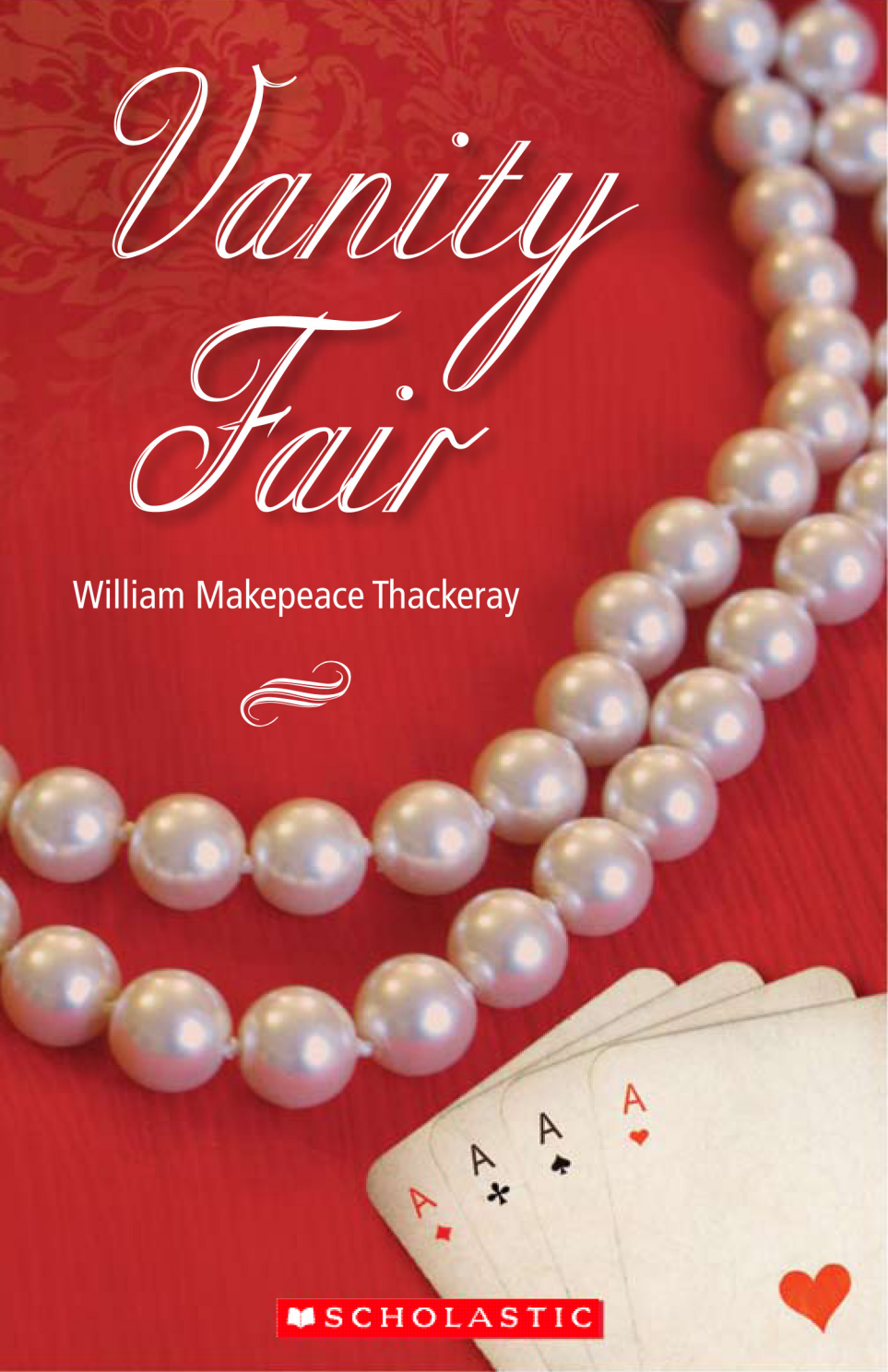


Vanity Fair

William Makepeace Thackeray



SCHOLASTIC



Contents

Page

Vanity Fair	4–77
People and places	4–5
The language of William Thackeray's time	6
Preface	7
Chapter 1: Goodbye to Miss Pinkerton	8
Chapter 2: An evening at Vauxhall	12
Chapter 3: Becky starts again	18
Chapter 4: Vanity Fair loves a rich lady	21
Chapter 5: A god among men	25
Chapter 6: A wedding	29
Chapter 7: Dobbin buys a piano	34
Chapter 8: Someone saves Amelia	37
Chapter 9: Good news and bad news	40
Chapter 10: Amelia and Becky go to war	46
Chapter 11: The price of a horse	51
Chapter 12: Fathers, mothers and sons	55
Chapter 13: Becky catches the light	57
Chapter 14: Letters	60
Chapter 15: Becky shines in Vanity Fair	63
Chapter 16: A fight	69
Chapter 17: Dobbin gives up hope	72
Chapter 18: Endings ... and beginnings	75
Fact Files	78–83
William Thackeray: a character in his own book	78
The Battle of Waterloo	80
Young men in Regency England	82
Self-Study Activities	84–88
New Words	inside back cover

BECKY SHARP is a clever girl. She has no money, no fortune and no parents. But that does not stop her from making her way in the world.



AMELIA SEDLEY is a sweet girl. She has a comfortable house and a good fortune.



GEORGE OSBORNE is a rich and foolish young man who thinks very well of himself.



WILLIAM DOBBIN is George Osborne's best friend. He is the only honest person in Vanity Fair.



JOS SEDLEY is Amelia's older brother. He is a tax collector in India. He is lazy, he loves his food and drink, and he dresses in bright clothes.



RAWDON CRAWLEY

is the younger son of Sir Pitt Crawley, and an officer in the army. He loves gambling, horse-riding and drinking.



LORD STEYNE is a very rich and important man in Vanity Fair. He does what he wants and never thinks about other people's feelings.



SIR PITT CRAWLEY

is a lord from an old English family. He doesn't wash very often, wears old clothes and can be rude!



AUNT CRAWLEY

is Sir Pitt's unmarried sister. She has a great fortune and lives in Park Lane, in London.



PLACES

IN LONDON:

Russell Square: some richer families who work in the City live here

Great Gaunt Street and Gaunt Square: lords and ladies live here

Curzon Street, Mayfair: a cheaper part of central London

OUTSIDE LONDON:

Brompton: a cheaper place outside London where shopkeepers and city workers live

Queens Crawley: a large country house in Hampshire, owned by the Crawley family for hundreds of years



The language of William Thackeray's time

William Thackeray wrote *Vanity Fair* in 1847–8. The English that people spoke then was a little different from modern English. Here are some of the differences in *Vanity Fair*.

William Thackeray's language		modern English
<i>do not, are not</i>	=	<i>don't, aren't</i>
<i>'I am a modern man'</i>	=	<i>'I'm a modern man'</i>
<i>'There is singing and dancing'</i>	=	<i>'There's singing and dancing'</i>
<i>to wish</i>	=	<i>to want</i>
<i>'I wish to end our engagement'</i>	=	<i>'I want to end our engagement'</i>
<i>a handsome man</i>	=	<i>a good-looking man</i>
<i>the drawing room</i>	=	<i>the best sitting room in the house</i>

People only used first names for children, families or for loved ones. So Jos Sedley calls Becky 'Miss Sharp', even though they are both young people. Servants, like Briggs, were usually called by their last name.

There is an extra person in this story: the writer. The people in Mr Thackeray's story often *say* one thing but *mean* something else. Mr Thackeray sometimes likes to point this out to the reader, in case the reader believes the speaker's words.



Vanity Fair

PREFACE

Vanity Fair is an idea more than a place. All the rich, fashionable people of England lived in Vanity Fair. People from old, rich families – like Lord Steyne – were born in Vanity Fair. People from City families – like the Osbornes – wanted to get into Vanity Fair. People from no family – like Becky Sharp – had to fight their way in. And even if you got in, it was not easy to stay there.



What happens in Vanity Fair? There is a lot of eating and drinking and there are many parties; there is falling in love and pretending to fall in love; there is gambling and dancing; buying and selling; bullying and lying; and there is fighting and dying.

Vanity Fair is not a good or happy place, but it is very noisy and never boring.

CHAPTER 1

Goodbye to Miss Pinkerton

A fashionable carriage stopped outside Miss Pinkerton's School for Young Ladies. Inside, Miss Pinkerton was writing the final report for one of her best pupils, Miss Amelia Sedley. Miss Sedley was returning to her parents' home in Russell Square after six years of music, dancing and French.

Amelia was a dear little thing. Everyone at Miss Pinkerton's loved her. Her face was fresh and pretty. Her eyes shone, specially when they filled with tears, which really was too often. She would cry over a dead flower, the end of a novel or an unkind word.

Miss Pinkerton spoke sharply to Miss Jemima, her nervous younger sister.

'Get me a dictionary for Miss Sedley, Miss Jemima,' said Miss Pinkerton. All of Miss Pinkerton's pupils received a dictionary on their last day at the school.

Miss Jemima brought two dictionaries.

'Here is a dictionary for Miss Sedley, and one for Miss Sharp,' she said. 'Miss Sharp is leaving too.'

'MISS JEMIMA!' cried Miss Pinkerton. 'I have done enough for Miss Sharp. I don't need to give her a dictionary!'



The two young ladies prepared to leave.

Miss Sharp said goodbye to Miss Pinkerton in perfect French. Miss Pinkerton did not understand French, but she was too proud to say so.

'Good morning, Miss Sharp,' she said icily. Then she turned to Amelia. She made a boring goodbye speech. Everyone cried and wanted to kiss their darling Amelia.

As the carriage was leaving, Miss Jemima ran up to the window.

‘Miss Sharp,’ she said, ‘here’s a dictionary for you too. Goodbye.’

The carriage moved off. Miss Sharp looked out of the window and threw the dictionary into the garden.

Miss Jemima nearly died of shock and the girls set off into the world.



Becky Sharp was small and thin. Her hair was light red and her large eyes were very attractive. One look from those eyes could kill a man across a room. Becky was

clever and funny, and had learned from her parents how to live on nothing.

Who were her parents? Her mother was French and sang in the theatre, but she died when Becky was only seven. Her father was an artist. He was a good artist, but he was lazy too, and he never made any money. Their house was always full of young artists. Little Becky loved to laugh and talk with them, and they loved her.

When he knew his end was near, Mr Sharp wrote to Miss Pinkerton. He asked her to look after his poor daughter. So, at the age of seventeen, Becky arrived at Miss Pinkerton's School. There she taught French in return for lessons, food and a bed. She hated it. She thought the other girls were boring and silly. Amelia was her only friend.

Becky began to plan for her future. She practised her music day and night. Miss Pinkerton asked her to teach the younger girls.

Becky refused. 'I am here to speak French with the children. I am not here to teach music and to save money for you. I will teach them if you pay me.'

No one had ever spoken to Miss Pinkerton like that before.

'I hate this place and I want to leave,' said Miss Sharp. Miss Pinkerton wanted Becky to leave too and found her a place as a governess. In ten days' time, Miss Sharp was joining her new family at Queen's Crawley in the country.

At Russell Square Amelia showed Becky her books, her piano and her dresses. Her brother Jos was home from India, and was staying in rooms round the corner.

'You are lucky, dear Amelia,' said Becky, with a sad smile. 'Your parents give you everything you ask for. And you have a brother, too. Isn't he very rich?'



Later, the two girls went down to the drawing room. By the fire, sat a fat man in a red shirt and a green jacket. He went bright red and dropped his newspaper.

‘He’s very handsome,’ whispered Becky, loudly.

Jos started putting more wood on the fire noisily.

Before we think badly of Miss Sharp for her interest in this greedy and foolish man, we must remember that she has no mother. And mothers usually find husbands for their daughters.

Jos Sedley was a tax collector in a quiet town in India*. He loved to be fashionable. He spent many hours dressing in front of his mirror. He thought he looked brilliant, but of course he looked a fool. And he was very frightened of ladies.

Becky sat next to Jos at dinner. Mrs Sedley had prepared some fine Indian dishes for her son.

‘I am looking forward to this Indian food,’ said Becky. She smiled sweetly at Jos.

‘Do you like it?’ asked Mr Sedley, after she had tasted it.

‘It is excellent,’ said Becky. But then her face went red and her mouth was on fire.

‘Would you like some more, Miss Sharp?’ asked Jos.

‘Water! Please, give me some water!’ she cried.

Mr Sedley and Jos laughed loudly. The ladies smiled a little.

But when the ladies left the room after dinner**, Mr Sedley said to his son, ‘That girl is after you, Jos. Take care.’

But Jos Sedley did not take care. In fact, he was already in love with Becky.

* Great Britain governed parts of India at this time.

** In those days, ladies left the dining room after the meal.

Young men in Regency* England

* 'Regency' is the time between 1811 and 1820.



Regency England is named after the Prince Regent, who became King George IV. He lived a wild life, and many young men copied him. He ate and drank too much, loved gambling and spent a lot of money.

“*Rawdon was excellent at gambling, horse-riding and drinking.*”

Becoming a gentleman

Boys from rich families studied Latin and Greek before going to a top school, such as Eton or Harrow. Families with a little less money sent their sons to schools like Dr Swishtail's School in *Vanity Fair*. They were taught writing, maths and French. Riding a horse, fighting with a sword and racing in a carriage were all important skills for a young gentleman.

Studying ... and having fun

Oxford and Cambridge were the only universities in England at this time. Young



men there studied Latin and Greek, the law or prepared for the church. Like Rawdon Crawley, and William Thackeray himself, many students cared more about horses, carriages, clothes and drinking than studying.

Working life: army, church or a rich wife?

What did a young gentleman do all day long? Older sons of lords and ladies, like Pitt Crawley, managed their country estates and went into Parliament.

Younger sons were less lucky. Like Rawdon Crawley, they often inherited very little. They either had to work or find a rich wife. Young gentlemen with a title (for example, Lord, Lady, Sir) and no money often married young ladies with plenty of money but no title.

If a gentleman had money but no title, he could buy a good place in the army. George Osborne begins this story as Lieutenant Osborne.



Britain was always at war at this time. There were no policemen, and fighting was an important skill for boys and young men to learn. Think of three times in *Vanity Fair* where men fight.

His father then buys him a promotion, and he becomes Captain Osborne. He could go into the church or the law, or become a banker. A gentleman could go abroad. Jos Sedley becomes rich as a tax collector in India.

What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.

sword manage Parliament inherit title promotion