

VANITY FAIR

by William Makepeace Thackeray



THE AUTHOR

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) was born in Calcutta to Anglo-Indian parents. His father held the post of Collector (the same position held by Jos in *Vanity Fair*), but died when William was four years old. He was then sent to England to attend boarding schools, while his mother remained in India to marry her childhood sweetheart. Thackeray was not a good student, finding his lessons boring and escaping by reading popular fiction. Though he did succeed in gaining entrance to Cambridge, he spent most of his time drinking and gambling, then dropped out after two years.

After leaving Cambridge, he spent time in Weimar on the Continent (the Pumpnickel of *Vanity Fair*), where he encountered for the first time the literature and religious skepticism of the Romantic Movement. Returning to England, he attempted briefly to immerse himself in the study of law, and then purchased a weekly newspaper, which soon failed. His substantial inheritance from his father was lost through the failure of the Indian bank with whom the funds were deposited, and he then found himself faced with the necessity of working for a living to support himself, and later his wife and their young children. He chose the life of a journalist, writing and drawing for a number of magazines and newspapers, including *Punch*. While freelancing for ten years, he produced a variety of fictional works, the best-known of which were *Barry Lyndon* (1844) and *The Book of Snobs* (1846-7), along with essays and travel books. His busy writing schedule often separated him from his family, and his wife (on whom the character of Amelia was based) fell into a depression from which she never recovered, ultimately requiring institutional care and leaving his children to be raised by their grandmother and a series of governesses. During his wife's incapacitation, he met and fell in love with Jane Brookfield, the wife of a college friend, with whom he carried on a platonic love affair for years.

Thackeray's first real success was *Vanity Fair* (1847-8). By the time he completed *Pendennis* (1849-50), he was being compared to Dickens, with whom he later feuded, by many critics, who openly wondered which was the greatest living English novelist. *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852), which he considered his finest novel, followed, along with *The Newcomers* (1853-5). After several speaking tours in the United States, during which his reaction was far more positive than that of Dickens, he wrote *The Virginians* (1857-9). After accepting once again an editorial position, he died suddenly of a brain aneurism in 1863.

Vanity Fair remains today the most popular of Thackeray's novels, with its memorable characters and sharp social criticism. In calling it "a novel without a hero," the author indicated his desire to focus his attention on an entire society rather than simply the lives of a few individuals (this is in some ways the opposite of what Dickens did in *A Tale of Two Cities*, where he sheds light on an entire movement – the French Revolution – by concentrating on the lives of the central characters). As the story bounces around from character to character and from setting to setting, the narrative center is not found in a person, but in an entire lifestyle and set of values – what Thackeray calls "Vanity Fair," an image he borrows from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. That he does not approve of that set of values is painfully obvious from his narrative asides; while few would complain about criticisms directed at the social climber Becky Sharp, the foolish and self-absorbed Jos Sedley, or the crude and obnoxious Sir Pitt Crawley, the reader somewhat regrets the barbs aimed even at good-hearted souls like Amelia, despite her weakness, and Dobbin, who becomes the target of rebuke for his very faithfulness.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins with the departure of Amelia Sedley from Miss Pinkerton's Academy, a finishing school for young ladies in London. Amelia, a sweet girl who is beloved by all, is returning to her wealthy parents, accompanied by Becky Sharp, an orphan who apparently will be missed by no one. Miss Pinkerton gives Amelia a copy of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary as a going-away present but refuses to give one to Becky; when her sister sneaks a copy to her in the carriage, she haughtily throws it out the window. Amelia is shocked at such disrespectful behavior, but Becky loudly swears that she hates the school and everyone associated with it.

We learn that Becky is an orphan whose father was an artist, perpetually in debt and often drunk, who had married a French opera girl. By the time Becky is seventeen, her mother has died and her father is in the process of being carried off by delirium tremens. She is thus taken in by Miss Pinkerton and allowed to learn whatever she can while she teaches French, learned from her mother, to the other students. She immediately establishes the fact that she has a way with men when the young local curate falls in love with her and even proposes marriage, despite the fact that the two have barely spoken two words to each other (though the rumor mill says otherwise). She thinks the girls at the boarding school are snobs, and finds their conversation dull beyond bounds after the excitement of the artists who frequented her father's studio before his death. Miss Pinkerton detests her as much as she hates her employer, and soon finds her a position as a governess in the house of Sir Pitt Crawley. When she leaves the school with Amelia, she intends to stay only a fortnight before moving on to her new place of employment.

When the girls arrive in Russell Square, Amelia kindly gives Becky one of her dresses and a few pieces of jewelry and introduces her to her family. Her brother Joseph has just arrived from India, having acquired considerable wealth after living there for more than a decade, and when Becky discovers that he is unmarried, she decides to try to make him fall in love with and marry her. When they meet, Becky finds that Joseph is rather stout and awkward, but she immediately tells Amelia how handsome her brother is, which causes him to blush and almost drives him from the room. He is both extremely vain and extremely shy, has no friends, and is scared to death of women. At dinner they talk about India, and Becky, who tastes curry and chili peppers for the first time, nearly chokes on them, but takes the embarrassing moment with good grace. After dinner, Joseph's father warns him that Becky is setting her cap for him.

Becky soon ingratiates herself with the entire household. She continues to pursue Jos, and Amelia begs her mother to extend Becky's visit another week. Jos, with considerable prodding from the girls, agrees to take them to Vauxhall, accompanied by George Osborne, a young man who has caught Amelia's fancy. The outing is postponed because of a thunderstorm, but the four have a delightful evening together. Becky works on a green purse she is knitting while talking to Jos, then sings a few songs in her beautiful voice, and by the end of the evening Jos has fallen in love with her. The next day, they spend time together, and all are convinced that he will ask her to marry him that night on the excursion to Vauxhall.

We now meet William Dobbin, the poor son of a grocer, awkward and shy, who grew up constantly serving as the butt of the jokes of his schoolmates. One day in school, he heard the school bully, Reginald Cuff, beating up one of the small boys, young George Osborne. He puts a stop to the thrashing and challenges Cuff to a fight, which he wins after Cuff gains an early advantage. Dobbin's reputation rises astronomically, and he actually begins to do well in his studies. He also makes a lifelong friend of George Osborne, and both join the same military regiment. Because of this friendship, George invites Dobbin to join the others on the trip to Vauxhall. When Dobbin arrives for the excursion, he is immediately smitten with the lovely Amelia, though says and does nothing because she is betrothed to George.

That night, the party travels to the Royal Gardens at Vauxhall with everyone in full expectation that Jos will declare himself to Becky before the evening is out. When they arrive, Jos goes off with Becky and George with Amelia, leaving poor Dobbin to watch their possessions and pay for the whole party. When Becky gets Jos alone, she tries to maneuver him into proposing, but they are repeatedly interrupted. Finally, Jos gets thoroughly drunk at dinner and has to be carried home by Dobbin, so the proposal never takes place. Jos awakes the next morning with a terrible hangover, and Osborne, determined to break up the romance so a lowborn person like Becky will not become part of the family into which he intends to marry, reenacts for Jos all of his deplorable behavior while drunk the night before. Jos is so humiliated that he leaves for Scotland the next day without ever seeing Becky again. The time now arrives for Becky to leave the Sedley home to take up her job as a governess. No one is really sorry to see her go except Amelia, but they send her off with many presents and professions of affection. She, on her part, is grateful to George Osborne for breaking up her romance with Jos, for she has now set her sights higher, though she is not quite sure who her new target will be.

As Becky goes to meet her new employer, Sir Pitt Crawley, M.P., she imagines a handsome and proud nobleman of the sort she has never encountered before in her life. Instead, she finds herself in a dingy London townhouse, where she is confronted with a leering, red-faced, poorly-dressed skinflint whom she initially mistakes for the doorman, and who spends most of his time suing and being sued by his neighbors. She has been engaged to tutor his two daughters by his second wife. The next morning, all leave for the country estate of Queen's Crawley. The place is every bit as depressing and run-down as the London townhouse. Here Becky meets the second Lady Crawley, Mr. Pitt Crawley, the Baronet's son, and her two young charges, Rose and Violet.

The author now introduces the rest of the Crawley family. Lady Crawley is Sir Pitt's second wife, the daughter of an ironmonger who had cut her former acquaintance and been rejected by the aristocracy in turn. She bore two girls, lost her good looks, and is now either ignored or beaten by her husband. Sir Pitt's elder son, Mr. Pitt Crawley, takes after his aristocratic mother and is the only member of the family who acts like a nobleman. In his presence, even his father moderates his crude ways to some extent. Pitt received a good education, dabbled in diplomacy and abolitionism (he assisted William Wilberforce in his crusade), is a devout Dissenter in religion, and in general

maintains a consistent mediocrity in every aspect of life. Rawdon, the younger son, is a pleasure-seeking ne'er-do-well, beloved of his father and wealthy aunt and thoroughly despised by his elder brother. With regard to Sir Pitt, his constant ventures in the courts left the Crawley estate constantly in debt despite its master's parsimony.

This is the family with whom Becky Sharp is employed. She immediately goes about ingratiating herself with anyone who is in a position to advance her ambitions, which of course involve marrying very well indeed – preferably leading to greater wealth and social status than that of her friend Amelia Sedley. She plays backgammon with Sir Pitt, and helps him with his correspondence and even with the management of the estate; she spoils the little girls in her charge so they will love her and leave her to pursue her own devices; she flatters young Pitt when he is there, and rapidly gains the approval of old Miss Crawley; with regard to Lady Crawley, that nonentity is completely unworthy of her attention.

We next meet Bute Crawley, Sir Pitt's brother. He is an Anglican rector who loves the sporting life, balls and dinners; in short, he lives the life of a country squire. His wife Martha, meanwhile, skimps and saves to pay his gambling debts and writes his sermons for him. His only hope of fiscal solvency is the hoped-for death of his wealthy sister Matilda. When word arrives at the rectory that Becky is making quite an impression at Queen's Crawley, especially among the men, the rector's wife becomes suspicious of her intentions and writes to Miss Pinkerton seeking to dig up dirt on the new arrival [the letters exchanged between the two are hilarious examples of inserting the knife between the shoulder blades with a smile upon the lips]. Becky, meanwhile, writes to Amelia, commenting with acerbic wit upon the doings at what she calls Humdrum Hall, and demonstrating herself to be every bit as much the hypocrite as the family she despises for fawning over their rich sister and aunt. She even receives (and quickly rejects) a proposal of marriage from the doctor who attends Mrs. Crawley in her illness. When Rawdon Crawley arrives, he proves to be boisterous and outgoing, and takes an immediate fancy to Becky. Even Martha Crawley starts flattering Becky's piano playing in the hopes of getting free lessons for her daughters. Miss Matilda Crawley, an old reprobate herself, quickly comes to favor Becky and refuses to allow her to be kept out of the company at family dinners; after dinner, the old lady invites Becky to her room so together they can "abuse the company." Rawdon, meanwhile, begins to show signs of affection for Becky, but she plays hard to get while enticing him at the same time.

While Becky is insinuating herself into the good graces of the important people in her new household, Amelia is being patronized by the sisters of George Osborne, who are clearly jealous of her beauty and sweet temper. In reality, when his sisters think that George is spending all his days with Amelia, he is making merry with his friends while she pines away wondering when he will come to visit her. Dobbin, who secretly loves Amelia, seeks to give her aid and comfort without in any way betraying his secret affection. When Amelia hears the news that Napoleon has abdicated, she is overjoyed because this means that George will not have to go to war after all. While she dotes on George, writing long letters to him every day and longing for his company, he pleases himself and practically ignores his wife-to-be. The men in his regiment consider him a real Don Juan and often speculate about his amours. One day Dobbin becomes so incensed that he blurts out a defense of Amelia and threatens anyone who dares to speak disparagingly of her. Osborne, in turn, is furious with Dobbin for ruining his love life by speaking of his impending marriage. He soon calms down and promises to change his ways after he gets married. He goes to visit Amelia the next day; Dobbin even lends him money to buy a gift for her, but he spends it on a diamond pin for himself instead. That evening, Amelia goes to the Osbornes' home for dinner. Mr. Osborne is clearly upset about something, and later he tells George that Amelia's father, who had given him his start in business

years earlier, has encountered some financial reverses, and that he questions the wisdom of George marrying her because her father is no longer wealthy.

When Matilda Crawley returns to her home, she takes Becky with her as her nurse and companion. This immediately sends her previous companion, Miss Arabella Briggs, into a fit of jealousy and irritates the other servants as well. When Rawdon Crawley comes to visit his aunt, he spends most of his time flirting with Becky. Miss Crawley's illness, which all her relatives fervently hope will be fatal, turns out to be nothing more than indigestion from eating too much lobster. Lady Crawley, on the other hand, is genuinely and seriously ill and receives no attention from anyone. Rawdon, meanwhile, begins to fall in love with Becky. The relationship is encouraged by his sister-in-law Martha, who fears that, should Lady Crawley die, Sir Pitt will want Becky for himself, but Becky again plays hard to get. Meanwhile, Sir Pitt soon finds the extent to which Becky has become necessary to him in his business and begs her to return.

One day Miss Crawley and Becky visit Amelia and her family. The encounter is brief, but the old woman remarks at Amelia's beauty and insists that Becky invite her for a visit. When Rawdon comes for dinner that night, Amelia is still the topic of conversation, but Becky immediately warns him that she is already engaged. It turns out that he knows George Osborne, and in fact has taken plenty of money from him by gambling; he suggests that George be invited for a visit as well so he can fleece him further. The visit goes well, but George spends much of the time flirting with Becky and being rebuffed. Soon word comes that Lady Crawley has died. On the day of the funeral, Sir Pitt comes to his sister's house, begs Becky to come back because his books are a disaster, and finally proposes marriage to her. She is much gratified by the offer, but surprises him [and the reader] by telling him that she is already married!

The members of the family are astonished that a mere governess should have the temerity to refuse the hand of a Baronet, but soon conclude that she would only have done so because of the existence of a prior attachment. In fact, Becky herself regrets her rashness at contracting a secret marriage when she could have been Lady Crawley, and contemplates how she ought to reveal that her husband is none other than Rawdon Crawley himself. The two take an apartment near the barracks, and Becky sneaks out of Miss Crawley's house in the middle of the night, leaving a letter to Briggs explaining the particulars of her marriage. Briggs is overjoyed to regain her place as Miss Crawley's confidante, and quickly communicates the news to Martha Crawley, who is hopeful that her sister-in-law will be so angry at Rawdon and Becky that she will disinherit them, leaving more money for her husband Bute. The old lady is indeed angry, as is Sir Pitt when he discovers the subterfuge.

Amelia's father is now forced into bankruptcy by the market crash caused by Napoleon's return from Elba, which also brings George Osborne and William Dobbin into active service. Sadly, the most obstinate of Sedley's creditors is John Osborne, whom he had initially set up in business. The ingrate crushes his former benefactor and insists that George break off his engagement to Amelia. John Sedley and his family move into a small townhouse and auction off most of their possessions. Among the purchasers is Captain Dobbin, who outbids Rawdon and Becky for a small piano, which he then gives to Amelia, who is pining away in her grief over George, to whom she ascribes the anonymous gift. Becky, meanwhile, manages to tame her wayward husband somewhat, though she quickly concludes that she can make little of such a brainless though handsome man. They live on credit and are perpetually in debt and wanting cash, while the anticipated reconciliation with Miss Crawley is long in coming, largely due to the influence of Martha, who has moved in to nurse and ingratiate herself with her sister-in-law. Martha fills the ears of Matilda with tales of George and Becky's past misdeeds, but cannot coerce her into changing her will. When she is told

by the doctor that Miss Crawley will soon die if she continues to languish in bed, she begins to take her on outings, though she is fearful that she might encounter the reprobate pair and be moved to forgive them.

At this point Dobbin, despite (or perhaps because of) his love for Amelia, attempts with all his energy to reconcile his friend George to her. George is sufficiently flattered by Amelia's obsequious clinging to him that he readily acquiesces, but the real problem is the two fathers; neither one is likely to permit a marriage when the alienation between them is so great. Dobbin concludes that the young lovers must follow the example of Rawdon and Becky and elope. He believes that they should marry before the impending military action so that the fathers will change their minds when George covers himself with glory on the field of battle. Dobbin's attempt to speak to John Sedley ends in failure, but he takes pleasure in seeing Amelia happy again, especially since the reunion was accomplished through his agency, even though Amelia takes little notice of her smitten benefactor.

Meanwhile, Rhoda Swartz, a schoolmate of Amelia and Becky from the West Indies, arrives on the scene; she is now a young lady, and fabulously wealthy. The appearance of such a rich young woman causes no little sensation, and she immediately begins to attract friends. Among them are the Osborne girls, encouraged by their father to ingratiate themselves with the heiress. He also orders George to drop Amelia, resign from the army, and court Rhoda forthwith, and is astounded when George flatly refuses all three demands. Rhoda, meanwhile, takes the affections of the Osborne sisters at face value and begins to find George attractive. One day Rhoda discovers that the Osbornes know Amelia, who was one of the few at Miss Pinkerton's who had treated her, a mulatto girl, with kindness. George praises her effusively, but the rest of the family tries to silence him and assures Rhoda that Amelia is unworthy of her attention. When Osborne threatens to disinherit George if he marries Amelia, the result is not quite what he expects: George determines to marry her the very next day.

Despite old Osborne's conviction that George will give in when he runs out of money, he does indeed marry Amelia a few days later. Dobbin serves as best man, but is desolate when his beloved Emmy is actually united to another. The two honeymoon in Brighton, where they meet and spend much time with Rawdon and Becky Crawley and Jos Sedley. A few days later Dobbin arrives, having broken the news of the marriage to George's father. He brings with him bigger news – the entire army is being called up and sent to Belgium to fight against Bonaparte the following week.

Dobbin had been reluctant to speak to old Osborne directly, so had sought the aid of George's sisters in breaking the news. Jane, the elder, thought Dobbin was going to propose marriage to her, but her disappointment was only temporary, and she was caught up in the excitement of an elopement. George's father responded very differently, however. He initially expected that Dobbin was bringing news of George's submission and received him very kindly. Dobbin began by speaking of the importance of reconciliation before the regiment left for a battle from which many might never return, but when the conversation took such a turn that George's fidelity to Amelia became obvious, old Osborne began to insult both of them. At that point Dobbin became angry, informed him of the marriage, and stalked out of the room. That night, Osborne sealed up all his mementos from George's childhood, obliterated his name from the family Bible, and wrote George out of his will.

In Brighton, Dobbin does his best to be cheerful company despite his feelings about Amelia's marriage. He tries to protect her feelings by downplaying the dangers of the impending trip to Belgium. Amelia knows nothing of his ardor and thinks him rather clumsy and backward. George, the beneficiary of so many acts of friendship, becomes furious with Dobbin when he receives the

letter from his father disinheriting him, arguing that he never would have gotten married in the first place had Dobbin not encouraged it and insisting that he could not possibly survive on his officer's salary. Becky, meanwhile, understands Dobbin perfectly, but fears him because he is totally immune to her wiles and manipulations. Becky and George often flirt with one another, leaving Amelia to suffer silently and Rawdon to fume at his wife's gaiety. When the announcement of the departure comes, the wives decide to accompany their husbands, though Dobbin thinks it is a mistake to do so.

Matilda Crawley and her entourage are also in Brighton, and she has come completely under the control of Martha Crawley, who not only kills her with kindness, but also makes sure that she never has an opportunity to forgive or even contact Rawdon and Becky. She is even on the verge of dismissing the household staff and replacing them with her own daughters. When Rev. Bute Crawley falls from a horse and breaks his collarbone, Martha is called home and the entire household breathes a sigh of relief. Becky takes the opportunity to seek reconciliation, first by approaching Briggs, the housekeeper. She dictates a letter for Rawdon to write to his aunt seeking reconciliation. Matilda sees through the ruse, but briefly meets with Rawdon, though she refuses to see Becky. She then writes to them telling them not to seek another audience, and orders Briggs to tell Martha that her services will no longer be required either.

Upon returning to London, George hosts an opulent banquet for his new wife and their friends Dobbin and Jos. When Dobbin chides him for the expense of the meal, which George surely cannot afford, he insists that he and his wife will live well whatever the coffers may contain. He then proceeds to ignore her all evening long. Amelia goes to visit her parents and soon realizes that, though she has only been married for little more than a week, she misses her old life and has serious doubts about her new one. George is living the life of a dandy about town, gambling and carousing, and withdraws every penny he owns in order to finance his lifestyle and prepare for the coming voyage to the Continent. He generously tells Amelia to buy whatever she needs for the trip, but pays for her clothes with checks he is unable to cover.

Amelia then accompanies George as he joins his company, and is warmly received by all, including Major O'Dowd and his wife. Dobbin quietly admires her from afar and is glad at the way she is made a fuss of by all around her. Jos accompanies the ladies as they follow the regiment to Brussels in preparation for the battle of Waterloo. Few acknowledge the seriousness of the coming encounter; most become absorbed in the balls and parties. Jos tells anyone who will listen that he intends to join Wellington's army, though few believe him. Meanwhile, what remains of George's money is running through his fingers like water. One night he gives a large and expensive dinner for Lord and Lady Bareacres and their friends, who eat George's food without compunction while treating Amelia with great rudeness, much to Dobbin's displeasure. Soon Rawdon and Becky Crawley arrive, and Becky quickly works her way into the highest circles of Brussels society. She, too, ignores Amelia, though Rawdon does not. Before the day is out, however, their society games are interrupted by the sound of cannon in the distance.

Brussels immediately flies into a panic as rumors of Napoleon's triumphs spread. The Belgians flee the field and bring back highly-embellished tales of the slaughter of the British troops. Jos, trembling with fear, forgets his boastful intention of joining Wellington's army and prepares to fly from the city. When he insists on taking Amelia with him, Mrs. O'Dowd refuses and bravely cares for her charge. For those who intend to flee, horses are not to be found. Becky, however, owns some, and is determined to make the best bargain possible. Lady Bareacres, who had treated Becky with great disdain, offers a small fortune to purchase the horses, but Becky refuses, delighting in the humiliation of her arrogant rival. When Jos arrives, however, Becky strikes a hard bargain, figuring

that if Rawdon dies, she will now have quite a little nest egg for herself. Meanwhile, soldiers returning from the field bring better news – the British have turned back the French advance. Good news or bad, however, Amelia is still desperate for word about George. When a wounded boy from their regiment arrives in a cart, he assures them that both George and Dobbin acquitted themselves well in the field, and that both were safe, though Dobbin was wounded. Becky, meanwhile, has in her possession the bouquet and love note that George had brought her, and muses how these simple things would give her the means to destroy Amelia (which she has no desire to do), and considers what a worthless cad George really is. She, of course, has no more love for Rawdon than George does for Amelia. The next day, the British engage Napoleon's main army at Waterloo. Jos flies in earnest this time. The British are victorious, but George is killed in the climactic engagement.

Back home in England, Miss Crawley has negated her will, and the vultures are circling to gain her favor. Becky writes frequently in Rawdon's name, sending trophies of war that she purchases from souvenir sellers in the streets of Paris, but the old woman still holds a grudge against her favorite nephew for marrying someone so lowborn. Pitt Crawley the younger and Lady Jane Sheepshanks, his intended, also determine to ingratiate themselves with the dying invalid. Lady Jane and her mother, Lady Southdown, call on her, intending to convert the old reprobate to Christianity before her death if at all possible despite Pitt's warning that such a frontal assault on his aunt is not wise. The visit goes well, and Pitt and his fiancée make a good impression, though Lady Southdown does not despite the fact that she refrains from mentioning religion. Miss Crawley tells Pitt he can bring Jane around any time, but that he should leave her mother home. She thereafter visits often, and becomes a favorite of the old lady.

Insanely jealous as a result of these attentions given to a potential rival, Mrs. Bute Crawley determines to make inroads in the old woman's affections by sending her son James for a visit. Miss Crawley treats James well, much to the annoyance of Pitt, who conspires to get James drunk, then tells him that Miss Crawley is a true republican who desires her guests to do exactly as they please in her presence. James proceeds to behave badly indeed, topping all off by smoking his pipe in his bedroom, spreading an odor that Miss Crawley could not abide throughout the house. The next morning, he is summarily dismissed, having lost all hope of gaining his aunt's favor. Meanwhile, Becky is the toast of Paris, gaining the favor of the French (especially the men) and earning the animosity of the English (especially the women). She and Rawdon live expensively, and she soon bears him a son. When word of this reaches Miss Crawley in England, she is furious at Becky's success, both in society and in motherhood, and insists that Pitt and Jane Sheepshanks should marry immediately, after which she leaves her entire fortune to them when she should pass away.

When word of George's death reaches England, his sisters are inconsolable, and his father, despite his efforts to excuse his behavior toward his son, regrets his refusal to reconcile with him. Even a letter written before his death and forwarded by Dobbin does not produce forgiveness in the old man's heart, though Osborne does go so far as to order a monument to his son's death to be placed in the church. Soon he makes a pilgrimage to Brussels to see his son's grave and the battlefield on which he fell. He passes Amelia's carriage by chance, but refuses to acknowledge her, and when Dobbin intercedes, he swears undying hatred for the woman who led his son astray, despite the fact that she carries his grandchild in her womb. Amelia, meanwhile, is sick with grief and Dobbin is at a loss about how to care for her. When the child is born, however, she revives. Dobbin is named the godfather of little Georgy, and showers him with presents. Amelia is grateful, but is oblivious to the profound love that drives Dobbin's actions. Finally, he tells her that he plans to go away, and that she must write to him often. At this point he says nothing of his destination, but he plans on taking up a post in India.

Rawdon leaves the army soon after the end of the war, and while Becky is making a great impression on Paris society, he is bored to tears with French aristocrats and seeks the company of a different sort of society. In short, Rawdon makes his money by gambling. Debts continue to pile up, however, and when old Miss Crawley dies, Becky sends her husband back to England; Rawdon, however, owing more debts in England than in Paris, goes to Brussels instead and continues his gambling pursuits. Becky leaves her child, little Rawdon, to whom she had never paid much attention, with her French maid and travels to England, where she succeeds in settling Rawdon's debts for shillings on the pound. Thus four years later, Rawdon and Becky are back in London, still living rather well on no income. They rent a house that had been purchased by Raggles, Miss Crawley's butler, who had done well for himself in retirement as a greengrocer. His gratitude to the Crawley family led him to let them live in the house for nothing (which eventually ruined him and landed him in debtors' prison). Furthermore, Rawdon and Becky resolutely refuse to pay any of the merchants, tradesmen, or servants who do them service, though they live lavishly and entertain their friends and relatives in the same manner. Becky, unsurprisingly, is shunned by female society, though men continue to be attracted to her, while Rawdon leaves the management of their lives completely in her hands. The next step is to arrange a reconciliation with Pitt, the heir to the family fortune, and his new wife Lady Jane. Pitt is willing to reconcile and Jane is sympathetic, but at this point the correspondence produces no financial benefits. Becky soon decides that she needs a companion to protect her against aggressive suitors, the worst of whom is Lord Steyne, a wealthy man who won his title at the gambling table and is known to be crude and lascivious. Little Rawdon, meanwhile, continues to be ignored by his mother and spoiled by his father, causing him to befriend the latter and worship the former. Becky treats her husband kindly despite feeling nothing but scorn for his weakness, and he increasingly spends his time with his old regimental friends while leaving his wife to her wealthy and influential male companions. One day during a walk in the park, Rawdon and his son encounter old Sedley and young Georgy; the two boys, who are much the same age, begin to play together.

The author then fills the reader in about the subsequent histories of other main characters in the narrative. Jos, after his flight from Brussels, returns to India, bragging interminably about the important role he played in the Duke of Wellington's army. He does manage to arrange for the care of his parents, since old Sedley's fortunes never revive following his bankruptcy. Amelia quietly raises her son in her parents' home, though she and her mother have a rift over the care given the child that never quite heals. Meanwhile, all the men in the neighborhood fall in love with her; the local parson even proposes, though she kindly refuses because she insists that she could never love anyone except her dear George, for whom she continues to wear mourning garb. Dobbin, who like Jos is in India, uses a considerable quantity of his own money to bury George, pay his debts, and set aside a sum for Amelia's maintenance, all unknown to her. When old Sedley accuses him of mismanaging George's estate, Dobbin finally tells him the truth about George's finances, and the old man plagues him no more. Amelia writes to Dobbin a few times each year, mostly telling him about little Georgy's progress, and he sends her and the boy frequent presents. She, however, is unable to see what is clear to all those around her – that Dobbin is in love with her, and has been for a long time. Georgy grows up brilliant and proud – indeed much like his father – and Dobbin arranges to pay for his education. Then one day Dobbin's sisters bring Amelia amazing news: Dobbin is preparing to marry Glorvina, the sister of Peggy O'Dowd. Amelia is overjoyed for him, but at the same time wonders why she doesn't feel quite as happy as she should.

Mrs. Bute Crawley, disappointed in her hope of receiving her aunt's fortune, makes do as best she can, feigning riches even if she has none in order to gain for her daughters a place in society.

Bute's brother, Sir Pitt, now approaching eighty, is more crotchety than ever, and is allowing the estate to fall into ruin. His butler's daughter has become virtual mistress of Queen's Crawley, and a source of great scandal in the neighborhood. Betsy Horrocks even fancies that she will become Lady Crawley one day, though Sir Pitt laughs at her pretensions. One night when Sir Pitt is taken ill, Bute and his wife rush to the house and find Betsy trying to steal the old man's valuables. They promptly send both her and her father away, bearing all their hopes of preferment with them.

Sir Pitt never does recover from his illness, and retains little of his former energy. Pitt and Lady Jane, along with Lady Southdown, move into Queen's Crawley and take over management of the estate. Pitt finds the estate encumbered with debts and lawsuits of all kinds, which he promptly proceeds to sort out. Lady Southdown dominates her weak and pliant daughter and son-in-law, while Lady Jane gives all her attention to her children. When Sir Pitt dies, however, and his eldest son comes into possession of estate and title, he becomes a new man, determined to reconcile with the various branches of the family. When he invites Rawdon and Becky to the funeral, Lady Southdown objects in the strongest possible terms. The new Sir Pitt stands firm, however, and calls her bluff when she threatens to leave the house. Becky, meanwhile, is still scheming and conniving; she has hired Briggs, the former companion of Miss Crawley, as her companion, but instead of paying her, borrows money from her. She is thrilled when she receives the letter of invitation to the funeral, seeing this as a great opportunity to advance her husband's fortunes in the world and ingratiate herself with the compliant Lady Jane.

Rawdon and Becky go to old Sir Pitt's funeral and promptly fawn on the new heir and heiress to gain their approval and acceptance. Becky is readily befriended by Lady Jane, and even gains the recognition of Lady Southdown by reading her tracts, listening to her sermons, and submitting to her medications. Rawdon actually begins to treat Pitt with some civility. They hardly give their son a thought until they return to London after some weeks. Back in London, old Osborne is lonely and miserable. After George had refused to court Miss Swartz, he had made the attempt himself, only to be brusquely refused. Maria Osborne had married Frederick Bullock, Esq., and as a consequence of coming up in the world, generally ignores her family. Jane, the elder daughter, is trapped in the life of a spinster; any attempt at romance is squelched by her father, who wants her to remain as his housekeeper. One day, however, Jane encounters little Georgy in the park and is transfixed by his sweetness and beauty. She promptly reports the encounter to her father, who begins to consider his duty to his grandson.

Meanwhile, Colonel O'Dowd's regiment is stationed at Madras, in India. Lady O'Dowd dominates the menfolk, and she and her sister Glorvina are determined to match the latter up with Major Dobbin. Glorvina is an incurable flirt who has gone about with men from Ireland to Bombay, and Dobbin has absolutely no interest in her. This does not stop rumors from spreading, one of which reaches his sisters in England, and through them Amelia, who writes a congratulatory letter to Dobbin on his engagement, which sets his mind even more strongly against Glorvina. When he receives a letter from his sister telling him that Amelia is about to marry a certain Rev. Binny, he requests an immediate leave and departs the next day for England.

The new Sir Pitt is busy renovating the Crawley house in London, and Becky takes the opportunity to flirt with him and get him to spend time alone with her in order to try to get money out of him – an endeavor in which she is almost entirely unsuccessful, for the fiscally conservative Pitt is ever aware of the huge debts and entanglements left him by his father. The closer relationship with the head of the family earns for Becky some credit with her landlord and her servants, who now have more confidence in her promise of future financial benefits. At the same time, Becky is becoming increasingly estranged from her young son Rawdon; while his father cherishes and spoils

him, his mother ignores him and thrashes him whenever he interferes with her schemes and flirtations. She enters into a serious flirtation with Lord Steyne, from whom she has already received many presents and who hopes to receive from her something in return. When the family goes to Queen's Crawley for Christmas, young Rawdon is pampered by his aunt and uncle and enjoys privileges he has never known at home, but both Rawdon and Becky fail to pry any money from their tight-fisted relative.

Sir Pitt, having engaged in the task of rebuilding his dilapidated estate, now seeks to rebuild the family name. He treats his tenants with kindness and consideration, supports local charities, is hospitable to his neighbors and invites the local noble families often to dinner at Queen's Crawley, begins to attend the Established Church while avoiding Dissenter chapels, and soon is elected to Parliament. When he goes so far as to arrange to take his wife and daughters to county balls, Lady Southdown, unable to tolerate such worldly behavior, returns to her home in Brighton and is missed by no one. Becky quietly encourages his ambitions, and he soon becomes convinced that she is the only person in the world who truly understands and appreciates him. The entire family gathers for Christmas on the estate, with the highlights being rat-hunting in the barn and fox-hunting in the meadows. Relations between Becky and Lady Jane begin to cool, however, as the former scorns the latter for her sweetness and simplicity, while Lady Jane becomes jealous of the extent to which Becky attracts the attention of her husband, as well as all the other men. Becky even manages to arrange for Lord Steyne to notice the new M.P. Rawdon, meanwhile, is increasingly isolated and lonely in the wake of his wife's brilliant achievements in society; he lives more and more at his club, spending time at home only to be with his son.

Amelia, on the other hand, is living in poverty, scraping by with enough to support her parents and her son. Young Georgy is doing very well in school, and the schoolmaster, Rev. Binny, pays constant attention to Amelia. The Osbornes increasingly cast covetous eyes on the young boy, and soon begin to invite him to visit them. Soon what Amelia fears the most happens – old Osborne offers to take the boy into his home and make him his heir, leaving Amelia with a small allowance and an empty heart. But how can she refuse advancement for her son? She angrily rejects Osborne's offer of money in exchange for her son, but when her father's speculations fail again and Jos is tardy in sending his accustomed aid, she sells her shawl in order to get Christmas presents for Georgy. When her mother discovers what she has done, she rebukes her for her selfishness, and Amelia begins to realize that her only alternative may be to accept Osborne's offer.

The author then gives background information on Lord Steyne. He is a crude man who has married above his station, having gained the hand of a woman from an old and prominent Catholic noble family. He treats her terribly, engages openly in a series of affairs, and in short pleases himself with no concern whatever for the opinions of others. His eldest son has been committed to an asylum, but none of his bad qualities stop the nobility of England from attending his parties whenever they have the privilege of being invited. Becky has cultivated Lord Steyne to the extent that, when she is finally presented at Court to George IV through the good graces of Lady Jane, she wears stunning diamonds presented to her by the randy old nobleman, though she tells her husband that they were rented for the occasion. Later Lord Steyne visits Becky, and she tells him that she owes money to her servants and others. Steyne gives her a large note on his bank, and later invites her to dinner at his home. Instead of using the money to pay her debts, however, Becky buys Briggs a dress instead of paying her, then makes token payments to her landlord and other creditors before taking the larger part of Lord Steyne's money and secreting it away in a small chest where she keeps her diamonds. Lady Steyne and her daughter both object strongly to having Colonel and Mrs. Crawley to dinner, but Steyne bullies them into submission and the invitations are sent. At the

dinner, Rawdon is awkward and largely silent, but Becky is in her element, charming the men and infuriating the women. The latter snub her fiercely, but the men gather around her like moths drawn to a candle as she converses wittily and plays and sings after dinner.

As the Sedleys sink deeper into poverty, Amelia seeks sources of income. She tries painting, but no one is willing to purchase her pathetic efforts; she tries offering her services as a tutor of young ladies, but gets no response. Faced with the unthinkable – taking old Osborne’s money and turning young Georgy over to him – she even considers the unbearable – marry the tutor Rev. Binny who has expressed so much interest in giving her and her son a home. But such a decision would constitute disloyalty to the memory of her husband, so she rejects that option as well. She writes begging Jos to renew his support, but does not realize that the money is still being sent, but is flowing into the hands of a moneylender in London to whom her father is indebted. When old Sedley tells her the truth about the money coming from Jos, Amelia falls into despair, realizing that her only choice is to give the boy up to his grandfather. Her broken heart suffers even more when Georgy anticipates gleefully his new situation, and soon becomes haughty in his enjoyment of wealth he has never known before. Old Osborne, meanwhile, revels in triumph over his old friend Sedley and his daughter-in-law, and refuses her entry into his house.

Becky’s triumph at Lord Steyne’s party opens doors to other aristocratic houses, and soon she is frequenting the soirees of the highborn, and they are often seen in her home as well. Though she seems to have attained all for which she wished (except perhaps wealth), Becky soon finds herself bored to tears; the wealthy are no more stimulating than the average man on the street. But how did the Crawleys pay for all these dinners? Becky wheedled and cajoled all manner of assistance from her wealthy friends, scrimped and saved in running the household, and paid none of her creditors. Soon young Rawdon is sent away to public school under the patronage of Lord Steyne; his father misses him immensely, his mother not at all. Financial, social, and familial differences are increasingly driving Becky and Rawdon apart. When Lord Steyne finds out how Becky used the money he had given her earlier, he confronts her with the truth, and she promptly covers herself with another lie, blaming the misappropriation of funds on her husband. Becky, upon Lord Steyne’s recommendation, immediately goes home and dismisses Briggs, but not before providing her with a far superior position. Rawdon worries, however, that the economy of going without a companion would leave his wife in danger of scandal or worse; their friends concur, and insist that someone must accompany her on her travels around London and when gentlemen call at her home. Lord Steyne himself, whose presence could compromise any woman, is viewed as a particular danger. Becky promises Sir Pitt to comply with his wishes to protect the family name, but does nothing, though soon Rawdon gives up his clubs and begins to stay home when she is home and go with her whenever she goes out.

After a particularly marvelous evening for Becky at a party at Lord Steyne’s, however, Rawdon is confronted by three bailiffs and taken away to prison for debt. He writes Becky the next morning and asks her to arrange for the 170 pounds needed to secure his release. Becky writes back, bemoaning the fact that the creditor would not accept partial payment and insisting that they had nothing to pawn of adequate value while going on and on about the compliments she had received from the guests at the previous night’s dinner; she does, however, promise that Lord Steyne will provide the money the following morning. Rawdon, furious at Becky’s careless approach to his plight, writes to Sir Pitt and Lady Jane, and the latter comes quickly to deliver him. Rawdon from this point on determines to become a better man. When he gets home, however, he finds Becky alone with Lord Steyne, wearing the jewels the old lecher had given her. Steyne, fearing entrapment, attempts to leave, but Rawdon strikes him, then insists that Becky take off all her jewelry, which he

then casts in Steyne's face. Rawdon then marches Becky upstairs, demands her keys, and discovers all the money she had received and concealed. He determines to return the money to Steyne, pay Briggs the money owed her, and repay any other debts that can be covered. Rawdon then leaves the house, slamming the door on his way out.

Rawdon proceeds directly to the home of his brother Sir Pitt. He tells him what has happened and informs him that he is going to challenge Lord Steyne to a duel. Should he be killed, he wants Pitt and Jane to care for little Rawdon, knowing that his mother has no interest in doing so. He never wants to see Becky again. After locating an old army friend to serve as his second, he issues his challenge to the presumed defiler of his wife.

What is Becky to do now, with all her schemes in tatters? It helps very little that the French maid secured by Lord Steyne has walked out, absconding with many of her mistress' valuables in the process. She wakes the next morning to find the servants in rebellion and poor Raggles, her landlord, bemoaning the fact that her years of unpaid bills have ruined him. Becky then goes to see Pitt, weaves a fanciful tale of securing a governorship for Rawdon through Lord Steyne, and begs Pitt to seek reconciliation between her and her husband. As she kneels at his feet and kisses his hand, Lady Jane walks in and insists that this evil woman never be admitted to her house again, or she and her children will leave it forever. After she stalks from the room, Pitt agrees to try to find Rawdon and bring about a reconciliation.

When Lord Steyne's solicitor locates Rawdon, he confirms the offer of the governorship – Becky had not been making it up after all – and insists on the woman's innocence. Both he and Rawdon's second urge him to forego the duel, which he reluctantly agrees to do. Despite his hatred for Lord Steyne, Rawdon eventually accepts the governorship of Coventry Island, where he acquits himself well. Becky disappears from London without anyone knowing where she has gone. Little Rawdon, meanwhile, receives regular letters and presents from his father and is looked after by his aunt Lady Jane.

Back at the Osborne residence, Georgy's grandfather is determined to make a gentleman of him, though he largely succeeds in doing little more than spoiling the child and making him arrogant to those around him and obnoxious to the guests in the house. He treats his mother with condescension and seems to miss her very little if at all. Poor Amelia dotes on her boy and cherishes the little tokens he sometimes brings her. Old Osborne sends Georgy to a fancy tutor, but his learning makes him more, not less, domineering toward everyone he meets, including his grandfather, who lavishes on him the results of the guilt he still feels for rejecting the boy's father. Amelia occupies herself caring for her invalid mother, but when the old woman finally succumbs, Georgy feels no sorrow, only complaining that her death will prevent him from attending a play that evening. Amelia thence must take upon herself the care of her father, a man bitter at his fate and despised by his former benefactor Osborne, who takes great joy in sending him an occasional charitable pittance while openly scorning him before his grandson.

Then one day two strange men appear at the school to see young Georgy – they are Jos and Dobbin, returned from India. Dobbin had planned on leaving as soon as he heard of Amelia's impending marriage, but had been taken ill with a fever from which the doctor thought him unlikely to recover. But recover he eventually did, though he was surprised to find Jos, his tour of duty finished, on the same ship bound for England. Dobbin, overjoyed to find from Jos that Amelia had no plans to marry Mr. Binny, had convinced him of the importance of caring for Amelia and her child, knowing nothing of Georgy's capture by his grandfather. Before visiting Georgy at his school, Dobbin goes first to see Amelia, who is overjoyed to see him and hear that he, too, is not married.

She speaks of nothing but Georgy, however, and Dobbin soon gets the impression that her love for her husband has not waned, and wonders whether he will ever be free to express his devotion to her.

Jos takes his time seeing to his own comforts before visiting his family, but under Dobbin's prodding finally makes provision for Amelia and his father, securing a serviceable house for them. Amelia leaves most of the furniture with her landlord's daughter, but takes with her the piano that Dobbin had purchased for her, rescuing it from the debacle of her father's bankruptcy. She treasures it because she thinks George had been her benefactor, but she eventually realizes that Dobbin instead had comforted her by that generous gift. When she thanks Dobbin, he professes his love for her, but she insists that she can never love anyone but George, though she is happy to have him as her friend forever. Dobbin, needless to say, is both grieved and gratified. Amelia then settles down to her new life. Jos spends all his time with his retired army friends from India, and Georgy plagues all around him with his arrogance, speaking rudely to servants and ridiculing his uncle Jos and his teacher. Only Dobbin can control the boy, and the two become close friends. Old John Sedley's health continues to decline, however, and soon he joins his wife in death, mourned by none but his immediate family and scorned even in death by his former friend, old Osborne. The old man gradually softens, however, under the ministrations of Dobbin, who is Georgy's godfather. He even goes so far as to seek reconciliation with Amelia, but a seizure carries him off before he is able to do so. He leaves Amelia a bequest of five hundred pounds, restores Georgy to her care, and makes Dobbin the executor of his will. Since she now has money and Georgy has a large inheritance, Amelia suddenly finds friends and relations emerging from the woodwork – people who had shunned her for a decade or more when she was poor.

When summer comes, Jos, Amelia, Dobbin, and Georgy travel to the Continent and tour the Rhineland. Amelia is exposed to opera for the first time and is enraptured by its beauty. Gradually, during the tour, her attitude toward Dobbin begins almost imperceptibly to change. The travelers stop at the small German principality of Pumpernickel, where the author takes the time to satirize the pretensions of the minor German nobility. There Amelia is well-received, Jos puts on his usual airs, and Dobbin takes Georgy under his wing. One night during festivities surrounding the marriage of the crown prince of the place, Georgy wanders off to a gambling establishment. There he encounters our old friend Becky, who is making her way by her wits. She had left England after being rebuffed by all who knew her. Rawdon had given her a small allowance before leaving for Coventry Island on the condition that she never approach him again, and young Rawdon had been left in the care of Sir Pitt and Lady Jane, whom he came to view as his parents, and whose heir he became. Becky, meanwhile, is ostracized by the women and leered at by the men, and begins to miss her faithful husband. Wherever she goes, someone appears to enlighten the denizens about her past history and explode her pretensions. She soon yields to the blandishments of drink and gambling, mixing in the most disreputable parts of society as she moves from city to city. In Rome, she meets Lord Steyne, who threatens to kill her if she does not vacate the city. She ignores the threat, but he soon dies in the arms of another mistress, who proceeds to rob him of everything on which she can get her hands.

After meeting Georgy and Jos in the gambling hall, Becky seeks to renew her acquaintance with her old friends. She easily convinces the gullible Jos that she has been much put-upon and persecuted, and he then goes to Amelia and pours out to her the narrative of Becky's troubles. She, naïve and compassionate, insists on visiting her immediately, though Dobbin has serious doubts about the wisdom of such a step. Poor Amelia, of course, sympathizes with Becky, especially when Becky circulates the lie that her son had been torn from her loving arms by his cruel father. While Becky is soliciting Amelia's sympathy, Dobbin is downstairs waiting for her and hears a

conversation between two of her neighbors; their comments clearly demonstrate that Becky is still up to her old tricks. Amelia is fooled completely, however, and she goes home to Jos and easily convinces him that they should invite Becky to stay with them while they are in Pumpernickel. Dobbin nearly explodes, but Amelia chides him for lacking charity toward her oldest friend and storms from the room. Poor William, who knows that Becky had tried to seduce George before his death and had nearly succeeded, thus ruins fifteen years of patient work trying to build Amelia's trust in him. His attempts to reason with Jos produce no better results. Soon Becky arrives with her baggage, and before long is even flirting with Georgy. Dobbin does not come for dinner that night, but is busy finding all he can about Becky's history; he soon discovers the truth. But when he tries the next day to warn Amelia, she will hear none of it and angrily dismisses him. Before he goes, Dobbin opens his heart, tells her that she is incapable of the depth of love and devotion he has accorded her, and says goodbye. He intends to leave and never return. Becky, who overheard the entire conversation, scribbles a quick note to Dobbin, telling him to delay his departure so that she may have the opportunity of patching things up between him and Amelia, but he tears it up in a fury. Georgy, meanwhile, is heartbroken about losing the only real father he has ever known.

Becky soon exercises her brilliant social skills again and is surrounded by the cream of Pumpernickel society. In conversation in the house, she quickly becomes Dobbin's most ardent champion, softening Amelia considerably in the process, but the poor widow grows increasingly restless and unhappy over the absence of her dear and faithful friend. When she takes long walks with Georgy, they speak of nothing but Dobbin and what a great benefactor he had been in their time of poverty and suffering. Finally Becky loses patience with the little weakling and tells her straight out of George's offer to run away with her a week after his marriage to Amelia. Amelia refuses to believe it until Becky shows her the letter. In a sudden rush, she realizes what a fool she has been and writes desperately to Dobbin to beg him to return. Two days later Dobbin arrives, and the reconciliation is sufficient to satisfy even the most romantic of readers. The two soon marry, with Becky discreetly absenting herself from the ceremony that she had helped to bring about.

The author then briefly summarizes the events in the lives of other characters. Glorvina settles down with another officer from the regiment, Sir Pitt loses his seat in Parliament with the passage of the Reform Bill, and Lady Jane and Amelia become great friends, as do young George and young Rawdon. Dobbin and Amelia have a daughter, upon whom they both dote. Jos remains on the Continent, and Becky remains close to him, manipulating him to the point that he takes out an insurance policy on his life with her as the beneficiary. He dies three months later despite Dobbin's warning that he must break all ties with the little schemer. His speculations leave Becky little to inherit, however. When Rawdon Crawley dies of yellow fever on Coventry Island and Sir Pitt follows soon thereafter, young Rawdon becomes the heir of Queen's Crawley. The families refuse to have anything to do with Becky besides a small allowance from her son, now Sir Rawdon, but she manages to survive quite handsomely, though no one knows quite how. In the end, she gains a reputation for works of charity, and all those around her pity her as a most injured and put-upon woman.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Becky Sharp – A poor but ambitious girl who is determined to rise in society by her wits using any conceivable means. She succeeds, but in the process alienates everyone around her and is left virtually friendless.

- Amelia Sedley – Becky’s best friend in school, she is the perfect foil for her brilliant companion – sweet, innocent, and naïve. She marries George Osborne, then after he dies finds comfort in the arms of faithful William Dobbin.
- Joseph (Jos) Sedley – Amelia’s older brother, he is a vain and pompous man who has returned from India with considerable wealth. Becky tries to make him fall in love with her and succeeds, then leaves him for better prospects, eventually returning to him prior to his death.
- George Osborne – Sedley’s godson, he is a worthless young man with whom Amelia is in love. He marries her, but seeks a liaison with Becky, though he dies at Waterloo before he can consummate his romance.
- William Dobbin – Osborne’s best friend, he is quiet and shy, and has more integrity than most of the rest of the cast of characters put together. He loves Amelia, but refuses to express his love because she is first engaged, then later married, to George. The two marry at the end of the novel.
- Sir Pitt Crawley – A crude and lecherous old nobleman who hires Becky as a governess.
- Lady Crawley – Sir Pitt’s second wife, she was the pretty daughter of an ironmonger when he married her, but she quickly rejected her old companions as beneath her, then found that she was not accepted among the aristocracy because of her low birth. After producing two children and losing her beauty, she lives a miserable life, alternately beaten and ignored by her husband.
- Mr. Pitt Crawley – Sir Pitt’s elder son, he is the only member of the family who acts like a nobleman. He is stiff and formal, and when he is at home even his father moderates his crude ways.
- Rawdon Crawley – Sir Pitt’s younger son, he is a handsome wastrel and ne’er-do-well, and thus beloved of his father and his aunt. He secretly marries Becky, but the two soon tire of one another, though he is a loyal husband and loving father.
- Matilda Crawley – Sir Pitt’s sister, she is wealthy, and in consequence is fawned upon by all the members of the family.
- Bute Crawley – The brother of Sir Pitt, he is an Anglican rector who, quite in the fashion of the day, spends his time seeking amusement like any other country squire. His penchant for gambling keeps him constantly in debt, while his patient wife scrimps, saves, and writes his sermons.
- Martha Crawley – The rector’s wife, she is suspicious of Becky’s intentions and resents her popularity with the men of the family. She schemes constantly to gain favor with her wealthy relatives. In some places in the novel she is called Barbara.

- Arabella Briggs – Matilda Crawley’s companion, she instantly becomes jealous when Becky becomes the old lady’s favorite, but agrees to serve as Becky’s companion when the old woman dies.
- John Sedley – Amelia’s father, he is a stockbroker who is ruined when the market falls at the return of Napoleon from Elba.
- John Osborne - George’s father, he rejects Sedley, his former mentor, when the latter loses his money. He spurns both George and Amelia when the two marry, but later forces Amelia to turn her son over to him.
- Georgy Osborne - George and Amelia’s son, he is virtually adopted by his grandfather and sees little of his mother during his growing years.
- Rhoda Swartz – An heiress from the West Indies who is befriended by the Osborne sisters, she had gone to school with Amelia and Becky. John Osborne wants George to marry her because of her fortune, and later considers marrying her himself.
- Lady Jane Sheepshanks – The fiancée (and later wife) of Pitt Crawley the younger, she is a kind and gentle young woman.
- Lord Steyne – A crude and lascivious man who won his title at a gaming table; Becky flirts with him in search of financial benefits. When Rawdon catches them together, he leaves her never to return.
- Michael O’Dowd - Dobbin’s commanding officer, he is a fine leader of men and a kindly gentleman.
- Peggy O’Dowd - O’Dowd’s wife, she is an inveterate matchmaker.
- Glorvina – Mrs. O’Dowd’s sister (sometimes mistakenly called Glorvina O’Dowd), she attempts to get Dobbin to marry her, but without success.
- Betsy Horrocks – The daughter of Sir Pitt’s butler, she runs his household after the death of his second wife and mistakenly believes that she will become the third Lady Crawley.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Some people consider fairs immoral altogether, and eschew such, with their servants and families: very likely they are right. But persons who think otherwise, and are of a lazy, or a benevolent, or a sarcastic mood, may perhaps like to step in for half-an-hour, and look at the performances.” (Prologue, p.1)

“Revenge may be wicked, but it’s natural. I’m no angel.” (Becky, ch.2, p.12)

“All the world used her ill, said this young misanthropist, and we may be pretty certain that persons whom all the world treats ill deserve entirely the treatment they get. The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face.” (ch.2, p.13)

“A woman with fair opportunities, and without an absolute hump, may marry WHOM SHE LIKES. Only let us be thankful that the darlings are like the beasts of the field, and don’t know their own power. They would overcome us entirely if they did.” (ch.4, p.29)

“Are not there little chapters in everybody’s life, that seem to be nothing, and yet affect all the rest of the history?” (ch.6, p.50-51)

“Such people there are living and flourishing in the world – Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful too, mere quacks and fools: and it was to combat and expose such as those, no doubt, that Laughter was made.” (ch.8, p.76)

“A title and a coach and four are toys more precious than happiness in Vanity Fair.” (ch.9, p.78)

“What’s the good of being in Parliament if you must pay your debts?” (Sir Pitt, ch.9, p.82)

“It is in the nature and instinct of some women. Some are made to scheme, and some to love.” (ch.12, p.109)

“The major part of the Osborne family, who had not, in fifteen years, been able to get up a hearty regard for Amelia Sedley, became as fond of Miss Swartz in the course of a single evening as the most romantic advocate of friendship at first sight could desire.” (ch.21, p.196)

“She generally succeeded in making her husband share all her opinions, whether melancholy or cheerful.” (ch.25, p.246)

“Darkness came down on the field and city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.” (ch.32, p.323)

“Old Osborne did not speculate much on the mingled nature of his feelings, and how his instinct and selfishness were combating together. He firmly believed that everything he did was right, that he ought on all occasions to have his own way – and like the sting of a wasp or serpent his hatred rushed out armed and poisonous against anything like opposition. He was proud of his hatred as of everything else. Always to be right, always to trample forward, and never to doubt, are not these the great qualities with which dullness takes the lead in the world?” (ch.35, p.355)

“Almost all men who came near her loved her; though no doubt they would be at a loss to tell you why. She was not brilliant, nor witty, nor wise over much, nor extraordinarily handsome. But wherever she went she touched and charmed every one of the male sex, as invariably as she awakened the scorn and incredulity of her own sisterhood. I think it was her weakness which was her principal charm: - a kind of sweet submission and softness, which seemed to appeal to each man she met for his sympathy and protection.” (ch.38, p.388-389)

“I know no sort of lying which is more frequent in *Vanity Fair* than this; and it may be remarked how people who practise it take credit to themselves for their hypocrisy, and fancy that they are exceedingly virtuous and praiseworthy, because they are able to deceive the world with regard to the extent of their means.” (ch.39, p.397)

“I have passed beyond it, because I have brains and almost all the rest of the world are fools.” (Becky, ch.41, p.424)

“So these two [Dobbin and Glorvina] were each exemplifying the Vanity of this life, and each longing for what he or she could not get.” (ch.43, p.439)

“Delilah had imprisoned him, and cut his hair off too.” (ch.45, p.459)

“The hidden and awful Wisdom which apportions the destinies of mankind is pleased so to humiliate and cast down the tender, good, and wise; and to set up the selfish, or foolish, or the wicked. Oh, be humble, my brother, in your prosperity! Be gentle with those who are less lucky, if not more deserving. Think, what right have you to be scornful, whose virtue is a deficiency of temptation, whose success may be a chance, whose rank maybe an ancestor’s accident, whose prosperity is very likely a satire.” (ch.57, p.576)

“And so William was at liberty to look and long: as the poor boy at school who has no money may sigh after the contents of the tart-woman’s tray.” (ch.59, p.603)

“Poor Dobbin; poor old William! That unlucky word had undone the work of many a year – the long laborious edifice of a life of love and constancy.” (ch.66, p.674)

“Amelia stood scared and silent as William thus suddenly broke the chain by which she held him, and declared his independence and superiority. He had placed himself at her feet so long that the poor little woman had been accustomed to trample upon him. She didn’t wish to marry him, but she wished to keep him. She wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all.” (ch.66, p.680)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* is subtitled “A Novel Without A Hero.” Do you believe this to be an accurate assessment? Why or why not? If you agree, explain why the author may have chosen to write a story lacking a narrative center. If not, argue why your choice should be considered the hero (or heroine) of the novel.
2. The title of William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* is taken from an episode in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Read the episode in Bunyan’s allegory and discuss the appropriateness of the title chosen by Thackeray. In what ways does the title fit the central themes of the novel?

3. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the two central female characters, Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley, are foils. In what ways is this true? How do the differences in their characters bring out the salient traits of each? Use specific examples from the novel to support your argument.
4. Compare and contrast the characters of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. While one is clearly portrayed as without moral scruples and the other is perhaps excessively troubled by them, are both women at heart selfish people? In what ways is this assessment valid and in what ways is it not? Support your answer with specifics from the novel.
5. Many contemporary critics have disparaged the tendency of male writers to portray women at one of two extremes - the Madonna or the Prostitute. In chapter 12 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the narrator makes the following comment regarding Becky and Amelia: "It is in the nature and instinct of some women. Some are made to scheme, and some to love." Is the narrator falling into the same form of caricature that commentators today disparage, or is Thackeray's portrayal of his two female leads more sophisticated? If so, how? Support your conclusion with evidence from the novel.
6. When William Makepeace Thackeray called *Vanity Fair* "a novel without a hero," did he mean that this particular story had no hero, or that real life has no heroes? Support your answer with specifics from the novel, paying particular attention to the narrative asides scattered throughout the story.
7. William Makepeace Thackeray, unlike his contemporary Charles Dickens, shows little concern for the plight of the poor and downtrodden in his novel *Vanity Fair*. He instead aims his arrows of social criticism at the British aristocracy and those *nouveaux riches* of the middle class who would be part of it. What characteristics of this segment of British society does Thackeray most despise? Focusing on either the aristocracy or the middle class, choose three traits that Thackeray targets for criticism and discuss how he frames his critique. Be sure to use specific quotations and incidents from the novel to support your discussion.
8. The title of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is taken from *Pilgrim's Progress*, but is grounded even more deeply in the opening chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes – "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." In what sense is the novel an exposition of the theme of Solomon's discourse? Does Thackeray, like the twentieth-century existentialist, believe that all of life is meaningless, or is his complaint, like Solomon's, with a particular approach to life? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.
9. Does the title of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* refer to pride that obsesses and ultimately harms each of the major characters, or does it refer to the underlying meaninglessness of the pursuits of British society? Choose one of these meanings and support your contention that it explains the author's intention in writing the novel.

10. Few would doubt that the most sympathetic character in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is William Dobbin. Perhaps for this reason, some critics have argued that the author used himself as the model for the frustrated but faithful lover. From what you know about Thackeray's life, do you consider the comparison a fair one? If not, why not? If so, what aspects of the author's life correspond to the character with whom he clearly has the greatest sympathy?
11. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* has sometimes been compared to Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as a work of realistic fiction. Compare and contrast the central female characters, Becky Sharp and Emma Bovary, in terms of their attitudes toward life in general and marriage in particular. What do the two women demonstrate about the moral sensitivities of the authors? About their attitudes toward the hypocrisies they see in the worlds they inhabit? Use specific incidents and quotations from both novels in your answer.
12. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* was originally titled *Pen and Ink Sketches of English Life*. To what extent is this title more satisfactory, and in what ways is it less so, than the title Thackeray eventually chose? Consider both stylistic and thematic issues in answering the question, and be sure to support your answer with details from the novel.
13. Discuss the criticism of British financial practices in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Consider such aspects of the story as the devastation of John Sedley and his family through speculative investments, the evasion of payment of debts by Sir Pitt Crawley, and Rawdon and Becky's ability to live handsomely on no income whatsoever. What exactly is the author criticizing? Is his real point a financial one or a moral one? Why do you think so?
14. I Timothy 6:10 says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." How is the truth of this verse brought out in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*? Choose three characters who are brought to grief because of their love of money and explain how they illustrate the truth of Paul's warning to Timothy.
15. Discuss the role of ambition in the rise and fall of Becky Sharp in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. While in a great tragedy like Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, ambition utterly destroys an initially admirable character, Becky at the end of the novel is down, but hardly out. Evaluate the point of Thackeray's criticism of ambition and its relevance to his overall critique of British society.
16. The setting of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is about a generation prior to the time of the author (the claims of the narrator to know some of the characters, or those who knew them, shows the temporal relationship of the story to the author's own time). Thackeray is thus both criticizing the past with its romantic sensibilities and using his description of the past to ridicule his own era, which shares so much with it. What aspects of the novel constitute criticism of the Romantic era? Be specific.

17. The setting of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is about a generation prior to the time of the author (the claims of the narrator to know some of the characters, or those who knew them, shows the temporal relationship of the story to the author's own time). Thackeray is thus both criticizing the past with its romantic sensibilities and using his description of the past to ridicule his own era, which shares so much with it. What aspects of the novel utilize the past to criticize similar qualities in the author's own age? Be specific.
18. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the story is periodically interrupted by the voice of the narrator as he inserts comments on the people and action of the novel. What function do these narrative insertions play in the book? In what ways do they reveal and enhance the author's purpose in writing the novel? Do the views of the narrator correspond with those of the author, or are the insertions intended to provide an independent voice?
19. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is considered a realistic novel, at least in the context of the nineteenth century. One quality of a realistic story concerns character development. Which character in the story changes the most from beginning to end? What qualities define this change? How does the change in the character contribute to the central themes of the novel?
20. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the incident that destroys Rawdon and Becky's marriage occurs when he catches her alone with Lord Steyne. She professes her innocence and continues to do so throughout the remainder of the narrative, but others, including her husband, believe her to be guilty of marital unfaithfulness. What do you think? Use evidence from the novel to draw a conclusion regarding the guilt or innocence of Becky in her relationship with Lord Steyne.
21. At one point in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Miss Prism speaks of her lost novel by saying, "The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means." Charles Dickens certainly believed in this morally-centered approach to storytelling. To what extent may this be said of his erstwhile friend and contemporary, William Makepeace Thackeray? Does Miss Prism's definition hold true for Thackeray's masterpiece *Vanity Fair*? Why or why not? Give evidence from the novel to support your conclusion.
22. Critic James H. Wheatley, in commenting on William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, argued that "Externality is not only the subject, but finally, the villain of the book." Do you agree? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
23. William Makepeace Thackeray described his novel *Vanity Fair* in these words: "What I want is to make a set of people living without God in the world . . . greedy pompous mean perfectly self-satisfied for the most part and at ease about their superior value." To what extent did Thackeray achieve his goal? Choose three characters from the novel and explain how they either fit or do not fit the author's expressed purpose.

24. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is often characterized as a comic satire – funny, but with a point behind the humor. Do you agree? What about the novel did you find funny? Consider plot, characterization, and style, and comment on the satirical functions of these characteristics of the novel.
25. In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Faithful are able to resist the blandishments of Vanity Fair because they hold in view the promise of the Celestial City toward which they are traveling. The characters in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* have no such safeguard. What, in Thackeray's view, can deliver poor travelers from the lures of greed and materialism? Does the author see any hope of redemption from the temptations of his Vanity Fair, or does his satire provide clear-sighted criticism without hope for redemption? Support your answer with details from the novel.
26. Discuss the use of verbal irony in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, particularly as seen in the voice of the narrator. Give and analyze examples of this use of irony, being sure to demonstrate how it brings out the central themes of the novel.
27. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Becky Sharp busily spends her life reinventing herself in the face of the opinions of those around her and the circumstances against which she must do battle. How does this struggle embody the author's criticism of the society in which he lived? Consider not only the basis upon which people were evaluated in the Victorian Age, but also the desire of Becky and others within the story to achieve certain status in the eyes of those around them.
28. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* often parodies the literary conventions of the popular fiction of his day. One of the ways he does this is to introduce one of his leading female characters, Amelia, in terms reminiscent of the ideal romantic heroine, and then proceed to show how such a woman would really fare in the Victorian world. Discuss the details of Amelia's character and show how she serves as an apt instrument to parody the conventions of romantic prose.
29. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, as a realistic novel, constantly upends the reader's expectations by setting up fairy-tale scenarios and bringing them crashing down in contrary ways - the coach does not take Cinderella to the ball (Becky in the opening scene), the poor waif (Amelia) finds that her handsome prince is a cad, and Beauty (Becky again) fails to tame a whole succession of Beasts. What is the significance of these collapsed parallels in the novel? How do they relate to the central themes Thackeray seeks to convey?
30. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* holds hypocrisy up to ridicule as the fundamental way of life in Vanity Fair. Often that hypocrisy takes the form of Christian virtue. Is Thackeray implying by this, as Scripture teaches, that external virtue unaccompanied by real goodness in the heart is without value, or is he proposing something more sinister - that Christian virtue is in itself nothing more than hypocrisy? Support your answer with specifics from the story.

31. William Makepeace Thackeray illustrated many of his own works, including *Vanity Fair*, showing a well-developed artist's eye. How is this ability to observe with great care and portray with precision in a few lines the setting in which scenes take place evident in *Vanity Fair*? How does this talent enrich the story and stimulate the reader's imagination? Choose three examples of Thackeray's scene-setting descriptive power and discuss how they add meaning to the action being described by the author.
32. In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus tells the Parable of the Rich Fool, about a man who was covetous of material things. To what extent can William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* be viewed as a book-length exposition of Jesus' parable? To what extent may the reader, when reaching the end of the novel, legitimately conclude, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God"? Choose three characters from the book and discuss how they serve as illustrations of Jesus' teaching.
33. Modern critics, influenced by the prevalence of feminism, have tended to be very unkind to the character of Amelia Sedley in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. They view her as weak, passive, and therefore of little interest and undeserving of the pivotal role she is given in the action of the story. Do you agree with these criticisms? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details from the story.
34. Modern critics, influenced by the prevalence of feminism, have tended to lionize the character of Becky Sharp in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. They view her as independent, decisive, and determined to get what she wants no matter the cost, therefore worthy of admiration and to be viewed as the true center of the narrative. Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with details from the story.
35. In a letter sent by William Makepeace Thackeray to a friend, he described his object in writing *Vanity Fair*: "It is to indicate, in cheerful terms, that we are for the most part an abominably foolish and selfish people 'desperately wicked' and all eager after vanities." In your opinion, did he succeed in fulfilling his purpose? Does the novel transcend mere social criticism of the materialism of the Victorian Age to become a critique of the human condition itself? Why or why not? Support your answer with specifics from the novel.
36. Discuss the husband-hunting techniques employed by Becky Sharp in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. How effective were the flirtations that served as her main weapon in her striving for material possessions and social status? Did her tactics eventually gain her what she sought, or were they ultimately fruitless?
37. The ending of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is somewhat ambiguous, at least concerning the relationship between Becky Sharp and Jos Sedley. The most frequently-asked question involves the death of Jos: Did he die from the excesses of his own lifestyle, or did Becky poison him? What do you think? Support your conclusion with hints from the novel as well as your assessment of Becky's character. Was she really capable of such a crime?

38. In chapter 2 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the narrator says, "The world is a looking-glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his own face." Some critics have argued that the function of Thackeray's novel is the same - to serve as a looking-glass that reflects the true face of the reader. Do you agree? In what sense does the reader's reaction to a very unstructured plot and ambivalent characters say as much about the reader as it does about the author?
39. In chapter 8 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the narrator says, "Such people there are living and flourishing in the world – Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful too, mere quacks and fools: and it was to combat and expose such as those, no doubt, that Laughter was made." Though the specific target in this case is Becky, the description in many ways fits the novel as a whole. In what ways does Thackeray seek to "combat and expose" the "Faithless, Hopeless, and Charityless"? Does this mean he values the cardinal Christian virtues? Why or why not?
40. Many characters in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* float through life on a sea of unpaid debts, with Becky, George, and Sir Pitt being among the most obvious. Discuss the extent to which the novel serves as a critique of the credit economy that had begun to replace cash as a medium of exchange in the early Victorian period. Can the same criticisms mounted by Thackeray also be applied to the easy credit of our own age, the attitudes it encourages, and the social and personal consequences that result?
41. In chapter 21 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the narrator comments that "The major part of the Osborne family, who had not, in fifteen years, been able to get up a hearty regard for Amelia Sedley, became as fond of Miss Swartz in the course of a single evening as the most romantic advocate of friendship at first sight could desire." To what extent does the author, in his criticism of Victorian materialism, portray the commodification of people and relationships as the worst symptom of that which he seeks to condemn? Illustrate your answer with specific examples from the novel, being sure to discuss the significance of those examples to the overall themes the author seeks to address.
42. In chapter 39 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the narrator observes, "I know no sort of lying which is more frequent in *Vanity Fair* than this; and it may be remarked how people who practise it take credit to themselves for their hypocrisy, and fancy that they are exceedingly virtuous and praiseworthy, because they are able to deceive the world with regard to the extent of their means." In modern times, such an attitude might be described as "keeping up with the Joneses," or at least desiring the appearance of doing so. Discuss the extent to which this attitude drives the characters in the novel and in what ways it motivates people today, then assess it on the basis of Scripture. Why should a Christian never be caught up in such a pursuit, and what are the consequences of falling into this pattern?

43. In chapter 43 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the narrator describes the brief but doomed romance of William Dobbin and Glorvina, the sister of Peggy O'Dowd, in the following terms: "So these two were each exemplifying the Vanity of this life, and each longing for what he or she could not get." In what sense is longing for what one cannot have the essence of the life of vanity? How does the book make this point? How does the Bible make it?
44. In chapter 43 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the narrator says, "The hidden and awful Wisdom which apportions the destinies of mankind is pleased so to humiliate and cast down the tender, good, and wise; and to set up the selfish, or foolish, or the wicked. Oh, be humble, my brother, in your prosperity! Be gentle with those who are less lucky, if not more deserving. Think, what right have you to be scornful, whose virtue is a deficiency of temptation, whose success may be a chance, whose rank maybe an ancestor's accident, whose prosperity is very likely a satire." Is Thackeray's Wisdom a reference to God or to some impersonal Fate? Why do you think so? If he is speaking of God, is his description an accurate one? Why or why not?
45. In chapter 66 of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Dobbin, after years of faithful but hopeless longing, finally speaks the hard truth to Amelia. The narrator comments: "Amelia stood scared and silent as William thus suddenly broke the chain by which she held him, and declared his independence and superiority. He had placed himself at her feet so long that the poor little woman had been accustomed to trample upon him. She didn't wish to marry him, but she wished to keep him. She wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all." Neither character comes out of this description in a positive light. Which do you consider the most worthy of blame in the long-standing relationship that at this point seems about to fall apart - Amelia for taking Dobbin for granted, or Dobbin for being so foolish as to persevere in unrequited love for Amelia?
46. The competition for Matilda Crawley's money occupies considerable time and space in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Becky schemes to get it for Rawdon and Martha Crawley tries to control the old lady to win the inheritance for her husband, but the prize ultimately goes to Sir Pitt the younger and Lady Jane, largely because of the latter's sweet disposition. Discuss the question of desert here. Leaving the women out of the picture, was Pitt or Rawdon more deserving of their aunt's money? Who was ultimately the better man? Why do you think so? Defend your choice with specifics from the novel.
47. While much of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is taken up with the mad pursuit of money by various characters, who seek to gain what others have or at least to live like they have it. The notable exception to this rule is William Dobbin, who selflessly lends, spends, and gives on behalf of others while often refusing to allow his generosity to be known. Is he truly an example of Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 6:1-4? Consider not only his actions, but also his motives, in answering the question.

48. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Becky Sharp, who is selfish and scheming from the beginning of the story to the end, nonetheless goes out of her way to disillusion Amelia about the virtues of her husband George in order to pave the way for her to marry Dobbin. Throughout the story, Becky shows nothing but contempt for the weak Amelia and the virtuous Dobbin. Why does she, for once in her life, do something unselfish? Does she have an ulterior motive, or is she being genuinely kind? Support your answer with details from the novel.
49. The Battle of Waterloo plays a pivotal role in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, but its importance goes beyond the way it advances the action. Discuss the symbolic significance of the battle. To what extent is war a metaphor for the struggle for money and status that preoccupies *Vanity Fair*? Pay special attention to the "military campaigns" fought by Becky as she pursues her ambitions.
50. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Becky and Amelia are as different from one another as two women can be, yet men find both to be very attractive. Analyze why this is the case. What about the two women attracts men, and what do these features indicate about the men who are drawn to one, the other, or both?
51. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, William Dobbin proves to be a faithful friend to both George and Amelia Osborne and their son Georgy, at considerable cost to himself. What are his motives for doing so? Why is he so unappreciated by George and Amelia and loved by Georgy?
52. William Makepeace Thackeray, the author of *Vanity Fair*, is often considered a master of psychology before the discipline was invented. Though he allows the reader to know his characters by their actions rather than through their inner thoughts, the interjections of the omniscient narrator tell us about the quality of the author's perceptions of human nature. Evaluate Thackeray as a psychologist. In what ways does he show insights into the workings of the human mind and heart that ring true, even in the vastly different social settings in which we live today? Be sure to support your essay with details from the novel.
53. The two children who emerge from the marriages central to William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, little Georgy and young Rawdon, both turn into better men than either their fathers or grandfathers. How does this happen? What might the author be saying through the character developments of these young men?
54. At the end of his first epistle, John writes, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (I John 5:21). In what ways does William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* communicate the same message? Discuss how, in the novel, those who worship idols fail while those who avoid them prosper in the end. From a biblical perspective, do those who reject the idols of *Vanity Fair* truly shun the blandishments of idolatry, or do they simply pursue idols of a different sort? Support your answer with specifics from the story.

55. William Makepeace Thackeray, the author of *Vanity Fair*, may have lost his faith in his youth, but he retained his knowledge of the Scriptures, and often uses biblical allusions to illuminate characters and events in his stories. Choose three biblical allusions from his most famous novel and show how they serve that function, whether directly or through the use of irony.
56. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Becky Sharp's mother was an opera girl, among other things. Becky obviously inherited her mother's acting genes. Choose three scenes where Becky shows her acting talent and discuss the acting skills she demonstrates, the effectiveness of her charades, and the consequences for her and others.
57. Discuss the view of death presented in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. What role does it play in the story, and by extension in the world? Is his view a biblical one? Why or why not?
58. Compare and contrast the role of the narrator in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* with that of the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. Be sure to consider not only their respective roles as commentators on the foibles of society, but also the views of society they enunciate in the two works of literature.
59. Discuss the view of religion found in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Consider especially the characters who are its most active advocates - Bute Crawley, Pitt Crawley the younger, and Lady Southdown. What do these characters tell you about the author's view of British Christianity? From your knowledge of both the Church of England and the Dissenters of the period, how accurate is his characterization?
60. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* was written after the Parliamentary Reform Bill of 1832, but the story takes place earlier. What elements of the story ridicule the unfair system of Parliamentary representation that existed prior to the passage of the Bill? Give particular attention to those characters who are actually members of Parliament, including Lord Steyne and both Pitt Crawleys.
61. Some critics have argued that the character of Becky Sharp in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* represents a sort of poetic justice, in that the society that the author is targeting for ridicule richly deserves the manipulation and deception to which the little vixen subjects it. Underscoring the idea is the fact that only Dobbin, who pointedly does not share the values of *Vanity Fair*, is immune to her charms. Do you agree? Is that one of the reasons why so many readers find Becky an attractive character? Support your conclusions with details from the novel.
62. Discuss the view of marriage presented in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Consider the marital experiences of the major characters as well as the twist on the usual "marriage as happy ending" formula with which nineteenth-century novelists such as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens frequently concluded their stories.

63. One of the most famous accounts in the first part of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is Christian and Faithful's visit to the town of Vanity and its central attraction, Vanity Fair. This incident provided the title for a novel by William Makepeace Thackeray. Use the account in Bunyan's allegory to analyze the suitability of the title of Thackeray's novel. How does the narrative of the adventures of Becky Sharpe portray the essence of the fair in which Christian and Faithful were entrapped?
64. One reviewer of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* compares Cynthia Kirkpatrick to Becky Sharp in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* in the following words: "Cynthia may never be good but, like *Vanity Fair*'s Becky Sharp, she will always be interesting." Compare and contrast the two young women with regard to social skills, ability to manipulate others, self-centeredness, and honesty. Which of the two do you find the more interesting, and why? Include specific details from both novels in your analysis.
65. Early in Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*, the author makes a comparison between Lizzie Eustace and Becky Sharp, the protagonist of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Compare and contrast the two women with regard to their characters, their actions, and their impact on the lives of others. Which one more effectively compels the sympathy of the reader, and why?
66. Lily Bart, the heroine of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, and Becky Sharp, the central character in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, are both willing to do anything necessary to rise in society and gain wealth and prominence. Compare and contrast the values and actions of the two young women. Why does Becky succeed, at least to some extent, while Lily fails? How do the failure of one and the success of the other contribute to the satires of society intended by the authors?