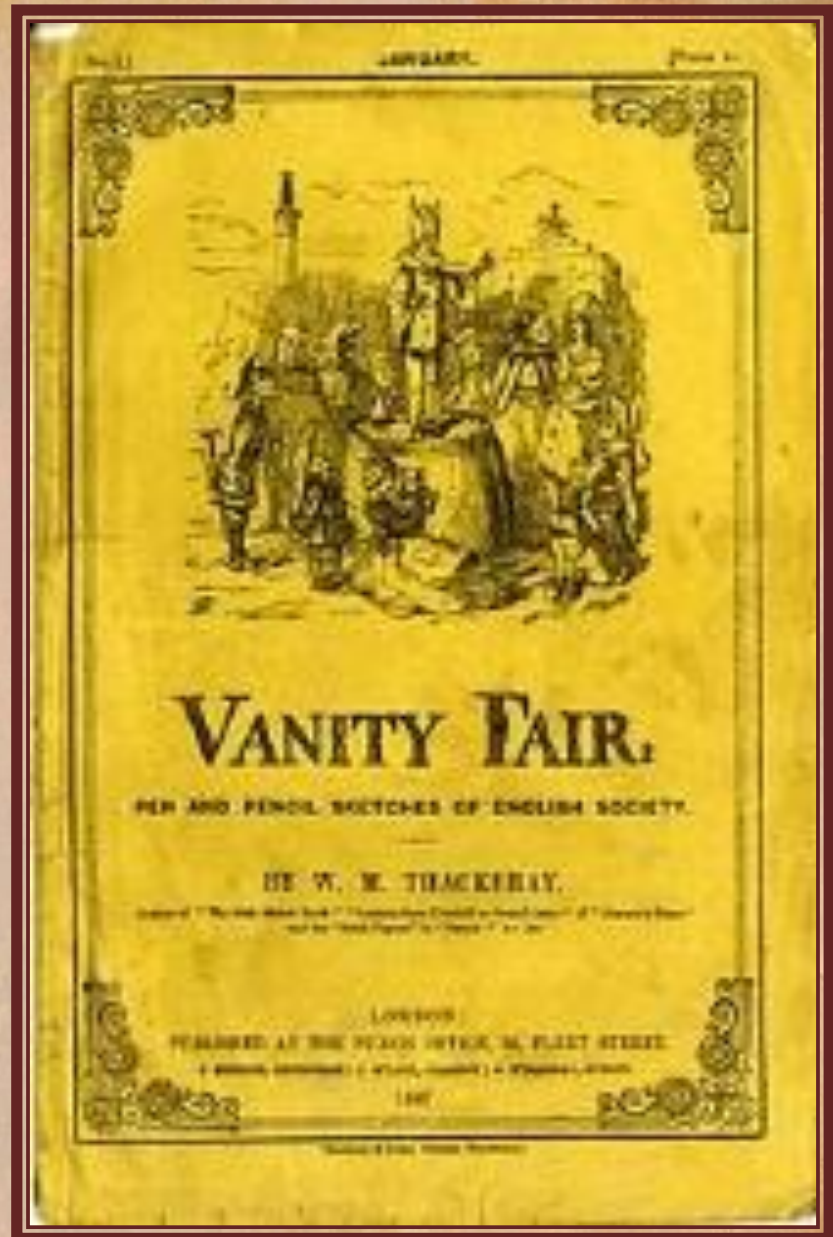




Vanity Fair

Vanity Fair is an English novel by William Makepeace Thackeray, which follows the lives of Becky Sharp and Emmy Sedley with their friends and families during and after the Napoleonic Wars. It was first published as a 19-volume monthly serial from 1847 to 1848, carrying the subtitle ***Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society***, reflecting both its satirisation of early 19th-century British society and the many illustrations drawn by Thackeray to accompany the text. It was published as a single volume in 1848 with the subtitle ***A Novel without a Hero***, reflecting Thackeray's interest in deconstructing his era's conventions regarding literary heroism. It is sometimes considered the "principal founder" of the Victorian domestic novel. The serial was a popular and critical success; the novel is now considered a classic and has inspired several audio, film, and television adaptations. In 2003, *Vanity Fair* was listed at No. 122 on the BBC's **The Big**



London, 1814. Rebecca Sharp ("Becky"), daughter of an art teacher and a French dancer, is a strong-willed, moneyless, young woman determined to make her way in society. After leaving school, Becky stays with Amelia Sedley ("Emmy"), who is a good-natured, simple-minded, young girl, of a wealthy London family. There, Becky meets the self-obsessed Captain George Osborne (Amelia's betrothed) and Amelia's brother Joseph ("Jos") Sedley, rich civil servant home from the East India Company. Hoping to marry Sedley, the richest young man she has met, Becky tempts him, but she fails. George Osborne's friend Captain William Dobbin loves Amelia, but only wishes her happiness, which is centred on George. Becky Sharp says farewell to the Sedley family and enters the service of the crude and profligate baronet Sir Pitt Crawley, who has engaged her as a governess to his daughters.

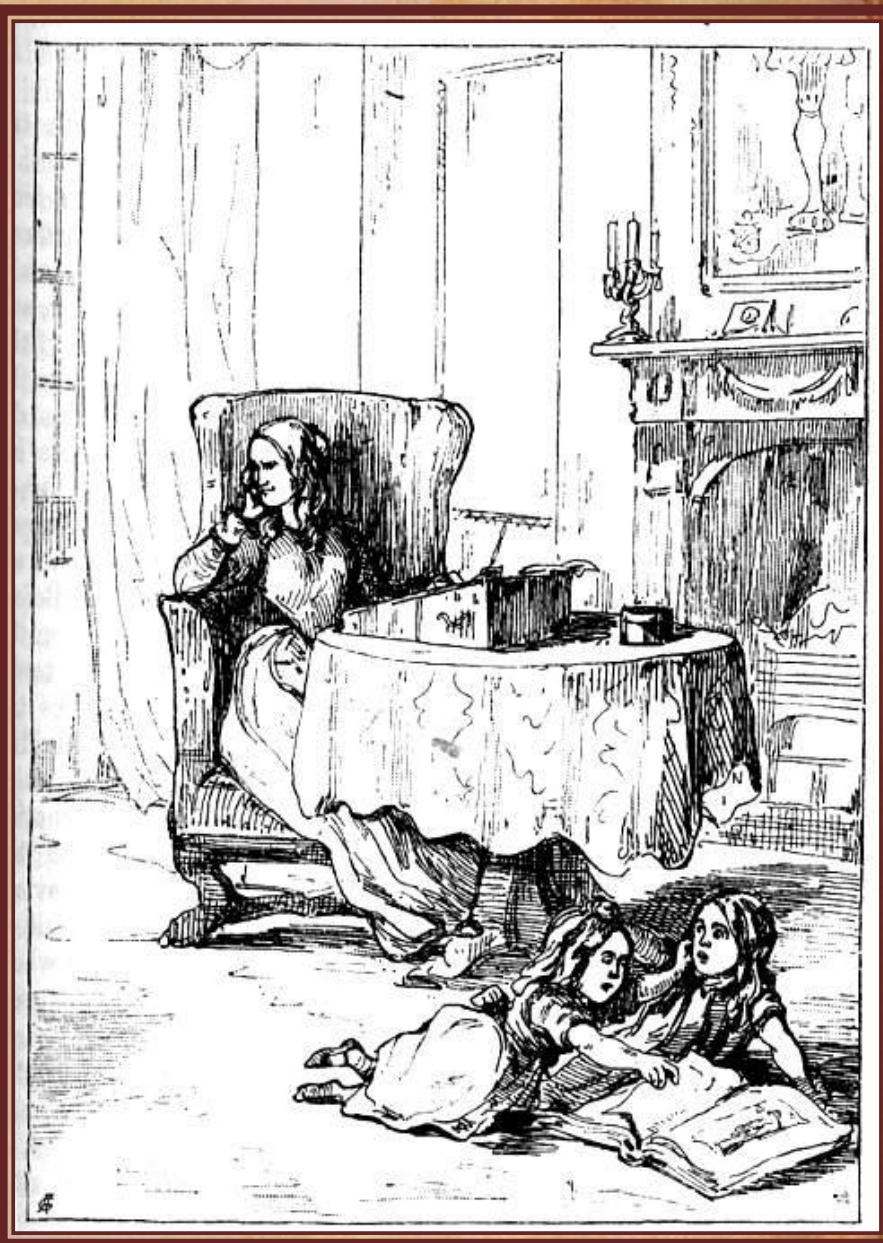


Her behaviour at Sir Pitt's house gains his favour, and after the premature death of his second wife, he proposes marriage to her. However, he finds that she has secretly married his second son, Captain Rawdon Crawley, but Becky very much regrets having done this as she had no idea that his father's wife would die so soon after. News arrives that Napoleon has escaped from Elba, and as a result the stockmarket becomes jittery, causing Amelia's stockbroker father, John Sedley, to become bankrupt. George's rich father forbids George to marry Amelia, who is now poor. Dobbin persuades George to marry Amelia, and George is consequently disinherited. He is also losing money to Rawdon at cards and billiards. At a ball in Brussels, George gives Becky a note inviting her to run away with him. But then the army have marching orders to the Battle of Waterloo, and George spends a tender night with Amelia and leaves. The noise of battle horrifies Amelia. Becky is indifferent and makes plans for whatever the outcome (if Napoleon wins, she would aim to become



Lieutenant Osborne and his ardent love letters.

George Osborne is killed at the Battle of Waterloo, while Dobbin and Rawdon survive the battle. Amelia bears him a posthumous son, who carries on the name George. She returns to live in genteel poverty with her parents, spending her life in memory of her husband and care of her son. Dobbin pays for a small annuity for Amelia and expresses his love for her by small kindnesses toward her and her son. She is too much in love with her husband's memory to return Dobbin's love. Saddened, he goes with his regiment to India for many years. Becky also has a son, named Rawdon after his father. Becky is a cold, distant mother, although Rawdon loves his son. Becky continues her ascent first in post-war Paris and then in London where she is patronised by the rich and powerful Marquis of Steyne. She is eventually presented at court to the Prince Regent and charms him further at a game of "acting charades"



At the summit of their social success, Rawdon is arrested for debt, possibly at Becky's connivance. The financial success of the Crawleys had been a topic of gossip; in fact they were living on credit even when it ruined those who trusted them, such as their landlord, an old servant of the Crawley family. The Marquis of Steyne had given Becky money, jewels, and other gifts but Becky does not use them for expenses or to free her husband. Instead, Rawdon's letter to his brother is received by Lady Jane, who pays the £170 that prompted his imprisonment. Having assumed the £1000 he had just given Becky was part of an arrangement with her husband. Rawdon finds Becky's hidden bank records and leaves her, expecting Steyne to challenge him to a duel. Becky, having lost both husband and credibility, leaves England and wanders the continent, leaving her



As Amelia's adored son George grows up, his grandfather Mr Osborne relents towards him (though not towards Amelia) and takes him from his impoverished mother, who knows the rich old man will give him a better start in life than she could manage. After twelve years abroad, both Joseph Sedley and Dobbin return. Dobbin professes his unchanged love to Amelia. Amelia is affectionate (loving/tempting), but she cannot forget the memory of her dead husband. After the death of Mr Osborne, Amelia, Jos, George and Dobbin go to Pumpnickel where they meet the destitute Becky. Becky has fallen in life. She lives among card sharps and con artists, drinking heavily and gambling (card gaming). Becky fascinates Jos Sedley all over again, and Amelia is persuaded to let Becky join them. Dobbin forbids this, and reminds Amelia of her jealousy of Becky with her husband. Amelia feels that this dishonours the memory of her dead and revered husband, and this leads to a complete breach between



However, Becky has decided that Amelia should marry Dobbin, even though she knows Dobbin is her enemy. Becky shows Amelia George's note, kept all this time from the eve of the Battle of Waterloo, and Amelia finally realises that George was not the perfect man she always thought, and that she has rejected a better man, Dobbin. Amelia and Dobbin are reconciled and return to England. Becky and Jos stay in Europe. Jos dies, possibly suspiciously, after signing a portion of his money to Becky as life insurance, setting her up with an income. She returns to England, and manages a respectable life, although all her previous friends refuse to acknowledge her.



Virtue rewarded: A booth in Vanity Fair.