





John Sutherland

– Introduction –

I was inducted into a lifetime love of Thackeray by a remarkable woman: Monica Jones, a lecturer at Leicester University, is known, nowadays as the paramour and muse-of Philip Larkin.

Jones's views on life and literature, which she studiously refrained from putting into print (most academic publication was, she believed, drivel) permeated the work of Britain's most esteemed twentieth-century poet. They also had a formative effect on lesser me.

It was Miss Jones who directed me, tutorially, to Thackeray with the instruction: 'He will be gold in your pocket for life.' He could jingle there alongside her other two favourite authors, George Crabbe and Walter Scott.

I went on to do a doctoral thesis on Thackeray and a book on his uniquely relaxed working methods. Fuelled by my fascination with him, I later edited the three major novels: *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, and *Henry Esmond*, digging into the dust that, alas, lies thicker on their author than it does on Dickens, the Brontës, George Eliot, or even the 'lesser Thackeray', Anthony Trollope.

My aim was simple – I wanted to get as close to the

man as a century's historical distance would allow. As part of that project I spent hours contemplating the Queen Anne House he designed and built for himself – 2 Palace Green, Kensington. It is now the Israeli embassy.



Thackeray's house in Palace Green, Kensington

The house embodies in red bricks his Augustan view of life, but the hem of the robe for me was the manuscripts: one touches what his hand and pen touched. Thackeray's literary remains are *dissecta membra*, torn into posthumous fragments and scattered in scores of repositories by nineteenth-century admirers and souvenir hunters. I felt, glamorously, like a scholar-adventurer hunting them down – an unusual feeling in academic life.

These literary remains, as their crests and