833. The magazine was founded by a group of young Tories of Dublin University or Trinity College, Dublin, who strongly protested against the liberalism of the senior group of University authorities. The revolt which was precipitated

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, London, LIII, April, 1856.
by the Reform Bill of 1832 was embodied in the new publication. Modeled on Fraser's and Blackwood's, the early Dublin University Magazine copied their brash and facetious tone. The second issue of the magazine sets forth the conservative and protestant policy of the founding group.

We desire, that religion may be respected, and upheld, and its institutions saved from innovating and destroying hands—that the great political establishments of the country may not be rashly disturbed, and ignorantly overthrown—that the wise and the well-informed may be our legislators and governors, rather than the shallow, conceited and turbulent parasites of a headstrong populace, drunk with religious or political bigotry.

When Charles Lever was appointed as editor in 1842, the magazine was no longer to be academic and political-propagandist, but rather a literary and political monthly. Although still Irish in purpose and still conservative and protestant in policy, the strong partisan bias of the early days was no longer present. When Lever became editor he wrote that

it is my intention, while steadily maintaining the assertion of our political creed, to introduce a greater variety into the contents of each number, to procure reviews and notices of interesting foreign works—to give from time to time, such rapid and comprehensive sketches of the current literature of the day as may serve to keep up with the course of book-writing, many of those who cannot devote to such subjects, more than the ordinary time of consulting a periodical.

Lever, who remained as editor until 1845, contributed stories to the periodical from 1836 to 1859; his Harry Lorrequer, Charles O'Malley, and Jack Hinton all appeared serially in the magazine. Other writers whose works appeared in the Dublin University Magazine were William Carleton, Samuel Lover, Sadleir, Dublin University Magazine: Its History, Contents, and Bibliography, Dublin, 1936, 60.


32 Sadleir, Dublin University Magazine, 64.

33 "Editor's Address," DUM, XIX, April 1, 1842, 124.
The magazine continued publication until 1880.

A typical copy of the *Dublin University Magazine* in the 1850's contains 125 double-columned pages with twelve separate items including verse, three serial stories consisting of thirty-five pages, several character sketches, and miscellaneous articles.

The *Athanaeum*, a journal of Literature, Science, the Fine Arts, Music, and the Drama first appeared in January, 1828, and continued until 1921. It was founded by James Silk Buckingham as an independent organ. In the first and second issues of the paper an objection is raised to the *Quarterly Review's* practice of combining politics and literary criticism. One of the aims of the paper is said to be to oppose:

as far as our efforts can effect it, the torrents of dissipation, frivolity, and corrupt taste, which seems to threaten the extinction of all intellectual greatness or refinement among us.

This low opinion of literary standards and the magazine's independent spirit were embodied in the drive against publishers' puffery, similar to that conducted by Fraser's. The paper maintained its independence by printing practically no political matter.

Among the contributors to the *Athanaeum* were Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Hood, Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb, and G.H. Lewes.

35 *DUM*, XLII, November, 1853.


The *Athanaeum* was a finely printed, three-columned weekly paper selling for fourpence. A typical copy in the 1850s\(^1\) consists of thirty-one pages, with the main body of nineteen pages preceded and followed by six pages of advertisements. The section called "Reviews" contains notices of four books including a 1,600 word review of *Bleak House*, a 2,000 word review of a travel book, a 1,400 word review of a German translation, and a 3,800 word review of a new History of England. This section of the paper is followed by a quarter-column list of new books, a letter from a correspondent, a page of miscellaneous items called "Our Weekly Gossip," a one-column section on Fine Arts, a page and a half on Drama, and ten pages devoted to a report of a British Scientific Institution. The last item is a special feature.

The *Saturday Review*, also a weekly paper, appeared first in November, 1855, and continued until 1938. It was founded by a wealthy amateur politician, Alexander Beresford Hope, who was aided by a group of brilliant, ambitious, highly educated young men of leisure who, because of the prospects of success in other professions, were able to write in the spirit of amateurs rather than journalistic hacks.\(^4\) In a letter, the founder stated the plan for the periodical. He wanted:

a paper not bound to any party, but written by a combination of Peerlite Conservatives and Moderate Liberals, and to be the mouthpiece of the middle moderate opinions of thoughtful and educated society.\(^4\)\(^1\)

The opening issue prospectus developed the founder's ideas in this statement:

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39 *Athanaeum*, September 17, 1853.


Neither does the SATURDAY REVIEW affect that impartiality which consists in an indifference to all principles, — on the contrary, its writers, most of whom are known to each other, and none of whom are unpracticed in periodical literature, have been thrown together by affinities naturally arising from common habits of thought, education, reflection, and social views. Yet they all claim independence of judgment, and in the SATURDAY REVIEW they hope to find an opportunity, with certain limits, for its exercise and expression. They will consequently address themselves to the educated mind of the country, and to serious, thoughtful men of all schools, classes, and principles... In politics the SATURDAY REVIEW is independent both of individual statesmen and worn-out political sections; in literature, science and art, its contributors are entirely free from the influence or dictation of pecuniary or any other connexions with trade, party, clique, or section. 42

The Saturday Review became a self-appointed critic of all phases of English civilization and earned a reputation of being a destroyer both of writers of established reputation and of beginners. In an "exposure" of Saturday Review tactics, Grant, writing in 1873, lists a number of names by which the periodical was to have been scornfully called by its contemporaries. He writes that among these were: the Saturday Snarler, the Saturday Scorpion, the Saturday Slasher, the Saturday Scourge, the Saturday Slanderer, the Saturday Butcher, and the Saturday Reviler. 43

Among the distinguished contributors to the Saturday Review were: Walter Bagehot, George Eliot, T.H. Huxley, Charles Kingsley, George H. Lewes, Coventry Patmore, and Leslie Stephen. 44

A typical issue of the Saturday Review 45 contains twenty double-columned


44 Bevington, Saturday Review, 331-391.

45 SR, I, December 29, 1855.
The issue contains six political articles, averaging about 1,300 words, and one article each on religion and art, and two on science. The reviewing section contains reviews of six books, including two novels, with lengths ranging from 900 to 2,500 words. The issue is concluded with a page of book advertisements.
A comparison of the novel reviews in the mid-nineteenth century periodicals with those of the present time presents several striking differences. The first is the universal anonymity of the earlier novel criticism. The traditional practice of publishing reviews and articles without the author's signature gained acceptance as well as notoriety in the early years of the nineteenth century with the rise of the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. In this early period the method was not challenged except by the short-lived *London Review* (1809),¹ and not until 1865 when the *Fortnightly Review* began publication did a change in policy, with a signing of contributions, slowly come into being.² By means of this anonymity the periodicals acquired a distinct personality of their own with the result that the opinions expressed in them were known to be those of the *Review* or magazine and would be accepted by the majority of readers as the final word on any question. The readers preferred to have books recommended by the authority of the Great Unknown rather than by some young obscure critic. Some of the contemporary arguments which were presented in defense of anonymous reviewing were that literary articles should make their way by their own value, not by the recommendation of a critic's name; new writers were said to be aided by the

¹ Graham, *Periodicals*, 239.
² Ibid., 258.

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support of a reputable periodical; if anonymity were abolished, the hold which 
reviewing had over the public would be lost, and consequently, reviewing would 
become feeble; and, the abandonment of anonymity would lead to the creation of 
an oligarchy of critics, under which, names as well as articles would have to 
be purchased by publishers. 3

The second difference between the novel criticism under study and that 
of the present day is the greater length of many of the reviews and critical 
articles during the earlier period. An age which produced an abundance of three- 
volume novels just as readily provided a counterpart in criticism with thirty- 
page accounts of many novels.

The third distinction is the amount of non-literary matter which often 
was included in the reviews.

The novel criticism in the periodicals may be classified into several 
types according to the basic plan or structure which was adopted by the re-
viewers and critics. The first type, the common stereotyped novel review, was 
the most frequently used form, utilized especially by those periodicals which 
were obligated to bring to the attention of their readers an extensive survey 
of current publications. The reviews in this category followed a set pattern 
and varied as slightly as many of the novels which were reviewed by this means.
Opening with a brief paragraph on the general nature of the novel, the review 
continued with comments on some of the leading characters, a summary and seve-
ral extracts, and very often ended with a statement of regret that the reviewer 
was forced to conclude because the allotted space had been used. If the author 
of a work were anonymous or if a pseudonym were used, a few paragraphs were de-

3 Edwin M. Everett, The Party of Humanity: The Fortnightly Review 
and Its Contributors, 1865-1874, Chapel Hill, 1939, 67.
voted to an attempt to solve the mystery of his identity. For example, George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* provided material for speculation on the part of reviewers and the readers.⁴ The stereotyped reviews contain very few critical comments which are of value to a student of literature. A *Dublin University Magazine* reviewer, in explaining his reviewing technique, illustrates very well the methods and attitudes of the writers of stereotyped reviews. He wrote:

It is by no means our intention to analyze the novel now before us. We never analyzed a novel in our critical existence, nor is it by any means necessary. In order to discuss the author's object, and the manner in which he handles his subject, "a few orient pearls at random strung," by way of extracts, with now and then the elucidation of a principle, or the discussion of an opinion, is all that we profess to undertake.

This reviewer believed that to ponder over the contents of each novel reviewed was "quite beyond the range of a common intellect."⁵

Frequently as many as twenty of the stereotyped reviews were grouped together under one heading and given a title such as "Novels of the Season," "Our Spring Crop of Novels," or "Our Batch of Novels." The introductory paragraphs to these composite reviews often contained useful statements concerning contemporary views of the novel.

If an author or book were considered to be of sufficient importance, a more impressive review was granted. This second type of periodical novel criticism was more lengthy and more substantial in content. In addition to the usual character sketches, plot summary and extracts, critical comment, varying in length and quality, was included. The nature and content of this commentary

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⁴ For example—"New Novels," *DUM*, LIII, April, 1859, 483-495; "An Evening's Gossip on New Novels," *DUM*, XXXI, May, 1846, 608-625.

⁵ "Novels and Novelists of the Day," *DUM*, XXX, September, 1847, 261.
will be considered in the following chapters.

The third major category of novel criticism in the periodicals was the article in which some novel or novels served as a center for a discussion which involved more than the works of fiction themselves. The article was usually one of three general types. First, one in which the novel served as a focal point in a general account of an author's works; second, one in which the novel was related to an historical discussion of the novel as a genre, and since the novel was still a relatively new form, this type of discussion occurred quite frequently; and third, one in which the novel acted as a point of reference in a discourse on some religious, political, or social problem of the day. 6

The quarterly publications, the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly Review, and the Westminster Review did not print novel reviews with any degree of regularity. As with other books chosen for discussion in their pages, great selectivity was exercised in the choice of novels. Between the years 1850 and 1860, for example, the Edinburgh Review considered novels eleven times, or an average of one review or article in every four issues. In this group, seven discussed a novel or novels for their own sake, the remainder used the novels as a springboard for a discussion of religion, 7 education, 8 or politics. 9 In

6 In the course of the thesis, when referring to novel criticism, the term "review" will indicate that periodical criticism which is concerned with the presentation of some new work for the reader's consideration, either with or without critical comment. The term "article" will refer to that criticism which has a novel or novels as its center, but uses the works for some broader discussion than the books themselves.

length the criticism ranged from a discussion of several novels in ten pages, to a discussion of Thackeray's works in forty-five pages.  

In the years between 1850 and 1860, the Quarterly presented four articles and reviews dealing with novels, or about one in every ten issues. Included were: a review of The Newcomes, an article on Smollett on the occasion of a new edition of his works, a composite review of novels based on some phase of education, and a discussion of George Eliot's novels.

In the Westminster Review, novels were noticed in two ways, either at length in the manner of the other quarterlies, or more briefly in the "Contemporary Literature" section of each issue. In the latter case, five or more novels were reviewed briefly in each issue with little critical comment. Of the longer reviews and articles, between the years 1850 and 1860, six appeared in the Westminster. All of these were of a literary nature; none was used directly for political or social discussion, although such did appear occasionally. The reviews ranged from seven to twenty-six pages.

The monthly magazines, Fraser's, Blackwood's, and the Dublin University Magazine, were more informal and not as highly selective in their choice of novels for reviewing. In fact, many of the reviews included an apology for printing remarks about such worthless writing. For example, one reviewer concluded his series of reviews with this comment:

10 "Recent Novels," ER, XCVII, April, 1853, 380-390.
12 "The Newcomes," QR, XCVII, September, 1855, 350-378.
So much for a fortnight of pure and unadulterated novel reading. Other works of fiction lie beside us, but we have no power to encounter them; for we are weary of this work of sympathy with the idle creations of the brain, and so we dare say, by this time, are our readers.16

As a result, the pages of the monthly publications contained many reviews of the stereotyped class.

The monthlies, though reviewing novels more frequently, did not present the reviews with any more regularity than the quarterlies. Between 1850 and 1860, Blackwood's printed twenty reviews and articles dealing with the novel. Of this group, six were based on continental or American novels; five considered single English novels; two were composite reviews; and seven were articles based on some contemporary or past novels.

During that same period, Fraser's printed twenty reviews and articles. Of the twenty, five were based on individual works; seven were composite reviews; and eight were articles based on some novel or novelist. During this period, no foreign novels were reviewed, although Fraser's did not confine its reviewing to English works.

From 1850 to 1860, the Dublin University Magazine presented twenty-nine novel reviews and articles. In this group, five were on foreign works; five on individual English books; eleven were composite reviews; and eight were articles on novels or novelists. Because of the Irish viewpoint of the magazine Irish novelists were granted considerably more attention than they received in any of the English periodicals.

Because of their emphasis on the reviewing of new books, and since they appeared at more frequent intervals, the two weekly journals used as sources in this thesis, the Saturday Review and The Athanaeum, offered a far

16 "A Fortnight's Novel-Reading," Fraser's, XXX, September, 1844, 266.
wider coverage of contemporary fiction than any of the other periodicals thus far considered. The Saturday Review presented an average of two reviews of English or foreign novels in each issue. The reviews consisted almost entirely of critical comment with very few extracts. The length of the reviews varied, but they were rarely less than 800 words long.

The Athanaeum printed reviews of two or more novels in each issue. Both English and foreign novels were reviewed. The Athanaeum provided the readers with lengthy extracts in addition to brief comments, and made a practice of reviewing parts of books as they were published. Reviews of one or several numbers of a pamphlet novel or of one volume of a three-volume work often appeared. George Eliot's Middlemarch was reviewed in six separate parts. The first five reviewed individual books of the novel and contained little critical comment. The sixth review consisted of a summary of the entire work and included critical comment. A review of the first number of David Copperfield was followed by a review of the complete work. The first seven numbers of Vanity Fair were reviewed, followed by a review of the entire novel.

Although the abundance of the novel reviews and articles is commensurate with the high production of fiction during the period, the quality is


18 "Middlemarch," Athanaeum, II, December 7, 1872, 725-726.


20 "David Copperfield," Athanaeum, November 23, 1850, 1209-1211.

21 "Vanity Fair, Nos. 1-7," Athanaeum, July 24, 1847, 785-786.

22 "Vanity Fair," Athanaeum, August 12, 1848, 794-797.
not of equal value, due partly to the very nature of the form of the reviews and to the methods of reviewing. One reviewer remarked:

Anonymous criticism is, perhaps, the necessary production of the present state of society and literature. The immense and incessant accumulation of literary matter has rendered absolutely indispensable to the majority of the public an institution of professional sifters to separate the grain from the chaff.\textsuperscript{23}

Although the work of the mere sifters will not be totally disregarded in this thesis, the primary interest lies with the efforts of that body of periodical reviewers and critics who not only separated the grain from the chaff, but who also presented their views on the criteria for such separation.

\textsuperscript{23} "Novels of Fashionable Life," \textit{DUM}, XII, July, 1838, 38.
CHAPTER III

NOVEL CRITICISM IN THE PERIODICALS: CONTENT

This chapter consists of a survey and outline of those issues in the contemporary discussion of the English novel which most frequently attracted and held the interest of critics in the leading periodicals during the period from 1836 to 1870, and is centered on the three critical standards which served as the bases for the novel criticism in these publications. One or several of the following norms were utilized by the critics in individual reviews and articles: the artistic or purely literary standard; the moral standard in which artistic considerations were overshadowed by moral questions; and the socio-political standard in which various social and political problems were of primary concern to the novel critics.

The problem of novel construction was one of the key concerns of the artistic critics of the novel, and the majority of them agreed that the English novelists sorely neglected to construct their stories with care. The novels were either completely without plot or with one which was inferior and unoriginal. The faults of the novelists in this phase of novel writing were summarized by a Fraser's critic who wrote in 1865:

In no class of works is there so little art displayed as in the novel. The ordinary process is to construct the story first, and then to fit the characters into it....The action and reaction of characters and circumstances—the operation of circumstances on modifying character, or character in controlling or shaping circumstances—seldom enters into the philosophy of the novel.¹

¹ "On the Treatment of Love in Novels," Fraser's, LIII, April, 1856, 415.
The allegedly contrived conclusions of George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *Mill on the Foss* were severely criticized by many reviewers; one critic in the *Saturday Review* wrote that Dickens "never yet constructed an artistic story"; and Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* was criticized for its faulty construction, and consequently, wrote one reviewer, it "cannot be received as a work of art. It is not a picture; but a portfolio of random sketches for one or more pictures." For the same reason, in a review of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray was called "a satirist, not an artist." Late in Thackeray's career, in a review of *The Virginians*, a *Saturday Review* critic noticed that Thackeray placed more emphasis on plot construction and commented:

If he had acquired the knowledge and exercised the power necessary for such an undertaking whilst it was possible to do so, he might have written such a novel as haunts the dreams of most modern novelists.

Several novelists, especially Bulwer-Lytton and Wilkie Collins, were singled out for praise because of their attention to the structural aspects of fiction. A reviewer of one of Collins's novels commented on the merits of this type of story which was comparatively rare during the period. He wrote:

There is no nonsense, no silly sentimentalism. The author does not seek to interlope sermons. There are few, if any bad jokes and comic outpourings. This negative virtue is not to be despised, and we may be glad that there is at least one English novelist who has no philosophy to recommend nor any high purpose to serve.

Adding to the severity of the criticism of English novelists for their

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5 "The Virginians," *SR*, VIII, November 19, 1859, 611.
6 "Hide and Seek," *SR*, XII, October 5, 1861, 360.
flimsy and inadequate novel construction was the frequent comparison of their novels with those of the French novelists; the latter works were held up as examples of what might be accomplished in the presentation of more artistic novels. The merits of the French and deficiencies of the English novelists were summarized by a Fraser's critic who wrote:

All readers of French novels are struck by the enchanting interest of the plot, and the skill with which its capabilities are brought out and wrought up to the height of their effect. No opportunity is lost of giving expression to the subtle emotions of the scene, or of resolving into action the salient points of the fable. Everything seems to flow obviously and easily; every line contributes to the onward and accumulating interest; there is nothing de trop; no waste in the way of description or ruminations; all is essential, natural, and fresh. You are never suffered to dawdle or drop asleep over the book, and rarely find yourself galloping through half-a-dozen pages at a time, to get at the pith of the story.7

He wondered why English novelists did not throw some of this fire into their works. Although they could not treat all of the subjects which the French novelists were free to use, they certainly were free to adopt some of their techniques which would knit the incidents of their stories more closely together. He said that the French novels were successful because of their art and not because of their subject matter, so there was no excuse for boredom on these grounds. "The monstrous dulness" of the English novelist was not always the result of the English discrimination in the choice of topics.8

The faulty construction of the contemporary novels, the neglect of plot and structure, and the artlessness resulting from these faults were all attributed to the following causes: hasty writing and over-production, the inordinate length of the novels, the installment method of publication, and the nature of the content of the novels.

7 "English Novels," Fraser's, XLIV, October, 1851, 378-379.
8 Ibid., 379.
The reviewers felt that too many novels were being written, and those written were most frequently by persons who could barely produce a single satisfactory volume. In effect, the professional novelist had become a literary nuisance, a burden to readers and especially to reviewers. A prolific novelist, and one who might very well serve as an example of the tendency of rapid novel-writing during the period, was G.P.R. James (1801-1860), a favorite target of the critics. James was known as a novel-manufacturer and was said to write novels "as a hen lays eggs,—nearly as rapidly and at as uniform intervals, and with quite as few of the throes of parturition." Another reviewer wrote:

We wonder how many novels Mr. James has actually written. As long as we recollect anything, we remember to have seen them announced...He writes too frequently—he writes too much—he evidently does it by contract; and consequently many of his productions are only fit to line trunks. If the genius of Mr. Dickens—confessedly of such power—be insufficient to produce more than one book in each alternate year, can a feeble and prosy practitioner like Mr. James, expect the public will tolerate one of his novels, containing six hundred and sixty-nine pages or thereabouts, every month or every week, as the case may be.

Although the very quantity of James's novels annoyed the critics, their content was still greater a source of irritation. One reviewer, wearied by the task of noticing each novel from James's pen, made this suggestion concerning his novels and those of other novelists in his class:

It would be a wise economy if the critics were to keep a standing formula, with blanks, to be filled according to circumstances, for

9 "In the period of thirty odd years that comprised his writing life he produced fifty-six novels; eight additional volumes which may be loosely classified as short stories; five more in the form of poems and plays; several political pamphlets; and twelve works dealing with history....Roughly speaking, there are eighty-seven works by James, to say nothing of short stories and contributions to magazines not reprinted."—S.M. Ellis, Mainly Victorian, London, 132-133.

10 "Recent Novels," ER, XCVII, April, 1853, 382.

the purpose of noting the publishing progress of Mr. James, and some
other of our modern novelists,--every three months bringing some
fresh specimen, so like its predecessors, that, after cataloguing the
dramatis personae and mentioning the period, a Ditto to the last no-
tice would be as sufficient and efficient an account of the person-
ges and adventures as the public can require at their hands. 12

Although he was not quite as prolific as James, Dickens was likewise severely
criticized for his rapid writing, as the comments in the following chapter
will indicate.

The problem of the novel of inordinate length is chiefly connected
with the practice of publishing novels in three-volume form. During the first
quarter of the nineteenth century, the three-volume novel became the standard
form in which novels appeared. The convention was maintained throughout the
Victorian period, with only a relatively small number of novels appearing in
one, two, or four volumes. This practice may be credited more to economic rea-
sons than to the Victorian love of reading or to the more leisurely living of
the period. Phillips writes that the price of thirty-one shillings and sixpence
which was the standard price for the first edition of almost any novel, after
the setting of that amount for Scott's Kenilworth in 1821, led to the practice
of publishing novels in three volumes; the public which paid so high a price
would have felt cheated if they were forced to purchase a thin book. 13 Whatever
the causes may have been, the results, according to the critics, were disas-
trous to the novel.

As early as 1831 a reviewer of Mrs. Gore's Pin Money suggested that
the novel be limited to a single volume; 14 and at the end of the period, in

13 Walter C. Phillips, Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novels,
New York, 1919, 54.
14 "Novels of the Season," Fraser's, IV, August, 1831, 13.
1871, Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* was judged to be too lengthy and so minute in its descriptions that it defied "the art of skipping." The Fraser's reviewer of *Vanity Fair* advised Thackeray to keep within more narrow limits in the future because

"It is a gigantic undertaking to get through this massive volume, and in this age the consumption of time is a consideration. Inordinate length, however ably maintained, is an obstruction to enjoyment; and an author may be said to stand in his own light who produces a book that makes an unreasonable demand on the leisure of his readers."  

Some critics made a special effort to point out and praise certain of the shorter novels. Fraser's, in two articles entitled "Little Books with Large Aims," conducted a minor drive against lengthy works and in support of shorter volumes, both in fiction and in other forms of literature. In the first of these articles, again, as in the question of plot and structure, English works were compared with French and other continental literature; the latter works, said the critic, were remarkable for their brevity and conciseness. Although chiefly blaming the publishers for providing the public with the lengthy books, the critic felt that the reviewers were also responsible because they neglected the small books, while "whole columns and pages of wise commentary or testy sarcasm were given to bulky and voluminous productions." Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* was praised by the *Saturday Review* and hailed as the most artistic of his novels because it was far shorter than his other novels.  

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16 "Vanity Fair," *Fraser's*, XXXVIII, September, 1848, 332.  
17 "Little Books with Large Aims," *Fraser's*, XLIV, July, 1851, 26-40;  "Little Books with Large Aims," *Fraser's*, XLVII, April, 1853, 460-473.  
18 Ibid., XLIV, 28-31.  
reviewer's praise of Trollope's *Miss Mackenzie* was its appearance in one volume, thus doing its part in the breaking of the tradition.\(^{20}\) Although some critics expressed a dislike for the three-volume novels, *per se*, the chief objection of the majority of the critics was not essentially the length, because there were also works which they considered to be too short, but rather the low quality of the content resulting from futile attempts to stretch a flimsy work to three-volume length.

The publication of novels in installment form, whether in the more ambitious magazines such as *Fraser's* and *Blackwood's*, in the cheap miscellanies such as Dickens's *Household Words*, or in the separate paper cover installments, was a major factor in the popularization of the novel during the Victorian period. The extent of the popularity of the issue of novels in the paper cover installments may be shown by noting that all of Dickens's major novels except *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*, Thackeray's major novels except *Esmond* and *Adventures of Philip*, and also George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and *Middlemarch* appeared in this form. Some indication of the extent to which novels appeared serially in periodicals was given in the first chapter.

However enthusiastically this method of publication may have been received by the public at large, it met with poor reception from the critics. Although they could do little to halt this publishing trend which thrived on popular acceptance and demand, they did not tire in expressing their complete disapproval. They agreed that the method was "a practice far more advantageous to the novelist than to the novel";\(^{21}\) and novels were often said to succeed in


\(^{21}\) "Mr. Thackeray," *Fraser's*, LXIX, April, 1864, 405.
spite of serialization. The main arguments against this method were that the form of the novel suffered because the author was unable to view his work as a whole unless it were serialized after its completion; the novelist was required to provide some exciting incident in each installment in order to satisfy his readers; and finally, few novelists had sufficient imagination and talent to fill as many as twenty long installments adequately. Thus, the critics believed that the popularity of the novel was reduced "almost entirely to a question of style and sentiment, and to teach people neither to expect nor to relish an interesting plot." Likewise, the technique tended to induce carelessness and "a sort of indifference to the serious claims of literature." Two of the leading novelists, Dickens and Thackeray, were singled out by reviewers as both the causes and the victims of the installment method. A reviewer in the Edinburgh Review felt that they had a great deal to answer for, both to the public and to their own fame, for establishing that method of novel-writing in England. This critic added:

We can understand the temptation to poor men or obscure men of a plan so pecuniarily advantageous. But we do not understand that men of unquestioned genius and established celebrity should be willing to expose either to the temptations and dangers of so mischievous a habit.

Although they might not all state it so categorically and forcefully, the majority of the critics of fiction during the period would agree with the

22 For example: "Great Expectations," Athenaeum, II, July 13, 1861, 38; "Vanity Fair," Fraser's, XXXVIII, September, 1848, 322.
23 "The Virginians," SR, VIII, November 18, 1859, 614.
24 "Vanity Fair," Athenaeum, August 12, 1848, 194.
26 Ibid.
Fraser's reviewer who wrote: "We hate all serials."²⁷

The fourth leading factor which tended to produce novels with serious structural faults was, according to the critics, the nature of the content of the majority of the novels. Most critics agreed that novels should be more than mere entertainment; the element of instruction was considered to be a vital part of the novel. The "pure frivolity" of novels without a lesson was frowned upon. Because of its favorable position as a widely read literary form, many critics believed that full use should be made of that advantage. One reviewer expressed this dominant attitude when he wrote:

A novel particularly of the lighter class, finds its way into so many circles, where notwithstanding the rapid progress of education, grave treatises could never penetrate, that it may, beyond all question, be used as a most efficacious medium for the conveyance of useful instruction. The more pleasant and agreeable the medium, of course the better chance the information it contains has of being universally inculcated.

The most trivial occurrences of everyday life, if agreeably narrated, may be made to have their moral uses, and to convey sound, practical wisdom.²⁸

Similarly, a Fraser's reviewer commented:

[The novel, if it would discharge its proper functions and take the place in literature which appears to be marked out for it, must become the fearless though unformal censor of the age, and hold society in severe check by mercilessly exposing the errors, weaknesses, absurdities, excesses, and even crimes, which disfigure and disturb it.²⁹

However, the critics also believed that too many contemporary novels were seriously overburdened with elements which either had no place in fiction, or if they were legitimate didactic elements, like those mentioned by the reviewers above, they were over-emphasized. One critic commented: "We are too didactic.

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²⁷ "The Tower of London," Fraser's, XXIII, February, 1841, 169.
²⁹ "Recent Novels," Fraser's, XXXVIII, July, 1848, 33.
Thinking too much of the moral and too little of the story through which it is enforced, we suffer the end to overwhelm the means." This idea is emphasized and developed by a Dublin University Magazine reviewer who wrote:

Stories which have for their professed aim and object the inculcation of what is called a moral lesson, are simply a bore—a literary nuisance, to be abated. The recurrence of an indisputable truth at certain pauses of the narrative, the sedulous enforcement of it by every situation and incident, are anomalies never to be met with in real life, and, therefore, out of place in fiction. Not that we would be understood to object to the inculcation of such truths in their proper place; they should, however, wear an air of vraisemblance, and be, like the moral lessons of life, manifold and complex—hinted at, but not forced on the attention; left to be gathered by the reader, rather than forced on his notice at every page.

Thus, it was the abuse of the right and duty of the novelist to teach which brought adverse criticism. Teach he should and must, but the instruction was to be presented more naturally, pleasantly, and less overtly. What the critics wanted was not a moral with a story attached, but rather, a story with a moral skilfully attached.

There was a distinction made concerning the type of matter to be taught in the novels. As has already been indicated, the inculcation of some moral lesson, a guide to living, was permissible, indeed advisable. However, the practice of presenting philosophical, political, or religious discussions in the form of fiction generally found critical disapproval. Most reviewers were annoyed by the difficulties which faced them as reviewers of fiction because of the development of the novel into an instrument of universal instruction. As one critic commented:

To grapple with the novels of the present day requires a competent knowledge of the French and German languages, an extensive acquain-

30 "English Novels," Fraser's, XLIV, October, 1851, 380.
31 "Novels of the Season," DUM, XLIII, June, 1854, 727.
tance with the classics, the study of theology and ethics, political and social science, and a general smattering of chemistry, medicine, geology, botany, and natural history.\textsuperscript{32}

The inclusion of such sundry information in a work of fiction was recognized as mere padding and as an abuse of the novel as a literary form. The novels of such politician-novelists as Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli were often attacked for this reason. For example, Bulwer Lytton's \textit{Ernest Maltravers} was criticized because of the variety of episodical harangues introduced. However clever and pregnant these may be, they are in themselves out of place, and made yet the more so, by many of them relating to subjects of momentary interest. The remarks on politics and literature will, in five years, become as dead as the fashions of the month, so learnedly discussed in the first edition of 'Pelham' and which have since judiciously been suppressed.\textsuperscript{33}

The philosophical passages in his \textit{Pelham} were likewise attacked as "pure talk."

One reviewer, in commenting on that novel, made this suggestion to other novelists:

\begin{quote}
\textit{[P]rint the philosophical conversation, the moral essay, oh trusty historian! in an appendix, and merit the universal applause alike of those who read them, and of those who read them not.}\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Disraeli's \textit{Sybil}, another novel in which the extra-narrative elements were preponderant, was also criticized for a similar reason. In this work

\begin{quote}
[\textit{o}ne episodical scene after another distracts attention from the fortunes and misfortunes of hero and heroine; sometimes half a dozen pages of parliamentary history are dragged in, light or lumbering as may be—but as little suitable to a tale of life and manners, as a treatise on the Electrical Telegraph, or a discussion on the Atmospheric Railway system.}\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

To many critics, the presentation of detailed, realistic pictures by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} "Novels of the Day," \textit{Fraser's}, LXII, August, 1860, 205.
\item \textsuperscript{33} "Ernest Maltravers," \textit{Athanaeum}, March 21, 1838, 216.
\item \textsuperscript{34} "Bulwer," \textit{Blackwood's}, LXXVII, February, 1855, 225.
\item \textsuperscript{35} "Sybil," \textit{Athanaeum}, May 17, 1845, 477.
\end{itemize}
Dickens, George Eliot, and other realists was no more acceptable than the extra-narrative elements of the political and social novelists; they felt that both were merely methods of padding a novel to the desired length. A Fraser's critic, in commenting on realistic detail in novels, wrote that "in the separate monthly essays this was no harm,—on the contrary, it was of positive good to the main object, viz. the sale; but when we find them collected, they do not improve the sequence of the story, or advance the fame of the writer." The critics objected to this aspect of realism because the practice tended to render the imagination of the readers useless, often making them indolent; and it failed as art because of its lack of selectivity. One critic felt that Jane Austen's realism went far enough, but he believed that even her finest touches would, doubtless, seem coarse and conventional to the microscopic gravers of our own day. We are wandering further and further from that happy mean, which finds in art the purest expression of nature. Scouting all past rules and standards, with no eye for judging distance, no ear for general harmony, not much feeling for grand forms and large prospects, we cram our wallets with the strangest medley of weeds and wild flowers, only to offer them just as they are, unpicked and unassorted, to the gaze and custom of admiring bystanders.

The strong objections to realism on moral grounds will be considered in the next section of the chapter which deals with the moral standard of novel criticism.

A number of the implications of the link between the novel and morality have already been indicated in the presentation of the critical views in regard to the content of the novel. As was indicated, the discussion of the place of moral instruction in fiction was, in effect, a discussion of degree and method rather than of principle, since all agreed that novels should pos-

36 "Charles Dickens and His Works," Fraser's, XXI, April, 1840, 400.
ness substantial moral content. Many critics judged novels chiefly or even solely on the degree to which the stories fulfilled this accepted dictum. However, moral criticism went beyond the question of judging the quality of the moral lesson presented. It affected the criticism of all phases of novel writing: the characterization, the choice of incident, and even the form in which the novel appeared. Because of the strong moral consciousness of the Victorians, this second standard of novel criticism was a leading force in the discussion of novels in the periodical reviews and articles.

One group of moral critics were well pleased with the English novel as a whole because they believed that the English novelists exercised judicious restraint in choosing subjects for their works. After being thoroughly shocked by the French works of fiction, these critics smugly compared the foreign works with those of their own writers and found the latter to be pure and moral, the former, vulgarly indecent. They claimed that the English novelists wrote stories which might safely be read before the family, and which female listeners might hear without blushing in shame. Their novels were permeated with an "honest purpose and healthful tone," and they did not "wound Delicacy

38 A number of critics found fault with the installment method of publication on moral grounds. For example, a reviewer in the North British Review, a quarterly which placed great emphasis on moral issues, took a very dim view of novels and the serial method. He wrote: "The monthly number comes in so willingly, with methodical punctuality, and with so moderate an amount at a time that novel-reading becomes a sort of stated occupation...Useful as a certain amount of novel reading may be, this is not the right way to indulge in it. It is not a mere healthy recreation like a match at cricket, a lively conversation or a game at backgammon. It throws us into a state of unreal excitement, a trance, or dream, which we should be allowed to dream out, and then be sent back to the atmosphere of reality again, cured by our brief surfeit of the desire to indulge again soon in the same delirium of feverish interest.

"It is plain, also, that the form of publication must tend greatly to increase any pernicious influence....[5] or the characters and incidents are kept long before the mind."—*Writings of Charles Dickens,* North British Review, Edinburgh, III, May, 1845, 85-86.
nor shock Reverence." Fortunately, "the scissors of Bowdler" were not necessary in England. 39 The high position granted moral considerations in the judgment of novels by certain critics may be noted in the remarks of the following reviewers. A Dublin University Magazine reviewer commented in 1850:

In whatever other qualities the novels of the present day may be wanting, they have nearly all one common merit, which must always go far to compensate for any mere literary deficiency, and that consists in a sound and wholesome tone of moral feeling, and a praiseworthy retraction of much of that levity and frivolity which a few years ago was the prevailing characteristic of works of fiction.40

Writing in 1873, a reviewer of Middlemarch commented in the Edinburgh Review:

In 'Middlemarch' another volume is added to the noble series of British works of fiction, which is at once acceptable to 'girls and men,' and which is so peculiarly our own....Without any prudish condemnation of the great masters of invention and style that France has possessed of late years, and with it any exaggerated censure of their imitators among ourselves, we may observe with satisfaction that our best writers—especially among the women—have so trained and limited their fancy and wit, that they shock no susceptibilities, and do not affront even where they fail to please.41

Dickens was a favorite of this group of moral critics since they believed that his novels were free of all immoral elements. A Fraser's critic wrote that "[h]e has not lent his pen to any thing that can give countenance to vice or degradation."42 Another summed up his merits in the statement that he "never exceeded the boundaries of moral propriety; so that all, the young, the old, the virgin, the youth, the high, the low, might shake with innocent laughter."43

Not all critics were as pleased with Dickens or with the English no-

39 "Thackeray and Pendennis," Fraser's, XLIII, January, 1851, 76.
40 "Recent Novels," DUM, XXXV, May, 1850, 647.
41 "Middlemarch," ER, CXXXVII, January, 1873, 263.
42 "Charles Dickens and His Works," Fraser's, XXI, April, 1840, 400.
43 "Dickens's American Notes for General Circulation," Blackwood's, LII, December, 1842, 784.
ovel in general. The sterner moralists, and they were far more numerous, found
the English to be far from guiltless, although they certainly agreed that the
French novels were far more vicious, in fact the "cuisine à la diable."

This adverse moral criticism was aimed at two of the literary trends of the
period, "sensationalism" and "realism."

The English "sensational" or "sensation" novel which flourished dur-
ing the Victorian period had its roots in the eighteenth century novel of
terror, since the same basic material, crime and violence, were merely ad-
ted to the new conditions and to the new reading public. Published in the po-
popular cheap periodicals, this "romance of the populace" became one of the
outstanding phenomena of Victorian literature. However, the terms "sensational"
or "sensation," as applied to the novels by contemporary critics were not re-
served specifically to such novels of villainy as Dickens's Oliver Twist or
Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard, but were used likewise to refer to works such as
Mrs. Wood's East Lynne and Charlotte Bronté's Jane Eyre; novels in which the
element of love was very prominent; novels of "passionate excitement and warmth
of description, lax morality and startling incident."

Critics were virtually unanimous in their condemnation of the sensa-
tional novel, per se. They attributed its great success to the media of mass
distribution of fiction: the periodicals, circulating libraries, and the rail-
way bookstalls; and also to the state of English society. For example, in an
article published on the occasion of the republication of Ainsworth's Jack
Sheppard, an Athenaeum critic wrote a social and moral criticism of the work

44 "Thackeray and Pendennis," Fraser's, XLIII, January, 1851, 76.
45 Phillips, Dickens, Reade, and Collins, 38.
46 "Our Spring Crop of Novels," DUM, XXXIII, June, 1849, 677.
and discussed the factors in society which produced novels of its type. The critic did not blame Ainsworth for writing the book because "it is not his fault that he has fallen upon evil days, and that, like other tradesmen, he must subordinate his own tastes to those of his customers." Jack Sheppard was just another bad book "got up for a bad public." He believed that the work enjoyed such popularity because the readers who craved the unnatural excitement which it provided were "too prudish to relish humor, and too blase to endure true pathos." Thus, these critics took a view which was antipodal to that of the commentators who felt that the "pure" English novel was a reflection of a reverent, refined, and practically perfect populace. The one consolation the stern moralists had after viewing the entire situation was their belief that the "sensational" novels were, of their very nature, ephemeral works. A Blackwood's critic asked:

Where will the novels portraying manners in the lowest walks of life be ten years hence?...have these productions come up to the true standard of novel-writing? Are they fitted to elevate and purify the minds of their readers? Will the persons who peruse, and are amused, perhaps fascinated, by them, become more noble, more exalted, more spiritual beings, than they were before?  

However, their alleged ephemerality did not silence the moral critics; for although they believed that the novels would surely be forgotten in the future, the critics felt a responsibility to condemn them at every opportunity in the present.

Both the characters and incidents presented were judged to be wicked and unworthy of a place in the pages of a novel. Dickens was said by some to lack the highest moral tendency because the company introduced in his works

47 "Jack Sheppard," Athanaeum, October 26, 1839, 803.
48 "The Historical Romance," Blackwood's, LVIII, September, 1845, 342.
was not by any means good company. Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White* was found
to be faulty because the villain, Fosco, was an interesting character who was
treated sympathetically. One reviewer commented:

He is intended to be an impersonation of evil, a representative of
every diabolical wife; but Fosco is not detestable; on the contra-
ry, he is more interesting, and seizes on our sympathies more warmly
than any other character in the book.

This in the interests of art, it is necessary to protest against.49

Similarly Mrs. Wood was criticized for centering her story, *East Lynne*, on
a "Magdalen," a woman who permitted herself to be seduced from her husband;50
and Charlotte Brontë was accused of committing the "highest moral offence a
novel writer can commit, that of making an unworthy character interesting in
the eyes of the reader."51

That last comment, aimed at the characterization of Rochester in *Jane
Eyre*, sets the tone for an outline of the reception of that important novel,
for any discussion of the moral criticism of the novel would be incomplete
without an examination of the critical comments which that novel received. Just
as the novels of Ainsworth and others served as examples for critics of "sen-
sationalism" earlier in the period, *Jane Eyre* served this same purpose after
its appearance in 1847.

Although the reception of the novel in six of the seven periodicals
which reviewed it52 was generally favorable, the strong dissenting vote which
appeared in the *Quarterly Review* served as the basis for many unfavorable com-
ments about the book which appeared later, and inspired the great debate which

50 Ibid., 567.
51 "Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre," *QR*, LXXXIV, December, 1848, 166.
52 The *Saturday Review* did not begin publication until 1855.
was to continue for many years afterward. The ideas expressed in this adverse review written by Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake were re-echoed again and again, and the history of the English novel came to be regarded by many as the period before Jane Eyre and the period after Jane Eyre. Lady Eastlake's review is an excellent example of the almost blind moral criticism of the novel which frequently appeared in the periodicals.

After admitting that the novel possessed remarkable power, Lady Eastlake went on to condemn it because it was written in "horrid taste," Rochester was coarse and brutal, and as we have seen, had no place in the story to begin with; and Jane offended the reader with her "pedantry, stupidity, or vulgarity"; 53 in fact, rudeness and vulgarity were pointed out as the outstanding qualities of the book. The reviewer was especially shocked because Rochester pours into Jane's ears disgraceful tales of his past life, connected with the birth of little Adele, which any man with common respect for a woman, and that a mere girl of eighteen, would have spared her; but which eighteen in this case listens to as if nothing new, and certainly nothing distasteful. 54

In 1855, a Blackwood's critic assigned the role of revolutionary novelist to the book. He wrote that up to its appearance we professed an orthodox system of novel-making. Our lovers were humble and devoted—our ladies were beautiful...when suddenly there stole upon the scene, without either flourish of trumpets or public proclamation, a little fierce incendiary, doomed to turn the world of fancy upside down. 55

The critic concluded that "perhaps no other writer of her time has impressed her mark so clearly on contemporary literature, or drawn so many followers in-

53 "Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre," OR, LXXIV, 163, 166.
54 Ibid., 166.
55 "Modern Novelists—Great and Small," Blackwood's, LXXVII, May, 1855.
In 1867, a reviewer again considered the influence of the book and listed the evil results of its power over contemporary literature. He wrote:

Our novels were family reading; and the result has been a sense of freedom, an absence of all suggestion of evil, in the superficial studies of ordinary society, which it is impossible to estimate....

For there can be no doubt that a singular change has passed upon our light literature. It is not that its power has failed or its popularity diminished...it is because a new impulse has been given and new current set in the flood of contemporary story-telling. We will not ask whence or from whom the influence is derived. It has been brought into being by society. The change perhaps began at the time when Jane Eyre made what advanced critics call her "protest" against the conventionalities in which the world clothes itself. We have had many "protests" since that time, but it is to be doubted how far they have been to our advantage.57

The key phrase in both the praise and the censure of Jane Eyre was the term "reality." Those who praised the novel emphasized Charlotte Brontë's sketches of Jane's childhood; those who censured stressed the later realistic sections. All agreed that the book was realistic; the disagreement resulted from divergent views regarding the advisability of revealing certain aspects of life. The veil which shrouded these dubious events was partially lifted by Charlotte Brontë, and the rudeness and vulgarity which Lady Eastlake found in the book were judged to be the unfortunate results. Here we can best see the connection between the terms "sensational" and "realistic," since, as used by Victorian critics, the terms were often synonymous. The governing fault of realists as Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and others was that they saw too much and probed too deeply; in other words, many critics believed that the novelists should have been concerned with the everyday occurrences of life.

Love, as treated by the two lady novelists, was considered very shock-

56 Ibid., 568.

57 "Novels," Blackwood's, CII, September, 1867, 257-258.
Our error Bell and George Rirot, and we may add George Sand, all like to dwell on love as a strange overmastering force which, through the senses, captivates and enthralls the soul. They linger on the description of the physical sensations that accompany the meeting of hearts in love... There are very few men who would not shrink from putting into words what they might imagine to be the physical effects of love in a woman. Perhaps we may go further, and say, that the whole delineation of passionate love, as painted by modern female novelists, is open to very serious criticism. 58

Likewise, all forms of unpleasant events and serious, disturbing, and unsolvable problems were to be avoided by the novelists. Mill on the Floss was criticized by one reviewer because there was "too much that is painful in it... There is something in the world and in the quiet walks of English lower life besides fierce mental struggles and wild love." The reviewer felt that serious moral problems should not be handled in fiction, for,

what does it all come to except that human life is inexplicable... Fiction has, in such matters, the great defect that it encourages both the writer and the reader to treat the most solemn problems of human life as things that are to be started, discussed and laid aside at pleasure... The subjects started are, therefore, always too large for the manner in which they are handled. 59

Mrs. Gaskell was criticized for this same reason by an Athenaeum reviewer of her novel, North and South. He commented that she dealt with "difficulties of morals needlessly, and too fearlessly, because as we have again and again said, the riddle propounded cannot be solved in fiction." 60 Earlier in the period, a Westminster Review critic of Oliver Twist advised Dickens to refrain from presenting the details of misery because the practice "positively pains" the reader. 61 One of the factors in one reviewer's praise of Maria Edgeworth in

58 "Mill on the Floss," SR, IX, April 14, 1860, h70-h71.
59 Ibid.
60 "North and South," Athenaeum, April 7, 1855, h03.
1816 was her taste of avoiding "all the more agitating subjects which stir deeper feelings than are consistent with the character of romances of domestic life." A Blackwood's critic writing in 1867 viewed the whole situation and was quite satisfied because he found that there were other kinds of literature in which darker problems of life could be discussed, and that "with tolerably unanimous consent, English writers have agreed to leave those subjects in their fit place."

This conservativism regarding the choice of subject prevented many critics from giving their whole-hearted support to novelists whose works presented some new or deeper view of life; hence, the frequently unfair estimates of Thackeray, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë. The pictures these novelists presented were considered to be too painful and disturbing; they left the reader and his spokesman, the reviewer, with an uncomfortable feeling. Mr. Buckley in writing of the Victorian concept of art, states that successful ornament was expected not only to attain the appearance of actuality, but also to suggest that the illusion was merely illusion. The picture, realistic as it might be, was to remain recognizable as a picture, heavily matted and adorned in an embellished frame. So too, the novelist was expected to keep the reader aware of the fact that what he was reading was real life in a story, not real life itself. George Eliot, Thackeray, and Charlotte Brontë had violated this concept; they removed the frame from the picture and made their stories too real for comfort. As a result, in the judgment of some critics, their works

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63 "Novels," Blackwood's, CII, September, 1867, 257.
were considered at fault morally.

The majority of the periodical critics followed this traditional line of moral criticism which carefully selected those aspects of life which were suitable for presentation in the pages of fiction. There were, however, a few voices crying out in protest, although most often very feebly. These critics wanted to provide the novelist with a greater freedom. They were in no sense radical, since all of their comments were within the framework of the accepted and revered code of behavior of the period. Nevertheless, they did represent a reaction, however weak and ineffectual it may have been. The following are some of the comments of this small group of "advanced" critics.

As would be expected, the more liberal periodicals took the leadership in this regard. In 1851, a Fraser's critic, commenting on English and French novels, ironically presented his acceptance of conventional morality while longing for a more lively novel. He wrote:

Whatever sins against taste or morality may be chargeable upon French novels, it cannot be denied that they possess in a high degree the power of fascinating the attention...they are never dull ...We are by no means setting up this lively quality as an adequate compensation for the want of a strong, healthy, vital purpose; and we are still less disposed to admit it as an atonement for the depravities by which those clever stories are stained through and through. If we are to make a choice between prosy decent books, and vicious books that are written with sprightliness and skill, we are, of course, bound to prefer the former. There is no room or excuse for hesitation. But we cannot help regretting, at the same time, that our English novelists, who, for the most part, write unexceptionable morality, should not be able to make it a little more amusing.

In 1856, again in Fraser's, a critic commented on the dreary portrayal of love in English novels. He did not recommend the freedom of the French novelists, but believed that there is sufficient interest in the vicissitudes and disturbing influences of the passion itself to fascinate attention, without being

65 "English Novels," Fraser's, XLIV, October, 1851, 375.
obliged to resort to depravities of the imagination and violations of the Decalogue.

Love is not an ordinary transaction to those who are engaged in it; and the business of the novelist should be to seize its emotions with a corresponding freshness of spirit, and to make his narrative throb with the expectations and fears, the misgivings and hopes, and the multitudinous throng of sensations which are incidental to the reality. 66

In 1857, Fraser's defended Jane Eyre against the attacks which the book received and again presented its objections to the contemporary novels and to the standards of criticism. Jane Eyre was praised because:

it speaks freely of many questionable matters on which our sanctimonious society closes its eyes or passes by on the other side; and it exhibits a freedom and latitude in discussing difficult questions which have struck many pious souls with consternation. Wiser critics there are, however, who may judge more leniently. They may hold that rudeness, indelicacy, masculine directness, are words that have been somewhat loosely applied to describe a fine and peculiar insight into the heart of man. They may even go to the length of inquiring, as we do—Why should not holy hypocrisy be unmasked and scarified: Why should not the struggle between virtue and vice be chronicled: Why should it not be said—She was tempted, and she overcame; nay, even—She was tempted, and she fell? 67

In 1857, the frequently prudish Saturday Review in its notice of Madame Bovary contained these remarks:

It is true in one sense, no doubt, that our light literature is pure enough. That is, it is written upon the principle that it is never to contain anything which a modest man might not, with satisfaction to himself, read aloud to a young lady. But surely, it is very questionable whether it is desirable that no novels should be written except those which are fit for young ladies to read. It is not so with any other branch of literature....Are works of imagination, then, such mere toys that they ought always to be calculated for girlish ignorance? 68

In 1864, the Westminster Review, another liberal publication, contained an article which commented more boldly than any of the others here pre-

66 "On the Treatment of Love in Novels," Fraser's, LIII, April, 1856, 44.
67 "Charlotte Bronte," Fraser's, LV, May, 1857, 578.
The world of fiction is still, for the most part, a nursery and bread-and-butter world. Terrible dangers no doubt are described as therein to be met, dragons, and ogres, and giants, and strangely wicked people, waiting to devour the good little boys and girls. But the familiar, homely, real, seductive dangers of grown-up human life are not to be told of there. 69

He defended Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot and said that since art and morals alike suffered from the "prudish conventionalities of our present English style, "he would gladly welcome rebellion merely for the sake of rebellion. He was grateful, however, that in spite of the prudishness of the majority of the novelists, there were some who had "the courage to approach some of the great problems of existence, and to show us human creatures as we know them around us, tried by the old passions, and quivering with the old pains." 70

The third critical standard utilized by the periodical critics, the socio-political standard, arose from a combination of two factors: first, the use of the novel by authors as a tool for the promulgation of their opinions on various political and social questions; and second, the political or social biases of the periodicals themselves. Novels such as Disraeli's trilogy of political novels: Coningsby, Sybil, and Tancred; Charles Reade's didactic novels such as It Is Never Too Late to Mend and Hard Cash; Charles Kingsley's Yeast and Alton Locke; and many of Dickens's novels were necessarily criticized by this third standard since the authors of these novels placed as much emphasis, and often more, on ideas and opinions as on the narrative elements.

No attempt will be made in the thesis to present a systematic survey of the various political and social views reflected in the novel criticism

69 "Novels with a Purpose," WR, LXXXII, July, 1864, 47-48.
70 Ibid., 49.
since there are, most frequently, irrelevant to a literary study of the novel and novel criticism. Generally speaking, the critical fate of novels specifically written with a political or social purpose depended upon the proximity of the ideas which it contained to those of the editorial policy of the reviewing periodicals. Except perhaps for the *Athanaeum*, all of the periodicals allowed some partisan bias to interfere with an objective judgment of political or social novels. The more strongly biased publications, such as the *Quarterly Review* and the *Saturday Review*, frequently allowed their views to interfere even with their criticism of novels not written specifically with a social purpose.

The two examples which follow indicate the quality of the *Quarterly Review*’s biased criticism of the novels. In the first, the reviewer gave strong expression to his disapproval of Dickens’s pictures of workhouse conditions. He wrote:

The abuses which he ridicules are not only exaggerated, but in nineteen cases out of twenty do not at all exist...The besetting sin of ‘white-waistcoated’ guardians is profusion, not parsimony; and this always must be the case where persons have to be charitable out of funds to which individually they are small contributors. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating; one week’s poorhouse pot-luck fattens a pauper brat up to such a sucking-pig nicety, that its own parent, like Saturn, longs to eat it up with more than kisses. 71

In Lady Eastlake’s review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly*, in addition to the moral condemnation, the book was also given a Tory trouncing. She found that the novel was “pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition” and gave as her reasons that

there is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God’s appointment—there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man, for which

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71 “*Oliver Twist,*” *QR*, LXIV, June, 1839, 94.
we can find no authority either in God's word or in God's providence—there is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which is at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil which the law and the pulpit, which all civilized society in fact has at the present day to contend with. We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and the thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written Jane Eyre.72

An outstanding example of Whig political criticism of the novel is the Edinburgh Review article in defense of the Whig government against the attacks of novelists Dickens and Reade.73

The survey of the critical reception of Dickens's novels in the following chapter will furnish further examples of criticism of novels by the socio-political standard.

72 "Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre," QR, LXXXIV, 173-174.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THREE LEADING NOVELISTS:

DICKENS, THACKERAY AND GEORGE ELIOT

The Quarterly Review printed three reviews of Dickens's works. The first was a thirty-three page review of his *Pickwick Papers* and the *Sketches by Boz* which appeared in October, 1837. The books were praised because there were no sketches of the manners or conversation of the aristocracy and very few political or personal allusions, and because the lower classes were introduced as the subjects of the stories. The reviewer advised Dickens to take his time, for he believed that he wrote too often and too rapidly and warned him that


1 "The *Pickwick Papers,*" *QR*, LIX, October, 1837, 500.
3 "*Oliver Twist,*" *QR*, LXIV, June, 1839, 90.

52
cause he felt that the reader should not be acquainted with "the haunts, deeds, languages, and characters of the very dregs of the community." He added:

It is a hazardous experiment to exhibit to the young these enormities, even on the Helot principle of inspiring disgust. This perversion of education deadens and extinguishes those pure feelings which form the best guides through life; this early initiation into an acquaintance with the deepest details of crime reverses the order of nature; it strips youth of its happy confiding, credulity—the imputation of no wrong, the heart pure as a pearl.

As was indicated in the last chapter, this reviewer did not believe that Dickens's pictures of the conditions in the workhouses were realistic, and he took advantage of this difference of opinion to present his own views on the conditions in these institutions.

In the review of the American Notes in March, 1843, the author was again praised for his ability to treat low life in a desirable manner. Although his sketches of low life were judged to be free of vulgarity, the vulgarity of his attempts at portraying the aristocracy, his sketches of lords and baronets, were woeful. The reviewer expressed a preference for Dickens's earliest work, "some short tales published under the absurd pseudonyme of Boz.

The longer works contained considerable truth but were practically all the same. The critic ventured to predict of this class of works both in England and in France that "an ephemeral popularity will be followed by early oblivion."

The Edinburgh Review criticized Dickens's novels three times. A favorable review which considered the Sketches, Pickwick, Oliver Twist, and Nicholas Nickleby, appeared in October, 1838. The reviewer declared Dickens a

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4 Ibid., 97.
5 Ibid.
6 See page 50.
7 "Dickens's American Notes," OR, LXXI, March, 1843, 504-505.
very original writer, well deserving of his popularity, and he believed that
his popularity would be lasting. One of the writer's most admirable virtues
was that his writings contained "no passage which ought to cause pain to the
most sensitive delicacy, if read aloud in female society." He was praised for
his "comprehensive spirit of humanity" which the critic considered
plain, practical, and manly. It is quite untainted with sentimentality. There is no mawkish wailing for ideal distresses—no morbid exaggeration of the evils incident to our lot—no disposition to excite
unavailing discontent, or to turn our attention from remediable grievances to those which do not admit a remedy.9
Likewise, he did not make vice interesting to the reader. The vicious characters were drawn as they are in reality, "no creatures blending with their
crimes the most incongruous and romantic virtues."9

In January, 1845, a short, favorable review of The Chimes appeared
in the Edinburgh. The reviewer wrote that he did not agree with Dickens's system of Political Economy but felt that his lesson of human brotherhood was a
far more important factor to be considered.10

In 1857, in an article which discussed the relationship of modern novelists to politics, Dickens's Little Dorrit was unfavorably reviewed. The author's qualifications for social criticism were questioned,11 and Little Dorrit
itself was found to be peopled with uninteresting characters and said to pos-
see an inferior plot.12

Dickens's works were reviewed four times in the Westminster Review.

8 "Dickens's Tales," ER, LXXVIII, October, 1838, 77.
9 Ibid., 78.
10 "The Chimes by Mr. Dickens," ER, LXXXI, January, 1845, 182.
12 Ibid., 126.
The first review appeared in July, 1837, and considered the Sketches, Pickwick, and Oliver Twist.\(^{13}\) The new author was advised not to be content with the success of Pickwick, but rather to aim at greater heights; "[t]he renown of Fielding and of Smollett is that to which he should aspire, and labour to emulate, and if possible, to surpass."\(^{14}\) The concern which Dickens manifested for the poor in \textit{Oliver Twist} was appreciated, but the reviewer found monotony in the pathetic portions of the work. He commented:

The accumulation of little details of misery and discomfort positively pains, and at last harasses the reader. We must advise the author in continuing the work\(^{15}\) to put in some touches not merely of comedy, which is by no means deficient, but of something descriptive of a little more comfort and happiness. The very accuracy of all these minute details of human wretchedness makes their effect more distressing and renders such a variation necessary to relieve our feelings.\(^{16}\)

In a review of the \textit{American Notes} in 1843, the Westminster reviewer stated that he disagreed with Dickens's views on social problems, and believed that the novelist's views were much too harsh, but he praised Dickens because he was not merely a novelist. Dickens wrote to amuse, but he likewise had a higher object.\(^{17}\)

Dickens was not reviewed again until October, 1864, on the occasion of the publication of the Library Edition of his works. A much lower estimate of the author was given in this review than in the two earlier considerations presented. The novelist was singled out as "the main instrument in the change

\(^{13}\) The review is attributed to Thackeray.—Nesbitt, \textit{Benthamite Reviewing}, 171.


\(^{15}\) The review was based on the installments which were appearing in \textit{Bentley's Miscellany}.


\(^{17}\) "Dickens's American Notes," \textit{WR}, XXXIX, February, 1843, 160.
which has perverted the novel from a work of art to a platform for discussion
and argument. 18 He did this without possessing sufficient knowledge of the
matters he took upon himself to discuss. 19 The critic concluded with this pro-
phesy:

We cannot think that he will live as an English classic. He deals
too much in accidental manifestations and too little in universal
principles. Before long his language will have passed away, and the
manners he depicts will only be found in a Dictionary of Antiquities.
And we do not at all anticipate that he will be rescued from obli-
vation either by his artistic powers or by his political sagacity. 20

Our Mutual Friend was given a brief review in the "Contemporary Lите-
trature" section of the Westminster in April, 1866. The reviewer objected to
the discussion of the Poor Law in the pages of the novel. He added that "[i]
Mr. Dickens has anything to say about the Poor Law, let him say it in a pam-
phlet, or go into Parliament." 21

Blackwood's reviewed Dickens's works five times during the period.
The first review appeared on the occasion of the publication of the American
Notes in 1842 and commented on the novels written up to the appearance of the
review. The reviewer commented that the author's novels published after Oliver
Twist were far inferior to the Sketches, Pickwick, and Oliver Twist. The cri-
ic gave these reasons for his decision:

Quantity, not quality, seemed subsequently...to become his object--
to win "golden opinions" of one sort, at least, from his innumerable
and enthusiastic admirers. He did not give his genius fair play; he
did not allow himself leisure either to contrive a complete plot,
(essential to the composition of a sterling and lasting novel,) to
conceive distinctly the incidents of which it was to be constructed,

19 Ibid., 433.
20 Ibid., 441.
21 "Contemporary Literature," WR, n.s. XLIX, April, 1866, 584.
or to sustain, consistently, the characters by whom it was to be worked out.

Another fault was that in the characterization in his later novels he did not present "one single character in superior life, with a tithe of the truth, force, and consistency, with which he has delineated those of the inferior life." 22

Dickens was mentioned unfavorably in a dialogue on the novel which appeared in October, 1848. One of the speakers commented that Dickens "wants agreeability: his satire is bitter, unnecessarily accumulated, and his choice of odious characters offers too frequently a disgusting picture of life." He is not "a good-natured writer, and his attempt to bring contempt on the higher classes is vulgar." And, said the critic, he is also "an uncomfortable writer: he puts the reader out of humour with the world." 23

In April, 1855, Blackwood's printed a review on the occasion of the appearance of Hard Times. The novel was judged to be a "lamentable non sequitur" because it was written in direct illustration of a preconceived idea. 24

David Copperfield was selected as "his most able and most perfectly satisfactory story work" because it manifested "much very careful 'writing.'" 25

In April, 1857, a chatty, informal article on Dickens as a novelist appeared and included a review of Little Dorrit. The novel was severely criticized for its aimlessness, lack of form, and for the inclusion of extra-narrative.

22 "Dickens's American Notes for General Circulation," Blackwood's, December, 1842, 784-785.
23 "A Few Words About Novels—A Dialogue. In a Letter to Eusebius," Blackwood's, LXIV, October, 1848, 468-469.
24 "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's, LXXVII, April, 1855, 453.
25 Ibid., 461-462.
tive elements. The critic commented:

As a humorist we prefer Dickens to all living men—as artist, moralist, politician, philosopher, and ultra-philanthropist, we prefer many living men, women, and children to Dickens.26

In May, 1862, in an article on the "sensation" novel in which Great Expectations was reviewed, the critic felt that Dickens had failed in the attempt to write an exciting novel. However, his earlier novels were praised.27

In April, 1871, in a critical article, an estimate of Dickens's merits as a novelist was presented. The critic chose David Copperfield as the work in which Dickens's genius culminated, and he divided the novels of the author into "the works of his heyday and prime, and the works of his decadence."28 One of the author's chief faults was said to be his want of spontaneous moral feeling. The critic wrote:

He shoots fiery darts at an abuse because his attention has been directed to it as something which ought to be assailed...he does not fall upon it with sharp disdain and loathing, as a thing ruinous and pernicious within.29

The critic believed that Dickens's fame and place in literature would diminish in the future, when he would be judged solely on his merits.30

Fraser's Magazine reviewed Dickens twice during the period. The first was a review of Pickwick, Oliver Twist, and Nicholas Nickleby, which appeared in April, 1840. The author was criticized for failing to delineate characters satisfactorily, for padding, and for writing too frequently. The reviewer was

26 "Remonstrance with Dickens," Blackwood's, LXXI, April, 1857, 495.
27 "Sensation Novels," Blackwood's, XCI, May, 1862, 576.
28 "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's, CIX, June, 1871, 692.
29 Ibid., 694.
30 Ibid.
disturbed because the characters were not furnished with "a single gentleman-like feeling." However, these faults were said to be better than balanced by the noble fact that Dickens "has not lent his pen to any thing that can give countenance to vice or degradation."31

Between this review and the next, Dickens was mentioned favorably several times. In 1845, in an article on Disraeli, the writer attributed Dickens's success, not to the interest of the stories, but to the fact that his aim was "uniformly to inculcate the Christian duty of universal good-will and consideration between man and man."32 In 1847, Dickens was again mentioned and praised by a reviewer who commented:

Barring his miserable Christmas twaddle, he must be acknowledged to have done that which only a man of real genius can accomplish. He has struck out a new path, and though it be rather a narrow one, still he treads it with a firm and buoyant step, and we follow him pleasantly.33

In the review of David Copperfield, the reviewer presented his reasons for selecting this work as Dickens's best novel.

Here is no sickly sentiment, no prolix description, and scarcely a trace of exaggerated passion. The author's taste has become gradually more easy, graceful, and natural. The principal groups are delineated as carefully as ever; but instead of the elaborate Dutch painting to which we had been accustomed in his backgrounds and accessories, we have now a single vigorous touch here and there, which is far more artistic and far more effective. His winds do not howl, nor his seas roar through whole chapters as formerly; he has become better acquainted with his readers and ventures to leave more to their imagination.34

31 "Charles Dickens and His Works," Fraser's, XXI, February, 1840, 400.
32 "Mr. Benjamin Disraeli, M.P.," Fraser's, XXXI, June, 1845, 729.
33 "Spring Novels," Fraser's, XXXV, May, 1847, 548-549.
34 "Charles Dickens and David Copperfield," Fraser's, XLII, December, 1850, 704.
Dickens was reviewed twice in the *Dublin University Magazine*. Lengthy excerpts and a summary made up the greater part of the review of *Oliver Twist*. The reviewer expressed a fear that Dickens wrote far too much, and as a consequence, his reputation would have no permanency. As a result of the installment method, *Oliver Twist* was judged to be a jumble of striking scenes...carelessly thrown together, and obviously framed with little regard to the mutual dependence or sequence, one upon the other. The plot, if it can be so called, is singularly unskilful, the incidents mostly improbable, and the catastrophe forced and unnatural in the highest degree.  

In 1848, a *Dublin University Magazine* critic mentioned Dickens in relationship to the Quarterly reviewer's remark that Dickens would probably fall like a stick after rising like a rocket. He says that this was a fallacious prediction because "[t]he career of this writer has been bright, brilliant, and beautiful, and seems likely to continue to its close with undiminished luster."  

However, in June, 1857, Dickens was mentioned unfavorably in a comparison with Thackeray. The writer remarked that while Thackeray was progressing, Dickens was retrogressing.

In December, 1861, *Great Expectations* received an eight page review and the reviewer found the work to be "a rather agreeable surprise." It had the merits of being "less wearisome, less weak in structure and less scarred with politics and pretension, less bedizened with finespun sentiment and ground-

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35 "Oliver Twist," *DUM*, XII, December, 1838, 699.
36 See page 52.
37 "Contemporary Writers—Mr. Thackeray," *DUM*, XXXII, October, 1848, 702.
39 "Mr. Dickens's Last Novel," *DUM*, LVIII, December, 1861, 685.
less sarcasm." Also there was "greater artistic unity and scarcity of surplus details."

In keeping with its policy of reviewing a large number of new works, The Atheneum reviewed the majority of the works of the three novelists. Dickens's Sketches received only a very brief notice, but the first nine numbers of Pickwick received a lengthy, excerpt-filled review. The praise of the work was somewhat qualified by the reviewer's emphasis on Dickens's indebtedness to other writers. He found the work to consist of "two pounds of Smollett, three ounces of Sterne, a handful of Hook, a dash of grammatical Pierce Egan—incidents at pleasure, served with an original sauce piquante."

In the review of the first number of Nicholas Nickleby, the similarity of that novel to Pickwick was pointed out.

Varying the names a little, changing the scenes and streets, altering the waistcoats, phizzes, and peculiarities of his men, women, and children, we have the Pickwick Papers refreshed, renovated, re-beavered, and, in short, made to look almost 'as good as new.'

Oliver Twist was reviewed without critical comment, and Master Humphrey's Clock was praised with qualification because of its structural faults. On the other hand, Barnaby Rudge was praised for its construction.

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40 Ibid., 686.
41 Ibid., 693.
42 "Our Library Table," Atheneum, February 20, 1836, 145.
43 "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club," Atheneum, December 3, 1836, 841.
45 "Oliver Twist," Atheneum, November 17, 1838, 824-825.
46 "Master Humphrey's Clock," Atheneum, November 7, 1840, 887-888.
47 "Barnaby Rudge," Atheneum, January 22, 1842, 77-79. This review
In the review of the first two numbers of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the reviewer suggested that Dickens utilize Mr. Pecksniff, the architect, for other than mere narrative purposes. The reviewer wrote:

But Mr. Dickens has opened to himself an opportunity of doing much more than amuse—of exposing the mal-practices which take place at architectural competitions, and in the managing committee, who have sometimes a way of managing such matters with which the public ought to be made acquainted; and as he seldom loses sight of a moral purpose, we earnestly hope that the opportunity will not be lost.48

The completed work was also reviewed,49 and the reviewer commented unfavorably on the "freakish" style, and "the lack of simplicity, the redundancies, all of which are tricks for the magazines, but have no place on the library shelf."50

The first number of *David Copperfield* was reviewed,51 followed by a review of the complete work. Although he made an unfavorable comment on the looseness of the plot, the work was given very high praise by the reviewer who wrote:


49 This was the first of many Dickens reviews written by the prolific reviewer, Henry Fothergill Chorley. He also reviewed the completed *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. The first seven numbers of *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* were also reviewed by him. He was the "most prolific general reviewer of books,—poetry, fiction, memoirs, drama, and almost everything else, for the Athanaeum for a period of more than thirty years." Although not the best or the most penetrating of the Athanaeum critics, "perhaps he mirrored more truly the average opinions of the majority of the readers of the journal during the first three or four decades than did almost any other critic associated with the periodical in the same period."—Marchand, 181-182, 192-193.

50 "The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit," Athanaeum, July 20, 1844, 666.

In no previous fiction has he shown so much gentleness of touch and delicacy of tone,—such abstinence from trick in what may be called the level part of the narrative,—so large an amount of refined and poetical yet simple knowledge of humanity.52

The first number of Bleak House was reviewed,53 and this was followed by a review of the complete work. The latter reviewer praised the work but objected to the caricature of living people.54

Hard Times was given a brief and comparatively unfavorable review because the reviewer objected to the "coarse, violent, and awkward" passages.55

In the review of the first number of Little Dorrit, the work was highly praised and held up as evidence of Dickens's "ever-ripening genius and ... ever-progressing art.56 This praise of the novel was made more emphatic in the review of the entire work.

During the year and half of its existence as a proceeding fact in English literature, we have often heard it was cloudy, diffuse, uninteresting—that it was false in Art, exaggerated as to character, and the like. We have not found these things true....and looking at the story as a contribution to literature—weighing it as we should weigh 'Tom Jones' or 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' we have found it neither false nor weak....We see in 'Little Dorrit' no decrease of power, no closing of eyes, no slackening of pulse. There is enough of genius in this book to have made a sensation for any other name.57

Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend both received unqualified praise.58 Commenting on Great Expectations, the reviewer wrote that although

52 "David Copperfield," Athanaeum, November 23, 1850, 1209.
53 "Bleak House, No. 1," Athanaeum, March 6, 1852, 270-271.
54 "Bleak House," Athanaeum, September 17, 1853, 1067-1088.
55 "Hard Times," Athanaeum, August 12, 1854, 992.
56 "Little Dorrit, No. 1," Athanaeum, December 1, 1855, 1393.
57 "Little Dorrit," Athanaeum, June 6, 1857, 722.
the story was very exciting

there is no feeling of shock or spasm, still less any impression of 'dropped stitches' but a sense that we have to do with a work of Art arranged from the first moment of conception with power, progress, and a minuteness consistent with the widest apparent freedom. 59

The Mystery of Edwin Drood was reviewed favorably twice in 1870. 60

In January, 1857, the first of a series of scathing attacks on Dickens and his novels appeared in the Saturday Review. Since that periodical commenced publication twenty years after the beginning of Dickens's career as a novelist, it had a backlog of criticism to present before considering his current novels.

The first article scornfully summarized Dickens's numerous attacks on institutions and stated that to people who think, to men of cultivation, he is "nothing more than any other public performer—enjoying an extravagantly high reputation, and rewarded for his labours, both in purse and in credit, at an extravagantly high rate." However, the majority were not of this privileged class, and to this vast group a man like Dickens was an influential teacher.

The production, among such readers, of false impressions of the system of which they form a part—especially if the falsehood tends to render them discontented with and disaffected to the institutions under which they live—cannot but be serious evil, and must often involve great moral delinquency....Looking, therefore, at the sphere of Mr. Dickens's influence, we are compelled to think of him seriously. He is not entitled to the protection of insignificance. 61

In the climax of the article, the writer questioned Dickens's qualifications for social criticism.

59 Ibid., "Great Expectations," 45.


61 "Mr. Dickens as a Politician," SR, III, January 3, 1857, 8.
Who is this man who is so much wiser than the rest of the world that he can pour contempt on all the institutions of his country? He is a man with a very active fancy, great powers of language, much perception of what is grotesque, and a most lachrymose and melodramatic turn of mind—and this is all. He is utterly destitute of any kind of solid acquirements. He has never played any part in any movement more significant than that of the fly—generally a gad-fly—on the wheel. Imprisonment for debt on mesne process was doomed, if not abolished, before he wrote Pickwick. The Court of Chancery was reformed before he published Bleak House. In his attacks on Parliament he certainly relied on his own experience, and was utterly and hopelessly wrong.

...And yet this man, who knows absolutely nothing of law or politics...has elaborated a kind of theory of politics.62

The Saturday Review continued its attacks with a review of Little Dorrit which was based on an identical theme. Dickens was said to be intruding as a social reformer with a mission, whereas his real mission was "to make the world grin, not recreate and rehabilitate society."63

In May, 1858, the target for the Saturday Review's periodic abuse of Dickens was his management of pathos. The critic doubted the permanence of the novelist's works and felt that he had no place at the side of men like Defoe and Fielding. He admitted, however, that the novelist's influence over contemporary literature was immense, and therefore, "his books must always be an extremely curious study on that account."64

The critical lashing was continued in the review of A Tale of Two Cities. After giving an account of the story, the reviewer wrote:

Such is the story, and it would perhaps be hard to imagine a clumsier or more disjointed framework for the display of the tawdry wares which form Mr. Dickens's stock-in-trade. The broken-backed way in which the story maulders along from 1775 to 1792 and back again to 1760 or thereabouts, is an excellent instance of the complete disregard for the rules of literary composition which have marked the whole of Mr. Dickens's career as an author. No portion of his popularity is due to

62 Ibid., 9.


64 "Mr. Dickens," SR, V, May 8, 1858, 475.
intellectual excellence. The higher pleasures which novels are capable of giving are those which are derived from the development of a skilfully constructed plot, or the careful and moderate delineation of character... The two main sources of his popularity are his power of working upon the feelings of the coarsest stimulants, and his power of setting common occurrences in a grotesque and unexpected light. 65

In January, 1861, a remarkable review appeared in the Saturday Review for the first time, that periodical had a kind word for Dickens. Although the praise of the Uncommercial Traveller was qualified, nevertheless it was a drastic change from the previous critical notices of the author. The reviewer commented that it was impossible to praise Mr. Dickens's books when they were bad; but "a good book from Mr. Dickens is far too great a gain not to be acknowledged." 66

In July, 1861, in the review of Great Expectations, Dickens's good fortune with the Saturday Review continued. The book was acclaimed as "new, original, powerful, and very entertaining," and was said to indicate a more profound study of character. 67

Prior to the appearance of Vanity Fair in 1847, Thackeray received very few critical notices. Although he had been writing for a period of about fifteen years, his publication of the writings serially in magazines and under many pseudonyms resulted in the scarcity of criticism of his early works.

Thackeray's novels were reviewed twice in the Quarterly. In 1848, Vanity Fair was reviewed together with the notorious attack on Jane Eyre. The book was praised highly, and this commendation is heightened when it is con-

65 "A Tale of Two Cities," SR, VIII, December 17, 1859, 742.
trasted with the violent reception given Charlotte Bronté's novel. The reviewer had only one objection and that was in reference to the reality of the story. The quality of realism was judged to be both the charm and the defect of the book. Lady Eastlake, the reviewer, commented:

We almost long for a little exaggeration and improbability to relieve us of that sense of dead truthfulness which weighs down our hearts, not for the Amelias and Georges of the story, but for poor kindred human nature. In one light this truthfulness is even an objection; with few exceptions the personages are too like our everyday selves and neighbours to draw any distinct moral from.

In a review of The Newcomes, Thackeray was again highly praised as an artist. The realism, the effective handling of pathos, and the moral content were all singled out for praise. The author wisely did not leave his moral to be inferred, but rather made it explicit, and consequently, "[i]f the bad are not made good by the lesson, the good will at least be made better." Although the writer was defended against the attacks on the cynicism in his works, the reviewer admitted that there had been an improvement. He commented:

The larger infusion of benevolence, honour, and disinterestedness into the story makes it pleasant to read, and gives, we think, a juster notion of the world.

Thackeray's novels were reviewed by the Edinburgh three times during the period. The first, a review of Vanity Fair which appeared when the novel was being issued serially, commented on that unfinished work and on several of the earlier works. Vanity Fair was very favorably received and praised for

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68 See page 43.

69 "Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre," QR, LXXXIV, 155-156.

70 "The Newcomes," QR, XCVII, September, 1855, 352.

71 Ibid., 353.

72 "After a few numbers of 'Vanity Fair' had appeared, it was suggested to Abraham Hayward that he should write about the novel in the Edinburgh
its "entire freedom from mannerism and affectation both in style and sentiment."

This was a result of the fact that Thackeray never exhausts, elaborates, or insists too much upon anything.... His effects are uniformly the effects of sound wholesome legitimate art; and we need hardly add that we are never harrowed up with physical horrors of the Eugene Sue school in his writings or that there are no melodramatic villains to be found in them. 73

In a lengthy, forty-seven page review which appeared in January, 1854, *Vanity Fair, Pendennis, Esmond,* and the *English Humourists* were reviewed. In this group of reviews which consisted chiefly of summaries of the works, *Vanity Fair* was singled out as "one of the most remarkable books of this age—a work which is as sure of immortality as ninety-nine hundredths of modern novels are sure of annihilation." 74

The *Virginians,* reviewed in October, 1859, was given only faint praise by the reviewer who believed that the novel was "at best an expenditure of strength in a tour de force." The style was praised, however. 75

Thackeray was given favorable reception by the *Westminster* on three occasions. 76 The critic in the earliest review felt that Thackeray appeared at an opportune time, when

Review; but, though willing to do so, he was so busy that he would not bind himself to write the paper: thereupon Mrs. Proctor undertook to mark passages that might be usefully quoted; and at last Hayward consented, basing the review upon the notes supplied to him."—Lewis Melville, *William Makepeace Thackeray, A Biography,* I, London, 1910, 238-239.

73 "Thackeray's Writings," *ER,* LXXXVII, January, 1848, 50.
75 "The Virginians," *ER,* CX, October, 1859, 441.
sham sentiment, sham morality, sham heroism, were everywhere rampant; and romance-writers every day wandering farther and farther from nature and truth. Their characters were either paragons of excellence, or monsters of iniquity—grotesque caricatures, or impossible contradictions; and the laws of nature, and the courses of heaven, were turned aside to enable the authors to round off their tales according to their own low standard of morality or ambition, and narrow conceptions of the working of God's providence.77

Thackeray was then defended against the attacks of critics who emphasized his alleged cynicism. However, the defender himself believed that Thackeray might have accomplished his object as well "by letting in a little more sunshine on his picture, and by lightening the shadows in some of his characters."78

In an obituary article in 1864, the critic commented that Thackeray's chances for immortality were excellent because "[p]owerful sketches must always live. A vigorous writer free from any sectarian bias, must have some claim to immortality."79

Thackeray's works were reviewed only once in Blackwood's. The review appeared in 1855 and consisted chiefly of a discussion of the characters in the novels.80

In 1871, in a Blackwood's article on Dickens, Thackeray was ranked higher than Dickens both as a humorist and as a satirist, "notwithstanding that the common verdict of the world in their day set down Thackeray as a cynic and sceptic, with no belief in virtue; and held up Dickens as a kind of apostle of human goodness."81

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78 Ibid., 374.
79 "Thackeray," WR, n.s. XXVI, 185.
80 "Mr. Thackeray and His Novels," Blackwood's, LXXVII, January, 1855, 85-96.
81 "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's, CIX, June, 1871, 695.
Thackeray was reviewed by Fraser's five times. The Irish Sketch Book was favorably reviewed in June, 1843, 82 and Vanity Fair in September, 1848. The writer of the latter review considered Thackeray's view of life to be excessively gloomy, but he admitted that there definitely was an important moral beneath the sneers and the cynicism. He said:

The defect is not in the moral of Vanity Fair, but in the artistical management of the subject. More light and air would have rendered it more agreeable and more healthy. The author's genius takes him off too much in the direction of satire. He has so quick an instinct for the ridiculous, that he finds it out even in the most pathetic passages. He cannot call up a tear without dashing it off with a sarcasm. 83

However, the style of the novel received high praise. It was judged to be free from over-refinement or elaboration; all was direct, palpable, and close. The touches exhibited the hand of a true artist. 84

Pendennis was criticized for its characterization and structure. The reviewer found that the author "at one time lingers and languishes, at another rushes on with feverish haste to reach the goal in time." 85

The reviewer of Esmond praised that work for its "plain, healthy English" style and for its freedom from "that morbid anatomy of sores and corruptions which is displayed with such consummate ability in Vanity Fair." As a consequence, the work was said to be "more hopeful, consolatory, and kindly...

Thinking and educated readers will discern in it an immense advance in literary

82 "Titmarsh's Travels in Ireland," Fraser's, XXVII, June, 1843, 678-686.
83 "Vanity Fair," Fraser's, XXXVIII, September, 1848, 321-322.
84 Ibid., 332.
85 "Wm. M. Thackeray and Arthur Pendennis, Esquires," Fraser's, XLIII, January, 1851, 86.
power over Mr. Thackeray's previous writings." 86

In 1864, in an article which appeared after his death, Thackeray was eulogized while Dickens received a thorough lashing. The critic commented:

It was one of Mr. Thackeray's best points that he never overrated himself or the party with which he was accidentally associated....Mr. Dickens expressed his regret, in the Cornhill Magazine, that Mr. Thackeray did not sufficiently appreciate the dignity of his calling. He understood it far better than his critics, for he knew that it consisted principally in minding his own business, and writing about matters which he understood. His memory has not to bear the disgrace of such ignorant and mischievous libels as the description of the Circumlocution Office, or the attack on the Court of Chancery in Bleak House ....he knew the limits of his province, and studiously kept within them. 87

Thackeray's works received three individual reviews from the Dublin University Magazine. The first, a favorable review of Vanity Fair, was centered on the discussion of the style of the novel. Thackeray was praised because

There is neither affectation nor mannerism to be found in his pages; and as a writer of the pure, good, honest Saxon school, he is, beyond all question, unrivalled; he is vigorous and at the same time agreeable—commonly terse, and always humorous; but there is no straining after effect, no attempt at fine writing. The details of his story are woven together with careless ease, and the incidents narrated in the most off-hand and pleasant manner possible. 88

In a review of Pendennis, Thackeray was again praised for his style and for the content of his novels. The critic found that

the author's reflections upon the various anomalies of our social system are generally sound, and exhibit a reach of thought more profound, and more calculated to excite our attention, than is even to be found in the writings of any of the elder novelist to whom he has occasionally been compared. 89

86 "New Novels," Fraser's, XLVI, December, 1852, 633.
87 "Mr. Thackeray," Fraser's, LXIX, April, 1864, 403.
88 "Contemporary Writers—Mr. Thackeray," DUM, XXXII, October, 1848, 447.
89 "Pendennis," DUM, XXXVIII, August, 1851, 205.
Esmond was given a short review in which the reviewer considered the novel to be "beyond all question, if we regard it merely as a work of art, of a higher order of composition than any of Mr. Thackeray’s previous per- formances."90

In 1859 and 1860, two articles on Thackeray’s writings appeared but they contained little significant criticism of the works.91

The Athenaeum reviewed Vanity Fair twice. The earlier review which considered the first seven numbers92 was followed by a review of the complete work. The author of the latter review93 praised the style of the writer and was very pleased because the "pleasant pages are nowhere distorted by rant," and noted the following as the novel’s other admirable qualities.

The author indulges in no sentimentalities—inflicts no fine writing on his readers. Trusting to the force of truth and humour, he is the quietest of contemporary writers,—a merit worth noting in a literary age which has a tendency to mistake spasm for force.... The writer is quite free from theatricality. No glare from the footlights is thrown upon human nature, exaggerating and distorting it. He is guiltless too—let us be thankful for such a boon in the sense here intended—of a "purpose." Unfettered by political or social theories, his views of men and classes are not cramped. The rich in his pages are not necessarily vicious—the poor not as a consequence of their poverty virtuous and high-minded.

The faults which the reviewer found were the lack of unity and proportion, and the contention that Thackeray made all the world a Vanity Fair with nothing good in it. This was judged to be "false and unwholesome teaching."94

90 "A Trio of Novels," DUM, XLI, January, 1853, 71.
92 "Vanity Fair, Nos. 1-7," Athenaeum, July 24, 1847, 785-786.
93 George H. Lewes—Marchand, The Athenaeum, 315.
94 "Vanity Fair," Athenaeum, August 12, 1848, 795.
The reviewer of Pendennis, while praising the style, which he believed to be antipodal to the "spasmodic and superb styles of narration," did not believe that it was an advance on Vanity Fair. He asked:

"Why must Mr. Thackeray be always 'going to the fair'?...His authorship seems in some danger of becoming a performance on one string: an execution of a long fantasia, with several variations, but all in the same key and all on the same theme of 'Humbug everywhere.'"

The Athenaeum reviews of Henry Esmond, The Newcomes, and The Adventures of Philip, were all centered on this criticism of the choice of theme. The reviewer of Esmond commented:

"Vanitas Vanitatum is still the text on which Mr. Thackeray everywhere moralizes....no fresh fount of thought is touched in 'Esmond'—no new characters are exhibited, no novel forms of life are introduced."

The Virginians received a favorable review.

The first review of Thackeray in the Saturday Review appeared in December, 1856, and was a criticism of Barry Lyndon on the occasion of its republication. The reviewer placed the work at the head of the list of Thackeray's novels because of its better form and shorter length.

In the review of The Virginians, Thackeray was again praised while Dickens was given another critical thumping. The critic said:

"We hope it may not be considered impertinent to say that one of the great leading features of Mr. Thackeray's books—and one of their..."

95 "The History of Pendennis," Athenaeum, December 7, 1850, 1273.
98 "The Virginians," Athenaeum, II, October 23, 1858, 515-516.
most honourable features—is that they are the writings of a thorough gentleman, and of a man of high and liberal education. This is not only high but it is rare praise. We do not allude to those constant denunciations and exposures of social meanness and vulgarity which fill, in our judgment, much too large a space in his works; for they suggest—like all very faithful delineations of vice—the remark that what was painted so clearly must have been studied sympathetically. We refer rather to the general tone of self-restraint, modesty, and honesty which pervades his books... There is no scene painting or death-hunting in his books....

The same temper of mind is even more strikingly displayed in the genuine modesty of all Mr. Thackeray's writings. They have not a single trace of that intolerable arrogance which too often distinguishes such works. The commonplace, ill bred, uneducated, literary gentlemen who take to writing novels almost always assume that they are not only the salt of the earth, but the natural rulers, guides, and lights of mankind.

The Adventures of Philip was briefly reviewed, but no significant comments were made.

George Eliot was reviewed twice in the Quarterly. In the earlier review which appeared in October, 1860, Adam Bede, Mill on the Floss, and Scenes of Clerical Life were considered. The reviewer had scarcely a single kind word for the authoress, and both moral and artistic faults were strongly emphasized.

The moral faults which the reviewer found in the works were founded on the contention that the authoress was coarse because she delighted in presenting "unpleasant subjects—in the representation of things which are repulsive, coarse, and degrading." Likewise, the reviewer believed that she forces "disagreeable people on us, and insists that we shall be interested in their story by the skill with which it is told." Hetty Sorrel of Adam Bede was considered to be the worst of this group of characters, and the reviewer

100 "The Virginians," SR, VIII, November, 19, 1859, 611.
102 "Eliot's Novels," OR, XCVII, September, 1855, 352.
103 Ibid., 476.
felt that is was unfortunate that "it is on this silly, heartless, and wicked little thing that the interest of the story is made to rest." The remarkable reality which resulted from portraying characters without concealing their faults was not worth the evil moral results. Thus, said the reviewer, in 'Adam Bede' we have all the circumstances of Hetty's seduction and the birth and murder of her illegitimate child; and in the 'Mill on the Floss' there are the almost indecent details of mere animal passion in the loves of Stephen and Maggie. If these are, as the writer's more thoroughgoing admirers would tell, the depths of human nature, we do not see what good can be expected from raking them up.

The reviewer also found numerous aesthetic faults. First, George Eliot's novels were judged to be excessively morbid. After listing examples of melancholy endings in the novels and short stories, the reviewer commented:

Surely this is an exaggerated representation of the proportion which sorrow bears to happiness in human life; and the fact that a popular writer has (whether consciously or not) brought every one of the five stories which she has published to a tragical end gives a very uncomfortable idea of the tone of our present literature.

Second, the reviewer objected to the realistic details, to the failure of the authoress to abridge what was superfluous and tiresome. He wrote:

If the morbid tone which we have already mentioned reminds us of a French school of novelists, her passion for photographing the minutest details of dullness reminds us painfully of those American ladies who contribute so largely to the literature of our railway-stalls, by flooding their boundless prairies of dingy papers with inexhaustable masses of blotchy type.

Third, the construction of the works was criticized; the plots were found to be slight, the narrative dragged painfully in parts, and melodramatic devices
were utilized. Fourth among the artistic faults was affectation as manifested in the description of scenery, in the "smartness in the headings of the chapters," and the needless intrusion of the writer's personality.

In the thirty-three page review of Middlemarch, Felix Holt was declared to be a failure because in that work, George Eliot, "under the promptings of her scientific interests...did very nearly lose her artistic perception and her whole capacity for unbiased observation and statement." The objections to the work were both aesthetic and moral since the critic found that there was no point of view from which the book could escape disapproval and condemnation. For example, he found that

[there was in the book, a quality of—shall we say?—coarseness, reminding one of, and in some respects reproducing in distortion, the more objectionable features of Charlotte Bronte's characters; there was an ill-controlled tendency to theorize concerning the animal basis of all the social and moral virtues.

The artistic fault which the critic found was that the story was used "too palpably and inconsistently, as a vehicle for certain opinions. The novel slid into a treatise." Although Middlemarch was declared to be "the most remarkable work of the ablest of living novelists," it too had defects. The first to be pointed out was "a certain want of enthusiasm in the writer...She does not write like the great names among her predecessors, for the sake of the story." What there was of a story had the effect of leaving the reader restless and distressed. "There has been no hero, there has been no romance, there has been

108 Ibid., 491.
109 Ibid., 491-492.
110 "Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life," QE, CXXXIV, April, 1873, 360.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 361.
no last chapter; the 'finale' repeats the sad note of the 'prelude.'\textsuperscript{113} The reviewer felt that the novel was permeated with profound despondency and concluded:

Truly it would be the most melancholy and forlorn historical situation (if actual and historical it were), that in which a reflective reader, rising from a study of George Eliot, might be inclined to place modern society, though all the while, he would hardly be able to make out to himself how far his hopeless mood had grown directly out of the words of his author or out of his own musings.

We repeat, and lay all possible stress upon our protest. It is not the moral nor is it the artistic purpose of a work of fiction, (or indeed of sound literature at all) to produce this state of mind and to invite such afterthoughts.\textsuperscript{114}

George Eliot's works were reviewed three times in the\textit{Edinburgh Review}. In 1859,\textit{Scenes of Clerical Life} and\textit{Adam Bede} received favorable notice. The reviewer found it difficult to single out one outstanding merit "where all is so excellent," but chose the quality of reality. He concluded that a book of more intense and absorbing interest had not refreshed the reading world for many years.\textsuperscript{115}

In a review chiefly consisting of a summary,\textit{Felix Holt} was praised by the\textit{Edinburgh}. However, one artistic flaw was pointed out.

Some of the episodes of 'Felix Holt,' after a laboured commencement, end in nothing; and the legal complication which forms the framework of the story is arbitrarily disregarded in the final solution.\textsuperscript{116}

\textit{Romola} was unfavorably mentioned in this review. George Eliot was said to have failed in the writing of a historical novel because the development of the characters was "provokingly overlaid by a profusion of irrelevant learning."\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 365.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} "Adam Bede,"\textit{ER}, CX, July, 1859, 223.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} "Felix Holt, the Radical,"\textit{ER}, CXXIV, October, 1866, 438.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 436.
\end{itemize}
Middlemarch was favorably reviewed in January, 1873. 118

Four of George Eliot's novels were given individual reviews in the Westminster Review. In the enthusiastic review of Adam Bede, the Dutch realism which many critics found distasteful was acclaimed for its artistic value. The reviewer liked the book so much that he believed it to be too short and felt that the author should not have been hampered by the three-volume tradition. 119

The criticism of Mill on the Floss centered about the structural defects of the work, such as its melodramatic conclusion. 120

Romola was given a short review in October, 1863, and hailed as George Eliot's greatest work; 121 and Felix Holt, reviewed in July, 1866, was praised for its realistic power and was said to stand "long before all other novels by contemporary writers." It was"marked by such poetry, such humour, such character painting as no one else but George Eliot can write." 122

George Eliot was reviewed four times in Blackwood's. Adam Bede was highly praised but the reviewer did not believe that everyone was likely to enjoy the work because

[It is quite possible that some of those who can devour with satisfaction the green trash of the railway stall, may lay by Adam Bede without much consciousness of having been in unusually good company. But the more thoughtful reader will feel at once that he has been reading a book which, for original power and truth, has rarely been equalled.] 123

118 "Middlemarch," ER, CXXXVII, January, 1873, 95-121.
119 "Adam Bede," WR, n.s. XV, April, 1859, 510.
120 "Mill on the Floss," WR, n.s. XVIII, July, 1860, 32.
121 "Romola," WR, n.s. XXIV, October, 1863, 341-352.
122 "Felix Holt-The Radical," WR, n.s. XXX, July, 1866, 207.
123 "Adam Bede," Blackwood's, LXXXV, April, 1859, 500-501.
Mill on the Floss, Felix Holt, and Middlemarch each received individual favorable reviews.  

Mill on the Floss was praised for its dramatic powers and for its descriptive passages. The reviewer emphasized the story rather than the ideas which the novel contained when he commented:

It may possibly disgust some critics to find that, in spite of our rapid progress towards the intellectual, the most striking novel of the day is but 'the old, old story.' Love is still the life of fiction.

In this same review, Thackeray was unfavorably compared with George Eliot.

Only in striving to right what seems wrong, does even satire in these hands wear its common bitterness. Alike in power, but how very different in its use, is George Eliot in this point, from another of our great novelists; he with the same keen perception, and knowledge of the universal disease, slashes remorselessly through the fair skin, and shows us, as with a fierce professional satisfaction, the lurking evil within; here we watch a hand not less steady or less skillful, which, if it cuts deeply through the cancerous growth, does so in confidence that there is wholesome life beneath.

In the review of Felix Holt, the critic found that one of the chief merits of the novel was the fact that nothing could be further from the sensational school. He also considered the diction to be exquisite, and although "in many passages the idea is carefully elaborated, there is hardly a word which could be spared, hardly a sentence which, carefully examined will not be found to contain some result of accurate thought."

Middlemarch was judged to be another masterpiece from the pen of a true artist who gave a new character to the English novel, and the critic be-


125 Ibid., "Mill on the Floss," 622.

126 Ibid., 623.

127 "Felix Holt, the Radical," Blackwood's, C, 106.
lieved that the mature judgment of persons who were not "mere novel readers" would surely recognize it as the most perfect of George Eliot's works.128

No reviews of George Eliot's novels appeared in Fraser's during this period.

Three of her novels were reviewed in the Dublin University Magazine. Adam Bede was noticed in a composite review and received a favorable reception with some qualifications. The critic summarized his attitude toward the work thus:

'Adam Bede' is an honest book, sound to the core and of the right grit, through and through, yet deficient in incident, not strong in construction, indulging occasionally in stock melodramatic reprieves and safe prison situations; but otherwise 'very admirably good,' and fresh as a cold but bracing March morning. The trifle too much dust standing for the trifle too much sermonism; and the slight soupçon of ritual, the slight chill of staginess.129

The critic of Mill on the Floss was not quite as pleased with Adam Bede. He found that both novels were founded on the same faulty principle; there was "quite as much of the old photographic pettiness, mingled with a larger vein of sententious satire, and set off by a certain amount of picturesque animalism."130 The principal complaint throughout the review was in regards to this "wearisome twaddle." The critic commented:

Here was matter for a good homely tale, in one volume, large or small. In the hands of Goldsmith, Fielding, or Miss Austen, such a conception would have been carried out gracefully and quietly, with no waste of words, no heaping-up of meaningless details. In the hands of George Eliot it begins at the beginning of all things, and stops short at the end of her third volume. Could a fourth have been added, probably Maggie and Tom would have been allowed to survive the flood. As it is, we have three volumes, one of which is wholly super-

128 "Middlemarch," Blackwood's, CXII, 745.
129 "New Novels," DUM, LIII, April, 1859, l85.
130 "Recent Popular Novels," DUM, LVII, February, 1861, 19h.
fluores, while the others might have been cut down one-half.\footnote{131}

The critic also decided that the novel was marred by serious moral faults, especially in the account of the love affair of Maggie Tulliver and Stephen Guest. He commented:

We are not for picking needless holes and do not care to cry out with prudish horror at the notion of an ardent lover rushing to kiss a handsome girl's beautiful round arm. It is not for showing up a conventional fallacy, however respectable, that George Eliot deserves our blame. But in her hatred of things conventional, she goes too often to the opposite extreme. The development of a gross passion much more akin to lust than love, takes up far too many pages of a work not especially written for students of modern French literature or the disciples of M. Comte... A little more reticence on a subject so perplexing to the largest minds would have saved the writer much waste of time, and satisfied the requirements of an art that has little to do with scientific problems or exceptional phases of life.\footnote{132}

\textit{Silas Marner} was treated just as severely in a composite review in April, 1862. The reviewer wrote that "a duller book it has seldom been our lot to read through," and said that he was reviewing the book merely because of his sense of fairness. He believed that a novelist with whose art principles he absolutely disagreed should be given fair treatment. He wrote that George Eliot was not lively at the best of times, but in this novel the very spirit of wilful dulness seems to have claimed her for its own. Her characters were never remarkable for pleasantness, but here they make themselves more than usually disagreeable... Her philosophy, seldom deep or original before, seems here to roam delighted over a dead level of the tritest commonplace.

The reviewer found the characters to be "mean, boorish, and heavy witted." He asked:

These dull clowns, who talk at least like thin dilutions of Mrs. Poyser, whose ideas and imagery seldom rise above the level of their native dunghills, whose highest faith in the powers above falls far

\footnote{131}{Ibid., 196.}

\footnote{132}{Ibid., 198-199.}
below that of a good Mohammedan or an educated Hindoo, are they the only kind of people one is like to meet with in the far-off countryside? 133

The Athanaeum reviewer found Adam Bede to be "full of quiet power, without exaggeration and without any strain after effect." Although there are a number of overly melodramatic incidents, "there is seldom a book in which there is so little to qualify our praise."134

Mill on the Floss was considered to be inferior to Adam Bede because it showed signs of haste.135

Silas Marner, Romola, and Felix Holt were all favorably reviewed.136 Felix Holt was praised for its construction; in the novel, "every incident is fitted together in its due proportion." However, the wise and noble thoughts made the beauty and the worth of the novel.137

Excessive artistry was the fault which the writer of the last of the six reviews of Middlemarch found in that novel.

If we have a fault to find with 'Middlemarch' it is that it is almost too laboured. Good are the points, and telling as is their humour, they yet show far too clearly the labor limae. They have been written and re-written, polished and re-polished, until they glitter almost painfully.... Paradoxical as it may seem to say so, 'Middlemarch' would probably have pleased most of us more than it does if it had been written in a greater hurry.138

133 "A Batch of Last Year's Novels," DUM, LIX, April, 1862, 399.
134 "Adam Bede," Athanaeum, I, February 26, 1859, 284.
135 "Mill on the Floss," Athanaeum, I, April 7, 1860, 468.
Consequently, he believed that the "general reading public will probably care
but little for it. It is indeed, almost inconceivable that it should interest
the young ladies for whose delectation the standard three volumes of the cir-
culating library are produced." 139

George Eliot's Scenes of Clerical Life was favorably reviewed by the
Saturday Review. The author was hailed as a new novelist "who to rare culture
adds rare faculty." 140

In reviewing Adam Bede the critic wrote that the book was
a novel that we can have no remorse in speaking well of. Persons who
only read one novel a year—and it is seldom that more than one real-
ly good novel is published in a year—may venture to make their se-
lection, and read Adam Bede.

The author of the book was said to possess great powers of observation, and
since she entered an original field, her achievement was that much greater.
The third volume was judged to be weak and superficial in comparison to the
earlier ones because of the excessive melodrama. There was another objection
which the reviewer had to this portion of the story. He said:

The author of Adam Bede has given in his adhesion to a very curious
practice that we consider most objectionable. It is that of dating
and discussing the several stages that precede the birth of a child.
We seem to be threatened with a literature of pregnancy.... Hetty's
feelings and changes are indicated with a punctual sequence that
makes the account of her misfortunes read like the rough notes of a
man-midwife's conversations with a bride. This is intolerable. Let
us copy the old masters of the art, who, if they gave us a baby,
gave it us all at once. A decent author and a decent public may sure-
ly take the premonitory symptoms for granted. 141

Moral censure made up the significant part of the review of the Mill
on the Floss. George Eliot, together with Charlotte Brontë and George Sand,

139 Ibid.
140 "A New Novelist," SR, V, May 29, 1858, 566.
was criticized for her manner of treating love. The reviewer called the reader's attention to the similarity of George Eliot and the authoress of Jane Eyre.

In her stern determination to paint what she conceives to be the truth, to soften nothing and not to exalt and elevate where she profoundly believes all to be poor and low, she shocks us with traits of character that are exceptional, however possible.... All this is entirely in the vein of Charlotte Brontë, and the Mill on the Floss shows that George Eliot has thought as keenly as the authoress of Jane Eyre on the peculiar difficulties and sorrows encountered by a girl of quick feeling and high aspirations under adverse outward circumstances.

The reviewer stated that he does not approve of the handling of such difficult moral problems in fiction, even when written by such gifted writers.144

Silas Marner was praised because in that novel George Eliot avoided the faults of the Mill on the Floss. This time there is nothing painful in the story, and "the misery of those who are miserable is not of a very intense kind."145

The Saturday Review critic of Romola believed that George Eliot had unfortunately written in an area which was unfamiliar to her, and although "she is not less than she has been," she has suffered. 146

The praise which Felix Holt received from the Saturday Review critic was based on artistic considerations. 147

These, then, are the highlights of the critical reception of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot in the eight periodicals during the period from 1836 to 1870. The tabular summaries and the interpretative analysis which follow are based on the data presented in this chapter. The tables summarize the

reception of individual novels of the authors as well as of their novels considered as a whole;\textsuperscript{146} the interpretative analysis traces the significant trends and patterns in the criticism of each author.

Dickens's early works were widely reviewed by all of the publications.\textsuperscript{147} This critical attention may be attributed to the fact that Dickens was a new author with an original talent and a large popular following; and also to the fact that his works appeared at a time when critical abuse was being heaped upon the novels of fashionable life which flourished in the 1820's and early 1830's. After these earlier reviews, the last of which appeared in 1839 with the publication of Nicholas Nickleby, the reviewing became less frequent and very irregular. In the case of the quarterlies this may be explained by the fact that their policy of selectivity did not warrant reviewing any novelist frequently. In fact, a single review in these publications, whether favorable or unfavorable, was an index of contemporary importance and an honor in itself. In the case of the other publications, the decrease in reviewing may be attributed to the following causes: the decline in novelty of a prolific novelist with a long writing career; the belief among most critics that Dickens's talents were diminishing, and hence that his later works did not merit reviews; and since his works appeared serially, they were

\textsuperscript{146} In the three tables, the following symbols are used: the qualitative symbol $+$ indicates a review which is basically favorable; $-$ indicates a review which is basically unfavorable; $+-$ indicates a review in which a substantial amount of both praise and censure are included; $M$ indicates a substantial mention of the novelist or of one of his novels rather than an entire review devoted to his works; brackets [ ] placed about a qualitative rating indicate a general article rather than a review of some individual work; the brace { } is used to join the ratings of several novels reviewed at one time. The dates accompanying the titles are those of the book publication of the novels.

\textsuperscript{147} The \textit{Saturday Review} did not begin publication until 1855.
not available for immediate critical attention. Consequently, the later criticism of Dickens developed into general discussion of his works. There are notable exceptions, however. Three novels, *Little Dorrit*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* were given an exceptional number of reviews. The nature and the causes of these flurries of individual notices will be discussed later.

The early reviews of Dickens's novels were predominantly favorable. His humor, pathos, and choice of a new segment of contemporary life were especially praised. The leading faults found in the later works were: his alleged inability to do more than sketch characters; monotony and repetition; hasty writing; poor construction; and, the most frequently mentioned complaint, the prominence of politics and social criticism in his fiction. Although no other periodical was as vehement as the *Saturday Review* in regard to this last fault, many of the other critics found it to be the most distressing flaw in Dickens's later novels. It was for this reason, more than for any other, that the reviews of *Little Dorrit* mark the lowest point in the criticism of Dickens's novels, for it received unfavorable mention in four of the publications, while only the loyal *Athanaeum* gave the book favorable mention. In addition to the objections to the extra-narrative elements, the critics emphasized the deficiencies of the form, plot, and characterization of the novel.

Apart from the earlier notices, *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861) were more widely and warmly received than any of the later novels; in fact, *Great Expectations* was even praised by the hostile *Saturday Review*. Both of these novels were hailed for their greater artistic qualities and for the exceptional care which the author took in their composition. Such phrases as "careful writing," "no exaggerated passion," "gentleness of touch," and "no sickly sentiment" were associated with the two novels. Likewise, the
absence of political issues was welcomed with great satisfaction.

As was previously indicated, prior to the appearance of _Vanity Fair_ in 1847, Thackeray received very few critical notices. However, after _Vanity Fair_, his major novels were given frequent, and, on the whole, favorable critical attention. His style drew unanimous praise; the disagreement arose in regard to the subjects of his novels. There were two schools of thought on this question. One group of critics believed that Thackeray was much too cynical; they considered his pictures of the world to be much darker than the facts warranted. His defenders believed that these charges of cynicism were grossly exaggerated or that his alleged cynical views were warranted by circumstances in the world.

No significant trends in the criticism of Thackeray's novels in individual periodicals appears except for the undeviating line of criticism followed by _The Athanaeum_ in regard to his view of life.

In the comparisons which were frequently drawn between Dickens and Thackeray, the latter most often emerged the victor. The caricatures, "spasmodic" style, and pamphleteering in Dickens's novels were contrasted with the artistic drawing of character, the calm and urbane style, and the freedom from espousal of any political or social cause which were considered to be the admirable qualities of Thackeray's novels.

The novels of George Eliot were consistently reviewed in all of the periodicals except _Fraser's Magazine_ which failed to review a single George Eliot novel during the period under consideration. _Adam Bede_ was reviewed by seven periodicals, _Mill on the Floss_ by six, and _Felix Holt_ also by six. No novels by Thackeray nor any novel of Dickens except _Oliver Twist_ received so many critical notices immediately after publication as did these works of George Eliot. The fact that most of her novels appeared first in book form, and
thus were available for immediate reviewing, explains in part the greater number of reviews her works received.

The reception of George Eliot was mixed. Her style, descriptive powers, characterization, humor, and artistry were all praised. On the other hand, her choice of incidents, treatment of serious moral problems, her alleged over-realism in details, and her intrusion into the narrative were the main targets for attack.

The most unfavorable comments on George Eliot's novels appeared in the Quarterly Review and the Dublin University Magazine. The Quarterly's objections were chiefly moral; the objections of the latter periodical were primarily artistic.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novels</th>
<th>Periodicals</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sketches by Boz 1836</td>
<td>QR  ER  WR  BL'WD  FRAS  DUM  ATH  SR</td>
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<td>Pickwick Papers 1837</td>
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<td>Oliver Twist 1838</td>
<td>+  −  +  +  +  +  −  N.C.?</td>
<td>5(+), 4(−)</td>
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<td>Nicholas Nickleby 1839</td>
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<td>Barnaby Rudge 1842</td>
<td>+  −</td>
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<td>Martin Chuzzlewit 1844</td>
<td>+  −</td>
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<td>The Chimes 1845</td>
<td>+  −</td>
<td>1(+) 1(−)</td>
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<td>Dombey and Son 1848</td>
<td>+  −</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Copperfield 1850</td>
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1 The Saturday Review first appeared in 1855.
2 Reviewed with no comment.
### Table I (continued)

**The Critical Reception of Dickens's Novels in Eight Leading British Periodicals**

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<th>Novels</th>
<th>Periodicals</th>
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<td></td>
<td>QR</td>
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<td>Bleak House</td>
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<td>Hard Times</td>
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<td>Little Dorrit</td>
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<td>A Tale of Two Cities</td>
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<td>Uncommercial Traveller</td>
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<td>Great Expectations</td>
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<td>Our Mutual Friend</td>
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<td>Edwin Drood</td>
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| Summary of reception in each periodical | 4(+) 4(+) 4(+) 3(+) 5(+) 3(+) 11(+) 2(+) 36(+) 2(-) 2(-) 3(-) 5(-) 3(-) 2(-) 7(-) 5(-) 25(-)
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<td>The Newcomes 1855</td>
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<td>1856</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<td>The Virginians 1859</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>[+]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adv. of Philip 1862</td>
<td>[+]</td>
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<td>1861</td>
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<td>1871</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary of reception in each periodical</td>
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1. The *Saturday Review* first appeared in 1855.
2. A review of *Barry Lyndon*.
### TABLE III

**THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELS IN EIGHT LEADING BRITISH PERIODICALS**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Summary</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>ER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenes of Clerical Life</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adam Bede</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mill on the Floss</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silas Marner</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romola</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felix Holt</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlemarch</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summary of reception</strong></td>
<td><strong>in each</strong></td>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1(+)</td>
<td>3(+)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4(-)</td>
<td>2(-)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. No reviews of George Eliot's novels appeared in Fraser's Magazine during this period.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to study and analyze the form and content of novel criticism in eight leading and representative British literary periodicals of the nineteenth century, during those years of abundant novel publication from 1836 to 1870. An effort has been made to single out those ideas and problems which were most frequently discussed by the novel critics, and thereby to outline the most significant aspects of the novel criticism during the period; to learn the contemporary status of the novel; and to gain a deeper insight into the spirit of the age.

The study of the methods and forms of novel criticism has shown that, in form, the reviews ranged from brief, insignificant notices, to very lengthy, extract-filled reviews, many of which contained significant and well-planned criticism. Three characteristics of the form and methods employed by critics were the anonymity of the reviews, their relative lengthiness, and the degree to which non-literary matter entered into the novel criticism. The extent of novel criticism in individual periodicals naturally varied with the format of the publications and with their frequency of appearance, as well as with the degree of importance they attached to the novel as a literary genre.

The novel was judged by three standards: the artistic, the moral, and the socio-political. The degree to which each standard was applied varied with the publications, but, in general, the first two norms were those predominantly utilized in the judgment of novels.

From the artistic point of view, criticism was centered on the defi-
ciencies of English novel form. The majority of critics expressed great dissatisfaction with the formal aspects of the novel, the looseness of structure and inadequate plotting, and they frequently used French novels as examples of what might be accomplished in the presentation of more skillfully written works. The three-volume tradition, the installment method of publication, and the inclusion of extra-narrative elements in fiction were repeatedly exposed by the critics throughout the period under consideration.

The findings disclosed in the survey of the reception of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot corroborate and emphasize the data presented above. First, Dickens’s early works, though hardly paragons of construction, were preferred by critics throughout the period primarily because of their relative freedom from extra-narrative elements. Second, the later works of Dickens which received notable critical attention acquired it because of the greater care exercised by the author in their construction. Third, in comparisons with Dickens, Thackery was judged to be the better novelist because he tended to the business of the novelist and did not assume the powers of a pamphleteer. Fourth, a large part of the praise of George Eliot was focused on the style and the careful planning reflected in her novels. Finally, the entire survey has clearly indicated the extent to which questions of form, plot, characterization, and style entered into the final judgment of the worth of a novel.

The critics who utilized the moral standard of criticism were of two classes. First was the group who smugly defended and praised the English novel for its virtue, while contrasting it with the evil French works of fiction. Their smugness extended still further since they believed that the purity of the English novel was merely a reflection of a virtuous English society. The second group of moral critics took the opposite view. To them, the English
novel, as well as English society, was far from pure and guiltless. Their attacks, often extremely prudish, were aimed at what they believed to be the excessive "realism" and "sensationalism" of the English novel. In their judgment, the English novelists were well on their way toward the devilish state of affairs which for so long had characterized the works of their French counterparts.

The socio-political standard was generally limited to the criticism of novels with a purpose, that is, works which were predominantly tracts for the dissemination of political or social ideas in palpable form. Strongly biased periodicals, such as the Saturday Review and the Quarterly Review, utilized this norm in passing judgment on novels which were not specifically written with a social or political purpose. Such evaluations, however, were rare in the other six periodicals.

The three standards of criticism, the nature of the content, the form, the methods, and the tone of the novel reviews all indicate that the novel was reviewed basically for three reasons. First, it was regarded as a legitimate form of art and one as deserving of thoughtful criticism as any other literary type. Second, the novel was reviewed from a sense of duty. There were critics who did not hold fiction in high regard, but felt that the reading public had a right to be informed of the state of all types of writing. Third, the novel was reviewed because of its social importance. Many reviewers felt that a form of writing which held such great power over the public could not be neglected, regardless of its literary deficiencies. Thus, it was considered as a social phenomenon, a sign of the times.

The faults of the novel critics are generally a reflection of the faults of the Age. Many reviewers were merely putting into words the thoughts
and feelings of the average middle-class reader regarding the novel; the reader found that the critics wrote exactly what he wanted him to say, and therefore, the reader thoroughly approved of the comments. By narrowly concentrating on moral questions, many critics were prevented from presenting any real literary consideration of the novel. When confronted with a choice between moral issues and artistic questions, few of these critics faltered in making the choice. On the contrary, they unhesitatingly selected any bad "moral" novel in preference to a good "immoral" novel; and since their concept of what was immoral included all shades of prudishness, many novels were unjustly slighted or condemned. A wholesome moral feeling was considered more than adequate to compensate for a mere literary deficiency; and novelists who did not affront or shock the reader were worthy of high praise even when they failed to please.

In the same manner, but to a lesser degree, the involvement of political and social bias in the judgment of novels presented another obstacle to the literary consideration of the novel. While concentrating on non-essential, secondary matters, the literary judgment of the novel was again neglected by the reviewers.

The extreme conservatism of many reviewers prevented their acceptance of innovations in the novel. Their arbitrary limitation of the novel to instructive and pleasurable topics while eliminating from the approved list all subjects which might disturb the reader and make him uncomfortable or provoke "afterthoughts" led to the often half-hearted and shallow reception of the novels of Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and Thackeray. Even Dickens, the dispenser of good cheer par excellence, did not escape censure on these grounds.

The lack of depth, the mediocrity, and the tone of boredom which characterized so many reviews was a result of the hasty reviewing which almost of
necessity accompanied the rapid writing of novels. There were relatively few novels which deserved more than a summary notice, since the content of the majority of them was quite obvious and not suitable for critical probing. Therefore, the fact that over two-thirds of the reviews were of the summary variety was a result of practicality rather than of neglect or sloth.

Finally, the fault of verbose, circuitous reviewing is another reflection of the spirit of an Age which was willing to accept long novels and the proportionately lengthy and cumbersome reviews which accompanied them. The editors, evidently, were content to give the public exactly what they wanted, and were likewise blessed with material which would help to fill the required number of pages of their bulky publications.

In spite of these faults, however, there were definite solid accomplishments which must not and cannot be overlooked.

As has already been adequately illustrated, moral and political considerations frequently obscured the artistic criticism of the novel. This must not be taken to mean that a literary evaluation of the novel was nonexistent. On the contrary, there was a definite interest expressed by periodical critics in the problems connected with the composition of an artistic novel. Many critics were genuinely concerned about the fate of the novel; the causes of poor novel construction and the novelists who failed to attempt careful writing were continually censured. This criticism may have been deficient in subtlety, yet it met the main issues squarely with an alert awareness. Thus it did its part in the effort to preserve the narrative form of the novel from the ravages of political and social pamphleteering, from sermonizing, and from commercialism. It must be remembered that if many of the remarks of the reviewers seem commonplace today, it actually is not their commentary which is hackneyed, but rather the comments of the critics who followed. A large number of the views which
have become part of the standard criticism of the Victorian novel were first presented in the pages of the periodicals. It did not take a retrospective critic to note that the novels were too long; frequently dull and formless; that the novels were often marred by extra-narrative elements; that Dickens drew caricatures and not characters; that Thackeray was a sentimental cynic; that George Eliot suffered from wordiness. All of these comments are found in the criticism of the contemporaries of the novelists. If we consider these remarks to be an artistic evaluation of the novel when they are made by our own contemporaries, there is no reason for denying the existence of an artistic standard of judging the novel during the nineteenth century.

It is very difficult to estimate the exact influence which was wielded by the periodical critics in this regard, but certainly, their dynamic and persistent interest, their lack of passivity in the face of insurmountable odds of public approval of shoddy writing, was a leading force in the reaction against the often indiscriminate taste of the reading public. The solid accomplishment of this artistic criticism is reflected in many ways. First, the reviewers were courageous in their criticism of established popular favorites; it must be remembered that, on the whole, Dickens was not a favorite with the critics although he was the pride and joy of the novel readers. Second, the critics intensively attacked the defunct, but to some extent still popular, "novels of fashionable life" as well as the trite "sensation" novels. Third, they were generally sensible in their recognition of novelists with genuine talent. And finally, they were quick to recognize the many faults of the contemporary novel, and a minority were even bold enough to question the wisdom of the unbounded emphasis on morality.

The ideal of the critics was a novel which was both moral and artistic; one which would conform to conventional moral standards as well as possess the
qualities of artistry. Since the ideal, in their judgment, was only infrequently attained, they followed their convictions which placed propriety above art in the scale of values. As had been said previously, most of them made this decision unflinchingly and automatically, but there was a handful of "advanced" critics who were disappointed that a choice had to be made.

The examination of the novel criticism in individual periodicals has shown that the selective reviews in the three quarterly publications were marked by a seriousness and formality of tone. The criticism in the Edinburgh Review and in the Westminster Review was rarely marked by partisan bias, and although the Westminster's liberal tendencies were discernible in its commentary, there was an open-minded attitude maintained. The Quarterly Review criticism was frequently marred by partisan bias, an oracular tone, and a tendency toward petty fault finding.

Of the reviews in the monthly publications, those in Fraser's Magazine were the most distinctive. Marked by a vigorous liberalism and by wit, flippancy, and irony, the reviews were nevertheless serious in purpose and positive in aim. The reviewers were most often writers with definite views which they did not fear to express. It was Fraser's which led in the fight against publishers' puffery and with it the low quality of literature; in the drive against lengthy works; and in the praise of the admirable qualities of French fiction. The novels were generally judged by the artistic standard, and the criticisms were unbiased by political or social considerations.

Blackwood's novel-reviewing was much more conservative and sedate. The reviews, generally based on the artistic standard, were serious, unbiased, and often very perceptive.

The Dublin University Magazine criticism was positive, vigorous, and often light in tone, and chiefly based on the artistic standard. The magazine
made special efforts to express disapproval of religious novels, especially those of the Evangelical variety, thus reflecting the High Church sentiment of the publication.

The Athanaeum reviews were not primarily written as critical evaluations of the novels. The critical comments were actually addenda to the long extracts printed for the convenience of the reader, and considered individually, these slight commentaries are of little value. When viewed as a totality, however, since so many novels were reviewed in the publication, the critical remarks present a clear picture of the Athanaeum's policy regarding the novel. The reviewing was based almost equally on the artistic and moral standards, and the comments were free from any partisan bias and were generous and moderate in tone. The reviewing expresses the conservativism of the periodical and its close reflection of the public taste.

The Saturday Review's novel criticism, like that of Fraser's, was marked by vigor and substantiality. However, unlike the reviews of Fraser's, the Saturday Review criticism was marred by a strong partisan bias, by an opinionated tone, and by a delight in fault-finding. Although it took great pride in its adult, educated outlook, the Saturday Review criticism was frequently hampered by a prudish view of life. Thus, while making slighting remarks about the lack of mature, intelligent novels in England, the reviewers, when presented with such works by George Eliot, qualified their praise with objections to the alleged distasteful and disturbing ideas which they contained.

The average, commonplace novels were reviewed by the Saturday Review in a purely destructive spirit. They were assailed chiefly because they were popular, a condition which to the educated staff of the Saturday Review was an adequate cause for attack. Novels which were limited to pure entertainment escaped with a minimum of damage, but novels with a purpose, like those of
Dickens, were given merciless treatment.

The fault of the Saturday Review criticism does not lie in the choice of targets for attack, but rather in the exaggeration and vindictiveness of the reviewers. Some moderation would have presented the often perceptive criticism into clearer view.

Whether conservative or liberal in outlook, moderate or vigorous in tone, the majority of the periodical novel critics from 1836 to 1870 had this attitude in common: they were not satisfied with the English novel during the period, and they felt that with greater care a better novel could be produced. In spite of the continuous repetition of the same faults by novelists, the critics did not relent in their efforts to point out these faults. Although not always correct in their judgments, the reviewers were not consciously insincere in their criticism. They served their readers not only as sifters of new novels, but likewise as observers and commentators on a form of literature which had in their time attained unprecedented success.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Stanley Thomas Ptak has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Date

Signature of Adviser