Vanity Fair Study Guide

Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

Contents

Introduction

Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero, the first major work published by William Thackeray under his own name, was published serially in London in 1847 and 1848. Previously, under various comic pseudonyms (such as Michael Angelo Titmarsh and George Savage Fitzboodle) Thackeray made clear, both in his role as the narrator of *Vanity Fair* and in his private correspondence about the book, that he meant it to be not just entertaining, but instructive. Like all satire, *Vanity Fair* has a mission and a moral. The first published installment had an illustration on its cover of a congregation listening to a preacher; both speaker and listeners were shown with donkey ears. In the pages, Thackeray explains the illustration thus:

my kind reader will please to remember that these
histories. ... have "Vanity Fair" for a title and that
Vanity Fair is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full
of all sorts of humbugs and falseness and pretentions.
And while the moralist who is holding forth on the
cover (an accurate portrait of your humble servant)
professes to wear neither gown nor bands, but only
the very same long-eared livery in which his congregation
is arrayed: yet, look you, one is bound to
speak the truth as far as one knows it.That Becky is allowed to live, and to live well, is perfectly
consistent with Thackeray's view of life and
morality. ... Losing is vanity, and winning is vanity.

By the halfway point in its serial publication, Thackeray's long, rambling tale of relentless and corrupt social climbing, told with biting humor and cynicism, was the talk of London. Readers eagerly awaited new episodes in the life of Thackeray's deeply immoral, self-serving anti-heroine, Becky Sharp, who has since become one of the most wellknown and most argued-about characters in literature. The novel secured Thackeray's place among the literary giants of his time; and the giants of his time, among them Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, Thomas Hardy, and Alfred Tennyson, have endured as giants to this day. *Vanity Fair* is considered a classic of English literature and one of the great works of satire in all history.

Author Biography

William Makepeace Thackeray was born in Calcutta, India, on July 18, 1811, the only child of English parents. His father, Richmond, worked for the East India Company until he died four years after William's birth.

At the age of six, William was sent to a boarding school in England while his mother, Anne Becher Thackeray, remained in India. Unsurprisingly, the young child was lonely and unhappy. In 1819, his mother remarried and returned to England where she and her new husband were able to give him the family life for which he longed.

Thackeray attended Charterhouse School and went on to Cambridge University's Trinity College but did not earn a degree. He studied art in Paris and later illustrated many of his written works, including *Vanity Fair.* It was in Paris that Thackeray met and married Isabella Shawe, an Irish woman. They soon moved back to London where Thackeray launched his writing career. He wrote for magazines, including the famous humor magazine *Punch.*

Isabella Thackeray suffered from mental illness after the birth of the couple's third child. After many failed attempts to cure her, Thackeray was forced, in 1842, to send his wife away to be cared for. Unable to rear his young daughters alone, he was separated from them, as well. The loneliness and separation from family that had been so difficult for Thackeray as a child were no less painful for him as a grown man. Because his wife was alive (in fact, she outlived him by many years) and divorce was not an option, Thackeray never remarried.

The first work Thackeray published under his own name was *Vanity Fair,* a long, sprawling satire that was published in four installments in 1847 and 1848. It remains among his most well-known novels, along with *The Luck of Barry Lyndon: A Romance of the Last Century* (later published as *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon*) and *The Virginians: A Tale of the Last Century,* inspired by Thackeray's travels in the United States in 1852-1853 and 1855-1856.

Thackeray was prolific, writing short fiction and nonfiction as well as novels. By the end of his life, he had achieved both critical and financial success. In addition, he had the joy of having his mother and two of his daughters living with him and of seeing daughter Anne recognized as a successful writer. Thackeray died at his London home on Christmas Eve in 1863.

Plot Summary

Chapters 1-7

As *Vanity Fair* opens, Amelia Sedley, a conventional girl from a well-to-do family, and Becky Sharp, Sedley's orphaned, penniless, and already corrupt friend, are leaving Miss Pinkerton's school where they have met and become friends. They go to the Sedley home where Becky will be a guest until she goes on to the governess position that Miss Pinkerton has arranged for her.

Becky meets Amelia's older brother, Joseph, called Jos, who is on leave from his government post in India. Although Jos is fat, lazy, conceited, and shy with women, he is also financially well off, and Becky schemes to marry him. Through flattery and false modesty, Becky succeeds in making all the Sedleys believe that she truly is enamored of Jos, and Jos is inclined to propose to her. George Osborne, Amelia's fiancé, intervenes, persuading Jos that he has embarrassed himself in Becky's presence. George does not want a governess for a sister-in-law. Defeated, Becky leaves for the Crawley estate where she is to be governess.

Chapters 8-14

The mean-spirited and stingy Sir Pitt Crawley is the patriarch of Queen's Crawley where Becky takes up her post as governess to his two young daughters, Rosalind and Violet. Sir Pitt also has two much older sons by his first wife. The elder, also named Pitt, is pious and proper to an extreme. The younger, Rawdon, is a dandy and a gambler. The two despise each other.

The irreverent and debt-ridden Reverend Bute Crawley, Sir Pitt's brother, and his nosy, overbearing wife come on the scene. Sir Pitt and Bute also hate each other. The family members are united only in their desire to see their wealthy, old Aunt Matilda dead, and they all connive to inherit her fortune.

George is disrespectful of Amelia in the presence of his army comrades, for which his longtime friend William Dobbin berates him. Physically awkward but highly virtuous, Dobbin has loved Amelia since youth but considers himself unworthy of her. George's father, who has long encouraged George to marry Amelia, now suspects that her family has lost its money and wants George to break the engagement. The self-serving George is willing to do so.

Becky has charmed Aunt Matilda and, at the old lady's request, has moved to her home to nurse her. Rawdon is smitten with Becky and spends as much time with her as he can.

Sir Pitt's wife, Lady Crawley, dies, and immediately Sir Pitt asks Becky to marry him. Here, Becky cries the only genuine tears of her life because she must reject the wealthy

Sir Pitt, having secretly married Rawdon. Sir Pitt and old Aunt Matilda are both enraged at this news.

Chapters 15-22

Becky and Rawdon go on a honeymoon, and Mrs. Bute Crawley descends on Aunt Matilda, hoping to turn her against Rawdon and secure her fortune for herself and her husband. Then the Sedleys' possessions are sold at an estate sale; the family's financial ruin, due to Mr. Sedley's unwise business speculation, is complete and public. In the meantime, against the wishes of both their fathers, George and Amelia marry. Next, everyone meets in Brighton where Dobbin announces that the men have been ordered to go to Belgium where the First Duke of Wellington, the British general who is commanding a multinational army, plans to launch an attack on Napoleon's army.

Chapters 23-35

The peace-loving, selfless Dobbin tries to get George's father to accept George's marriage to Amelia, but Mr. Osborne instead disinherits George. George blames Dobbin because it was Dobbin who encouraged him to marry Amelia.

Mrs. Bute Crawley is forced to leave Aunt Matilda when the reverend is injured and needs her at home. Becky and Rawdon then try to move in on the old woman, ostensibly to take over her care, but she is wise to their designs on her money.

Everyone goes to Belgium. The men, except Jos, are in military service; Jos and the women accompany them. George and Becky flirt shamelessly, and Amelia is too blind to understand why she is heartsick. George finally passes Becky a mysterious note and then, remorseful, tries to make up with Amelia.

General and Mrs. O'Dowd, the regiment commander and his wife, prepare for the battle. Mrs. O'Dowd, accustomed to sending her husband into battle, mothers the younger women and pursues her goal of finding a husband for the general's sister. Rawdon is distressed at leaving Becky; George is relieved at leaving Amelia.

The battle begins; the women can hear the cannons booming in the distance. Amelia is worried sick for George while Becky fantasizes about her prospects to better herself if Rawdon is killed. In fact, it is George who dies in the Battle of Waterloo.

Back in England, Sir Pitt has taken up with Miss Horrocks, his butler's daughter, scandalizing the family. Young Pitt courts Lady Jane Sheepshanks, and the sweet, kind Lady Jane in turn wins the affection of Aunt Matilda.

Both Becky and Amelia give birth to sons. Dobbin tries to comfort Amelia as she grieves for George.

Chapters 36-42

Becky and Rawdon manage to live well on very little money. Becky is an expert at avoiding paying her bills. Rawdon makes a little money gambling. They lease a house from Mr. Raggles, a former servant of the Crawleys but cannot pay the rent. In turn, Raggles is unable to pay his bills and is sent to debtors' prison.

Aunt Matilda dies, young Sir Pitt inherits her wealth, and Becky and Rawdon try to ingratiate themselves with the heir. Becky ignores her son, little Rawdon, but his father loves him. Dobbin gives Amelia much-needed money, saying it was left to her by George. Jos returns to India.

Sir Pitt becomes ill, lingers for a time, and then dies. Young Sir Pitt takes over Queen's Crawley and sends for Becky and Rawdon in a gesture of family unity.

Chapters 43-50

Dobbin is in India with his regiment when he hears a false rumor that Amelia is going to get married. He requests leave to go to England.

Becky and Rawdon go to Queen's Crawley for Christmas where Becky fawns over everyone who has status or money, especially the young Sir Pitt.

The Sedley family is sinking further into poverty. The Osbornes□George's father and sisters □want George's son Georgy to come live with them and offer Amelia money if she will give him up. After some delay, Amelia agrees to this so that Georgy is not reared in poverty.

Lord Steyne, with whom Becky has a vaguely explained and profitable relationship, arranges for Becky to be presented at court□the successful culmination of all her social climbing. She appears draped in expensive jewels; unbeknownst to Rawdon, these are gifts from Lord Steyne. This begins a period of social triumph for Becky.

Chapters 51-56

Lord Steyne sends little Rawdon away to school, which pleases Becky, who cannot be bothered with him. Rawdon, long ignored by his wife, is jailed for failing to pay a debt. Becky is slow to answer his message asking her to have him released so he contacts Sir Pitt and Lady Jane. Lady Jane arrives without delay to free him. At home, Rawdon finds Becky entertaining Lord Steyne. He attacks Lord Steyne□he hurls a diamond pin at his forehead, leaving Lord Steyne scarred□and goes through Becky's belongings and finds her stash of money and jewelry. Both Rawdon and Lord Steyne abandon Becky, and they plan to duel.

Becky pleads with Sir Pitt to help her reconcile with Rawdon, and he agrees to try. Lord Steyne's man, Wenham, uses diplomacy to prevent the duel. Rawdon takes a post on Coventry Island, a remote place from which he sends money for Becky and his son. Sir Pitt and Lady Jane look after little Rawdon.

Chapters 57-67

Dobbin and Jos return to England from India; Dobbin's return has been delayed by a serious illness. Dobbin goes to see Amelia and is relieved to find that she has not married. Finally, he divulges that he has long loved her, but she continues to think only of George. Dobbin spends time with little Georgy and improves the boy's character while Jos belatedly helps his family financially.

Old Mr. Osborne dies, leaving half his money to Georgy and also leaving some money for Amelia. Jos, Amelia, Georgy, and Dobbin go to Europe. Becky, who has been wandering around Europe since losing Rawdon and Lord Steyne, meets up with them and renews her pursuit of Jos. After warning Jos that Becky is dangerous, Dobbin leaves to rejoin his regiment.

Becky reveals to Amelia the contents of the mysterious note that George gave her on the eve of his death at Waterloo: George urged Becky to run away with him. Amelia finally has some understanding of George's true character. She sends for Dobbin, he returns, and they marry immediately.

Becky continues to ensnare Jos and talks him into taking out a life insurance policy with her as beneficiary. Within months, he dies of poisoning. Becky's role in his death is left unclear. Rawdon then dies on Coventry Island of yellow fever. Sir Pitt dies, and little Rawdon inherits Queen's Crawley. Amelia and Dobbin are happy together and have a daughter.

Becky lives comfortably in Europe on the money from Jos's insurance policy and on an allowance sent to her by her son (who nevertheless refuses to see her). She becomes a churchgoer and gives generously to charity.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The novel opens with the Sedley's coach pulling up to Miss Pinkerton's academy for young girls to collect Amelia Sedley, daughter of the wealthy merchant John Sedley, and Becky Sharp, a boarder at the school. The headmistress, Barbara Pinkerton, writes a personal reference to the Sedleys, speaking highly of Amelia, who is a delightful person well deserving of Miss Pinkerton's praise. The entire staff and student body of the school are sad to see her go. The narrator states that Amelia Sedley is not the heroine of this novel, though she will appear a great deal later.

Becky Sharp appears in the midst of the excitement surrounding Amelia's departure. She is not very well liked by Miss Pinkerton, and the two share a tense farewell before Becky slips into the coach unnoticed in the flurry of Amelia's farewell. Miss Pinkerton refuses to inscribe a copy of Johnson's dictionary, the customary gift for graduating girls, but her sister steals one and sneaks it out to Becky with some money. The chapter ends as Becky Sharp flings the book from the carriage window.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This novel is set in England in the 1850s. The characters of the novel are very concerned with appearances and issues of money and class. While a great deal of detail about the two women has yet to be revealed, the narrator suggests that Becky Sharp should not be liked. Her character, so obviously slighted by Miss Pinkerton in getting neither a letter of reference nor an inscribed dictionary, evokes a small bit of sympathy but also a bit of suspicion.

The narrator takes a great deal of care to make sure the audience does like Amelia Sedley. Her leaving brings sadness to all people involved in the school, giving the sense that she is truly a good person.

A straightforward narrator is used to introduce the action. This narrator leaves no doubt about feelings toward events and characters, intervening with a first-person voice to guide each situation. The narrator is a heavy speaker in the chapter, indicating that he will be an ever-present guide throughout the book, as much a main character as Becky and Amelia.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

As Becky and Amelia drive off in the carriage, Becky lets her guard down at last and reveals her hatred for Miss Pinkerton and the entire academy at Cheswick. Amelia is shocked by her behavior.

The world has not been good to Becky Sharp. Apart from Amelia Sedley, nobody has treated her nicely at all, a fact that is quickly overshadowed by a moral. People whom the world treats poorly often deserve what they get.

Becky Sharp's father was an artist who gave lessons at Miss Pinkerton's school. He was an abusive, alcoholic father, depressed over not being a greater success artistically. Becky's mother was a French opera dancer who died some time ago. Becky never spoke of her mother's occupation but instead emphasized her French heritage, claming to come from a noble family.

After Becky's father's death, Becky found herself at Cheswick to assist with French instruction, boarding there for free and gleaning education from the other professors. Becky had a mysterious affair with a young minister while at Cheswick. She is notorious for her cunning and ability to convince people to give her what she wants.

While living at Cheswick, Becky is surrounded by young ladies with immeasurable wealth. She is bitter about her circumstances and feels she is far cleverer than these women and that men prefer her company to theirs because of her artistic abilities. Becky is such a gifted musician that Miss Pinkerton decides to fire the music instructor and give Becky the task. Becky refuses, insisting she is there only to teach the young women French in exchange for room and board. Becky demands to be paid if she is to be the music teacher for the school. Becky earns payment for her services and the dislike of the other instructors for her efforts.

Miss Pinkerton is enraged that someone would question her authority, which Becky continues to do on a regular basis. She arranges for Becky to work as a governess for Sir Pitt Crawley's family. Her school friend Amelia has offered to let her stay with her until her position starts with Sir Pitt.

The girls are traveling to Amelia's home in London, where Becky is surprised at the wealth of the Sedley family. Amelia gives Becky gifts and insists Becky is not alone in the world but that she shall love her as a sister. Noting the fabulous gifts Amelia's brother, Joseph Sedley, brings her from India, Becky Sharp begins to scheme to marry him.

Chapter 2 Analysis

At this point, Becky Sharp's character is made certain. Subtle hints, through the tale of the affair with the minister, indicate that Becky is exceedingly cunning and will do anything to raise her status. An excellent depiction of the circumstances she is used to shows the difficulty of her growing up with an advanced intellect and yet coming from meager means financially. At no time, however, is Becky meant to evoke pity. Instead, Becky's thought process as she sets her mind on marrying Joseph is revealed as suspicious, and she puts on a false front to the world.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The chapter opens with Amelia and Becky surprising Joseph with their beauty. He awkwardly tries to light a fire in the middle of June to avoid looking at the beautiful girls. Amelia's father comes in and they proceed to tease Joseph for his pompous clothing. Joseph begrudgingly stays for dinner and escorts Becky downstairs.

Becky fantasizes about a life of luxury as Joseph's wife, imagining a fabulous life in India, where Joseph is stationed with the East India Company's Civil Service. Joseph has temporarily returned to London to heal from a liver condition. He is large, vain and good-natured, but he is shy around women and finds his life in India quite lonely. Joseph overhears Becky tell Amelia she thinks he is handsome.

Becky vows to pretend interest in all things Indian while at dinner. She suffers through spicy curry and eventually begs for water as Joseph teases her with hot peppers. Later, Mr. Sedley warns Joseph that Becky is flirting with him. Joseph is merely flattered and wants to sit in the drawing room to listen to Becky sing, but he is too shy. He leaves for his apartment, and Mrs. Sedley remarks that Becky has frightened him away.

Chapter 3 Analysis

By the end of this chapter, Mr. Sedley is on to Becky. He warns Joseph, who is known familiarly as Jos, that Becky is after his hand, and readers get the sense that Jos knows she is not in love with him but scheming for his place in society. The author shows flashes of the lonely life Joseph leads in India to offer good explanation of his awkward character. He is a lonely person extremely shy around women and sensitive about his weight. Jos is described as vain, but his actions indicate low self-esteem and shyness above all else.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Becky Sharp impresses the Sedley family with her kindness while she visits them, enjoying the luxury of life as a guest of Amelia's. She is polite and cordial to the housekeeping staff, and everyone adores her. Becky puts on great shows of emotion and flirts with Joseph, who remains shy and nervous around her. With Mr. and Mrs. Sedley's permission, the girls arrange to go on a trip to Vauxhall (The Royal Gardens) with Joseph and George Osborne as chaperones. Amelia blushes at the mention of George's name. In their bedroom, Mr. and Mrs. Sedley discuss the obvious advances Becky makes toward Joseph.

The trip to Vauxhall is cancelled by an unexpected thunderstorm, and the two gentlemen drink wine and entertain the girls with stories of their youth. George Osborne is Mr. Sedley's godson and is practically a member of the family. Becky announces her sadness at having to leave the Sedley house to take her post as governess. Amelia starts to cry and shares a meaningful look with George. They retreat to the music room, holding hands to maneuver in the darkness and leaving Becky alone with Joseph.

Becky comments on the obvious love between George and Amelia. Jos confirms that the two are as good as married whenever George gets command of his company. Jos and Becky share a pleasant conversation in which Jos is surprisingly not nervous - until Amelia stops playing the piano. Jos becomes self-conscious and begins to blow his nose loudly. Amelia urges Becky to take a turn at the piano and sing for the party. Becky performs beautifully and ends with a ballad, choking on the words "when I'm gone." At the end of the song, the group returns to their chatter. The narrator insists that Joseph Sedley is not in love with Becky Sharp at this time, but he thinks he would really like to hear her sing on a regular basis and that she is a wonderful girl. Joseph recognizes that Becky is smitten with him and thinks to himself that he could do far worse.

The next morning, Jos drives to the Sedley house with flowers for Becky Sharp and his sister Amelia. George Osborne is at the house, too, visiting with the family. Becky and Jos are left in the sitting room, discussing her singing from the previous evening while Jos helps her wind silk for her knitting. Jos thinks that he will propose when they go to Vauxhall.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Becky's scheme to woo Joseph is in full swing in this chapter. She feigns tears at the sight of her father's artwork and heavily hints at her sadness at having to leave for her job as a governess. Mr. and Mrs. Sedley are fully aware that Becky is wooing their son, but there is still uncertainty about whether the Sedleys realize her true intentions are not

motivated by love but money and status. (This motivation is made most clear when she searches Joseph's flowers for a love letter while pretending to merely smell them.)

This chapter creates the sense that George truly has feelings for Amelia. The author makes use of an omnipotent narrator, showing the thoughts and feelings of all the characters, including his own, to the readers.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The chapter opens with William Dobbin, a boy attending Dr. Swishtail's school for young men. Dobbin's father is a grocer, and Dobbin's tuition is paid for in groceries rather than cash. At the start of this chapter, Dobbin is taunted by the other boys because of this.

Cuff, the most popular boy at school, calls Dobbin "Figs" and tries to fight Dobbin in the schoolyard. When Dobbin defends himself, Cuff leaves him alone from that time on. Dobbin sees Cuff beating a smaller child, little Osborne, and Dobbin proceeds to defeat Cuff in a great fight. The narrator shows that the smaller child is George Sedley Osborne, who writes a letter home and mentions his love for Amelia. In gratitude for saving him in the beating, George encourages his family to shop at Dobbin's father's store. Dobbin also enjoys increased popularity at school. Osborne and Dobbin become close friends.

After returning to the present tense, George shows up at the Sedley's house to escort the girls to Vauxhall. He brings his friend Dobbin along. Dobbin is not very attractive, dressed in unfashionable clothing, but he is extremely nice and polite.

The narrator discusses some details of the military struggle between England and France during this period. Dobbin's father is colonel of the army, responsible for fighting off the French invasion. George Osborne has yet to be promoted in the corps led by Dobbin's father. The two young men have served in the military together since leaving school. The chapter ends with Jos, George and Dobbin sharing military stories with the ladies before they leave for Vauxhall.

Chapter 5 Analysis

A flashback shows the character of George Osborne, indebted to Dobbin from the start and always selfish. Suspicions of George Osborne grow in this chapter. Becky Sharp catches him staring at himself in the mirror while describing his lifelong friend as not being attractive. The narrator suggests lack of character by emphasizing the fact that George has yet to be promoted. Through subtle hints and glances and also through overt statements, Dobbin's character reveals he is completely in love with Amelia at first sight, but will not act because he respects his friend's assumed betrothal to her.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The narrator summarizes the plot thus far. George is in love with Amelia, and Jos is in love with Becky. The outspoken narrator insists there are to be no great romantic gestures in this novel. The characters arrive at Vauxhall, impatiently waiting for Jos to propose to Becky. Jos's father says he does not care whom Jos marries. Mrs. Sedley thinks it's demeaning for her son to marry an artist's daughter, and Amelia is anxious for him to propose to her best friend. Mrs. Sedley is reminded that she was the daughter of a grocer before marrying Mr. Sedley.

Dobbin, very much the fifth wheel, is responsible for the ladies' shawls and purses while the two couples peruse the gardens. Dobbin is so happy to see Amelia having a good time that he begins to hum the song she was singing earlier.

Becky and Jos separate from the others, and Jos is terrified to propose to her. The couples forget about Dobbin, who wanders off rather than spoil their romantic party. Jos gets quite drunk at dinner. He starts telling loud, drunken stories and draws a crowd. Dobbin reappears and helps Jos to the carriage while George helps the ladies. Jos confides in Dobbin that he loves Becky and wants to marry her.

Jos wakes up with a terrible hangover and, because of his liver condition, is quite ill the next morning. George and Dobbin go to his apartment, and George teases him by acting out his embarrassing behaviors from the night before. George then says he thinks Becky is too low class to ever be his sister-in-law. He speaks sharply to Dobbin, who tries to speak on Becky's behalf.

George goes to the Sedley house and makes fun of Jos for being so ill. He teases Becky, and she hates him and fears he will turn Jos against her. Amelia is upset with him for hurting Becky's feelings, and George says Becky "must learn her station."

The next day, Jos sends a note to his sister apologizing for his drunken behavior at Vauxhall and says he is going away to Scotland. Amelia is crushed that her brother will not be proposing to Becky after all. The maid tries to comfort her by saying none of the house staff like Becky anymore, anyway. She has been caught snooping through Mrs. Sedley's letters and through Amelia's things.

Becky Sharp prepares to leave the Sedley home. Amelia gives Becky some of her clothes and arranges for Mr. Sedley and George to give her expensive gifts. Becky blames George for ruining her chances, and the two girls part, promising to always remain friends.

Chapter 6 Analysis

This chapter reveals the ultimate truth of George's character. He hatefully denounces Becky to Jos purely because she is not from a wealthy family. He even shares his opinions with Amelia, saying someone should remind Becky of her class position. There is no question that this is a man not to be trusted, who will continue to take advantage of his kind friends as he has done his entire life. Becky's character is developed further. The novel hints at future bad blood between she and George by showing that Becky is on to George's schemes.

Becky elicits some sympathy when the maid reminds readers that a governess might dress and act like a refined lady, but really she earns the same salary and holds the same station in society as household maids. Try as she might to rise above her position, Becky Sharp remains a governess as far as the upper class is concerned. The fact that characters of all classes are reminding Becky and her friends of this fact does not bode well for the outcome of Becky's plans.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Becky arrives at the Crawley residence to work as a governess. Sir Pitt Crawley is a very respected gentleman whose family has long served on the British Parliament. The estate, once glorious, has fallen a bit to shambles. Sir Pitt has been married several times and is the father of four children: sons Pitt and Rawdon, both older, and two daughters, Rose and Violet, for whom Becky will be governess.

Becky is to meet Sir Crawley in their London home and ride with him to the estate the following morning. The carriage pulls up to a dilapidated house, and a dirty old man answers the door. John the driver refuses to help Becky unload her belongings, having no reason to respect her now that she is not staying with the Sedleys any longer. Becky also failed to tip the household staff, which angered him further. John angrily tells the old man that Becky is no good, having accepted the used gowns that were supposed to go to the lady's maid, and drives away.

As the old man carries Becky's trunks through the dusty, dreary house, Becky learns that he is not a porter but, in fact, her new employer. Becky discovers, to even greater displeasure, that he counts and keeps track of every farthing in his household accounts. Becky must share the first Lady Crawley's deathbed with Mrs. Tinker, the housekeeper, before their departure for Queen's Crawley the following morning. Becky snoops around and tries to get Mrs. Tinker to talk about the family, but she has no luck.

Because Sir Crawley has such a frugal reputation and never tips anyone, the public carriage driver who takes them to Queen's Crawley decides to steal one of Becky's trunks.

Chapter 7 Analysis

While the Crawley family has a more noble title than the Sedley one, they live in considerably less elegant conditions. Higher status, in this case, does not indicate more wealth. Becky had expected nobility, even royalty, and had trained herself to think of the Sedleys as common city folk. Instead, she is stuck with a frugal man who rides in public carriages rather then employ his own footmen full time. Becky jostles her way to his estate pressed between strangers, haughtily complaining about the circumstances.

Sir Crawley, though he is crass and frugal and dirty, is a genuine person. He does not put on an act, but he says how he truly feels in all instances. He is instantly more likeable than Becky, who tries to trick her way into a better place in the world. This is not to say that he is a likeable character on the whole, however.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The chapter opens with a letter from Becky to Amelia. She writes about the dirty conditions of the house and how shocked she was to meet Sir Crawley. Becky writes of his extreme frugality, how he takes her candles after eleven o'clock and how he calls her a hussy. The property at Queen's Crawley is not as run down as their town house, but Becky says the Crawley home is glum and old fashioned.

Becky writes of dinner with the Crawley family. The current Lady Crawley is the daughter of an iron worker, from similar means as Becky. Pitt Crawley is ugly, quiet and dresses like an undertaker. Becky passes the evening reading boring political pamphlets while the family members entertain themselves by the light of a single candle. The eldest Crawley son reads "dismal sermons" to the family every evening while Lady Crawley cries each night for her lost looks. Sir Crawley spends each night getting drunk. Becky Sharp finds it ridiculous that the family and servants gather together for prayers each evening, led by Sir Crawley's brother, the pastor for the church at Queen's Crawley.

The narrator ends the chapter by saying he will begin to describe a great crime by a great villain, taking liberty to talk about the characters as he introduces them to the story.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter presents no surprises. The previous chapter and visual description of Sir Pitt allows readers to expect the home and family he has raised. Frugality and crass language are expected from a man who does not put on airs for anyone, despite his position as a British noble. Least surprising of all is Becky Sharp being taken aback by this family, who behaves quite contrary to expected behavior by persons with such noble titles.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Lady Rose Crawley, second wife of Sir Pitt Crawley, is in an interesting predicament as the lady of Queens Crawley. She cannot entertain her childhood friends at her home because of their low status. She also is not accepted into social circles because of her background. Even his brother's wife refuses to visit with her. Sir Pitt used to beat her and leaves her alone at the manor when he travels to London for Parliament sessions. Lady Crawley has nothing but her looks - no talents, friends or intelligence. After the birth of her children, she has lost even her beauty and has no power over her husband. She is too depressed to even become an alcoholic.

Pitt Crawley, junior, has taken control of the household affairs. He hired Miss Sharp to be governess for the girls, whose only education so far has come from the servants. He is the type of man who would starve to death rather than eat dinner without a coat and tie. He attempts to bring the household up to the standards customary to their noble title. Pitt junior worked for ten years in a dead-end job and now is a political activist and philosopher. He wishes more than anything that his father would give him his place in Parliament.

Sir Crawley has made a number of poor financial decisions, and the family estate is in a dangerous place. It seems their only income comes from the two Parliament seats assigned to the estate. The narrator describes Sir Crawley as mean, selfish, cunning and disreputable. Here is a man who hates all things refined, has a foul sense of humor and imbibes too heavily in alcohol. Still, he holds a powerful position in the government and because of his title holds a high place in society.

Sir Crawley's half-sister is unmarried and has inherited a large fortune from her mother. She intends to split her fortune between Rawdon and the rector at Queens Crawley. Because of her wealth and the chance she might share it with the Crawley family, they bend over backwards to her when she visits the property.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter offers a straightforward insight to the Crawley family. Rose Crawley's position is an interesting one, as it gives a glimpse of what life must end up as for Becky Sharp if she reaches her goal and marries a higher-class man. Lady Crawley's condition foreshadows that like Lady Crawley, Becky will not be accepted in social circles and will have gotten nowhere.

Based on the fact that Rawdon stands to inherit the future riches from Matilda, it is assumed that Becky Sharp will next set her sights on his heart. The author makes heavy use of foreshadowing this relationship, emphasizing the special relationship to Matilda Crawley and her money.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Becky Sharp feels that she is far more intelligent and beautiful than her friend Amelia. She longs to someday show Miss Sedley her superiority. She decides to make friends with anyone in the Crawley family who could potentially better her situation. This list does not include Lady Crawley, who holds no power in the family whatsoever.

Becky does not challenge her students very much and lets them educate themselves based on their own interests. This amounts to reading books with Rose every day and not tattling on Violet for picking fights and stealing sweets from the kitchen.

Becky Sharp appeals to Pitt junior's ego by asking his opinion of books and for help translating French passages. She also pretends to be interested in his pamphlets and speeches. She hints that her mother's family was the Montmorency family, but she does not tell him her mother was a stage performer. Pitt junior is convinced Becky Sharp comes from French nobility.

Becky kisses up to Sir Crawley by volunteering to help him with his legal studies and playing backgammon with him. She becomes his exclusive confidant and, within one year, is privy to all household operations, from gardening questions to household management when Sir Crawley is away. She is, as the narrator insists, no longer the snobbish person from earlier but modest and composed, at least in appearance.

Rawdon Crawley hates his brother and most of the family and only comes home when his aunt is scheduled to visit. Matilda loves Rawdon and hates Pitt junior. She refuses to listen to his sermons when she visits, and he considers her an atheist. Matilda is a former beauty who is well read and well liked and supports women's rights. She considers Rawdon a son and paid for his college education until he got kicked out. She then paid his commission fee for him to join the military, where he has yet to go to battle. Instead, Rawdon is a known playboy, interested in gambling and partying and showing contempt for death after surviving three duels. Despite his reckless behavior, his aunt is certain Rawdon will turn out all right in the end.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Rawdon Crawley has not been introduced, nor have any clues to his personal character. There are brief mentions of his immature behaviors and his great affection for and from his aunt. Because Becky has worked so hard to butter up Sir Crawley, and also since she hates Pitt junior, the assumption is that she is hoping Rawdon Crawley will come to Queens Crawley so that she can seduce him to the delight of his father. As much as she may enjoy her new status as assumed mistress of the house, Becky Sharp still does not control the finances or have the power to make decisions in this home where she is still an employee. She will not rest until she is the lady of a wealthy house.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

This chapter introduces Sir Pitt's brother Bute Crawley, rector at the church on Queens Crawley. Bute Crawley is better liked among his people than his brother and was formerly a star athlete. His wife holds the power in their household and lets her husband have free reign outside of it. The couple is always in debt, mostly due to Bute's love of gambling on sporting events. Bute is eager to inherit the other half of his sister's fortune when she passes away. Sir Pitt and his brother do not get along. Both are in financial trouble, and both blame each other for these problems.

Mrs. Bute is always well informed of the happenings in her brother-in-law's house. Likewise, the servants of the two houses are close friends and often share drinks and gossip with each other, acting as spies for the respective households. It did not go unnoticed by Mrs. Bute when Becky Sharp started keeping track of household inventory for the Crawleys. The servants report her power in the household, and the rector's wife comments that she must have some awful plot in mind. Mrs. Bute decides to write to Miss Pinkerton to learn of Becky's character.

Miss Pinkerton responds by revealing the truth about Becky's bankrupt father, opera dancing mother and charity status at the school. She ends by saying she hopes Becky did not inherit her mother's loose morals.

A letter from Becky to Amelia follows. Becky talks about how boring her life is as Sir Crawley's secretary and governess. She also mentions that she snobbishly turned down the marriage proposal of a young country doctor. She then writes of how life is turned around by the arrival of Matilda to the manor. The house comes to life for the visit, with parties and finery and no skimping on candles or fires. She writes of a disagreement between Matilda and Bute over a morality discussion and finally mentions meeting Rawdon.

Becky writes about how handsome and gruff Rawdon is and how everyone loves him anyway. Becky gets to dance with him at one of the parties, and she later overhears him call her a "neat little filly." She sadly says that the country girls look down upon her, and she is delighted that Rawdon considers them to be boring. Mrs. Bute invites Becky to the rectory, which Becky assumes is a clever scheme to get her to teach Mrs. Bute's children for free while she teaches Sir Crawley's.

Becky seems to be right about Mrs. Bute's intentions when Mrs. Bute starts inviting the young people of Sir Pitt's household to the rectory for dinner. Bute complains of Rawdon drinking the expensive liquor while listing all the outlandish things the young man has done. He complains bitterly that this man will get the larger share of Matilda Crawley's fortune and refuses to stay in the house to eat dinner with Rawdon.

Meanwhile, Becky is befriending Matilda so well that she is invited to dinner with the nobility. Matilda insists Becky is the only person worth talking to in the country. Becky even goes into Matilda's dressing rooms to help her and gossip about the neighbors. Matilda repeatedly says the status of Becky's parents is irrelevant and that Becky has grown into a fine and worthy person. Matilda then insists that Rawdon does not have a penny to his name and that he must marry a wealthy girl.

The narrator then indicates that the dance was not the first meeting of Becky and Rawdon. He has, in fact, been hanging around her for weeks, draped over the piano while she played and escorting her on walks. Matilda, Becky, Rawdon and the children spend many nights at the rectory. While Matilda rides home in the carriage, Becky and Rawdon enjoy romantic walks home. Sir Pitt observes Rawdon cursing in Becky's presence and says to his friend Horrocks that he could strangle Rawdon for his crass. Horrocks comments that he thinks Becky and Rawdon would make a good match. The narrator ends the chapter by saying Becky would be a good fit for both Sir Pitt and Rawdon.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Many mini-flashbacks throughout this chapter introduce the new characters and develop the history behind their relationships. This chapter offers a lot of insight into the new characters and also gives some perspective on Becky. Her schemes to be nice to the family are not totally foolproof as Mrs. Bute sees right through them. There are hints that Mrs. Bute will begin a scheme of her own to ensure her own family inherits Matilda's wealth before Rawdon sees a cent of it.

Interestingly, Becky does not react severely when Matilda says that Rawdon is penniless and needs to marry a rich girl. It is obvious by the end of the chapter that the two are quite taken with each other. Based on Becky's character throughout the novel, readers wonder if she is capable of loving a man or marrying for love if she did.

The end comment is very interesting. It is easy to see why Sir Crawley would be romantically interested in Becky. He has a habit of marrying poor, younger women. The question is whether Becky would consider him at all. He has some wealth and slight power, but he is clearly not socially acceptable because of his crude behavior and appearance. Does Becky seeks status or wealth above all else?

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

The sisters of George Osborne and William Dobbin treat Amelia Sedley quite poorly. They find her boring and plain and wonder what George could possibly see in her. The narrator suggests this is because they are extremely jealous that all the men in the immediate area are mad for Amelia. They assume George spends every waking moment with her, and when he is not around the handsomest men around are asking her to dance. In reality, Amelia spends her days longing for George, who spends his days shooting pool and avoiding her. Dobbin assures Amelia that George spends his spare time with his sisters because he is afraid his regiment could be called to battle at any moment.

Peace is then declared in Europe, and Amelia rejoices because she thinks George will finally marry her. She writes him novel-length letters, to which he responds with very brief notes. Her letters are repetitive and sentimental, full of underlines and italics. Amelia spends her every waking moment pining for George who, it seems, wants very little to do with her.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Amelia is being set up as a very tragic character. She is deeply in love with George, who cares for her not at all, apparently. All her peers despise her because she is so nice and sweet that men dote on her, making them insanely jealous. Readers do not assume a very happy future for Amelia, because she will inevitably end up married to George because of their family's close and long-standing ties. There is a great deal of foreshadowing that George will not treat her well and that her good soul will continue to be abused by people who are jealous of her ability to form genuine friendships. It is ironic that the most wholesome characters in the book so far are infatuated with George, who has the least moral fiber of them all.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

George Osborne is embarrassed by the number of letters Amelia sends him all over the country. He refuses to accept them except in his private quarters and once lit a cigar from a burning letter from Amelia. The narrator suspects Dobbin would give anything for Amelia to write such letters to him.

George has been seeing a number of other women in the meantime and has a reputation as quite a ladies' man. He is quite the party man and drinks, gambles and carelessly spends money all over the place.

George never tells anyone exactly who the woman is who writes him these countless letters. His friends tease and speculate anything from a duchess to a poor miller's daughter. Dobbin overhears some friends teasing about the mystery woman and angrily tells them that Amelia is a wonderful person. He says that nobody had better make fun of her while he is present. George refuses to acknowledge that he is engaged to Amelia and gets very angry when people discuss it with him.

George is a frequent gambler and once lost a great deal of money to Rawdon Crawley, another of many scrapes that Dobbin helped him out of. Dobbin heartily advises George to do right by Amelia. George thinks Dobbin is patronizing him and grows angry and defensive. Dobbin convinces George to go visit Amelia and gives him some money to buy her a gift. George spends the money on a new pin for himself.

George and Amelia visit for a few hours and imagine a future together. George says he has important business and leaves Amelia to eat dinner with his sisters. He goes off to eat ice cream and go shopping before gambling and partying all night. Amelia is left alone with George's sisters and grumpy father.

Later in the evening, George talks with his father. Mr. Osborne warns George to be more discreet in his affairs. Mr. Osborne says he wants George to live a life he could not live as a child but that he will cut him off entirely if he gets involved in gambling. He also thinks George should marry a girl with a higher status to continue the family's upward mobility, saying he has more than repaid Mr. Sedley the kindnesses of long ago.

Mr. Osborne suggests that Mr. Sedley's business prospects are not looking good. He seems to have made some unwise investment decisions. He insists Amelia must pay a 10,000 pound dowry in order to marry George. The next day, George gets more of his father's money from the bank and passes Mr. Sedley, who is looking very depressed at the state of his affairs.

Chapter 13 Analysis

At last, the reader gets a solid look at George's true personality, and the narrator comments on it openly. He is a stuck-up playboy with little care for anyone's feelings but his own. He is clearly a user, as he abuses the friendships of Dobbin and Amelia and cares only for his selfish activities. After meeting his father and hearing him dismiss Amelia as a marriage prospect because of her shaky social status, readers have no difficulty figuring out where George would learn such attitudes.

This chapter heavily foreshadows that Amelia's financial situation might take a big turn for the worse, and it also contains more open evidence that Dobbin is secretly in love with her, though he might not even realize it himself.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Miss Matilda Crawley is quite ill, and Rawdon comes to visit her. He finds the house staff in tears and miserable. Matilda's lifelong friend and servant Miss Briggs is distraught because Matilda will not see her anymore. Matilda has a new companion who is administering her medication. The new companion is, of course, Miss Becky Sharp, who has agreed to stay with her until she is well.

Miss Firkin, Matilda's housekeeper, tells Miss Briggs that everyone is infatuated with Becky: Sir Pitt, Mrs. Bute, the house staff and particularly Rawdon. Miss Firkin thinks Becky has bewitched everyone.

Matilda has merely contracted food poisoning from a lobster she ate at Queens Crawley. In the meantime, Lady Crawley has become extremely ill, and nobody has noticed. Everyone is anxious about Matilda's health because of her will and estate. Becky gives them all regular updates.

Becky spends two sleepless weeks looking after the miserable Matilda. Rawdon confesses to his aunt that he is in love with Becky. Matilda, who loves Becky like a daughter at this point, does not want the girl's feelings hurt. She also does not want Rawdon to marry her.

Mrs. Bute tells Rawdon that when Lady Crawley dies, Sir Pitt will ask Becky to marry him. Rawdon is not surprised by this news, and he suspects that Mrs. Bute wants Becky's reputation ruined so that Sir Pitt cannot marry her. Rawdon confronts Becky about Sir Pitt's attraction. She assumes he is questioning her honor and leaves the room in tears.

Sir Pitt starts writing urgent letters to Becky commanding and begging her to return. Without her, nobody keeps track of his books, expenses and paperwork. The house is gloomy without her, he says. Sir Pitt pleads on behalf of his daughters, who he thinks are being denied an education.

Becky continues to dote on Matilda, who takes advantage of her kindness. The narrator reminds readers that people rarely do things for nothing and comments that Matilda must be aware of this. Becky receives new dresses and social contacts, and Matilda attempts to have Becky marry her pharmacist or get her settled into some similar comfortable lifestyle. She wants Becky out of her house before the season begins in London.

Becky and Matilda pay a visit to the Sedley house, and Becky and Amelia are awkwardly reunited. Matilda likes Amelia immediately and wants Rawdon to marry her. Becky says Amelia is engaged to George, and this makes Rawdon remember how

much money George lost to him shooting pool. They decide to invite George and Amelia to Matilda's house.

George and Rawdon make small talk and agree to meet the next day to shoot pool. George brings up Becky and irritates Rawdon, who is amused when Becky is very cold to George. George asks Becky how she likes her new "place." Becky snaps at him for reminding her of her social status. Becky tries to make him feel bad by reminding him that she now lives with actual nobility rather than wealthy city merchants. George retorts that the city people were good enough for her the previous year when she tried to marry Joseph. Their argument ends when Amelia comes up to them and George stomps off.

The next day, George tries to warn Rawdon that Becky is a dangerous flirt and very clever. Rawdon agrees and later laughingly tells the conversation to Becky. Lady Crawley has passed away. Sir Pitt begs Becky to come back more than ever now, as the girls and the entire household really need her. Sir Pitt eventually comes to London to ask Becky to return. He asks Becky to marry him and be Lady Crawley. Becky starts to cry and tells him she cannot marry him because she is already married.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Lady Rose Crawley's tragic death is one of the darker moments of the novel. She is a lower-middle class who woman married above her station and ended up miserable. She was wealthy and friendless in a loveless marriage, and she lived a depressed life for years before withering away. Nobody noticed or cared when she left, and she gained nothing by her elevated marital status.

Lady Crawley's story is going on while Becky Sharp is trying desperately to accomplish the same thing. She makes herself crazy catering to Matilda's every need, hoping that she will land herself a wealthy husband and get respect from the noble class. At every turn, George Osborne is there to put her back in her place and remind her that she is, after all, just a governess.

Only Amelia seems to value people for their personalities, although she is so blinded by love that she cannot see that George is a terrible person. This oversight forces one to disregard her character evaluations.

Becky's careful schemes seem only to fool Sir Pitt, who is as uneducated and crass. The servants, on the other hand, see right through her. Lady Crawley, who loves Becky and really enjoys her company, can even see why she is acting the way she does. Everyone but Sir Pitt and Becky herself seems irritated by Becky's conniving to raise her status.

In this chapter, the author makes liberal use of an interesting technique. The narrator first hints at and then later reveals the action. He spends pages describing the new maid for Matilda and then, only when readers are absolutely positive they have figured it out, discloses that it is in fact Becky. This is interesting because he builds up the end of

the chapter so that the reader questions the identity of Becky's husband. All indications point to Rawdon Crawley as the husband, but the narrator does not give an answer.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Matilda walks in the room as Becky is thanking Sir Pitt for his kindness. Sir Pitt tells Matilda that Becky has refused his proposal of marriage. Matilda cannot understand why a penniless governess would refuse to marry a baronet. She is insulted and thinks Becky has slighted her family. Becky begins to cry and falls to her knees thanking the family for their generosity. Matilda assumes Becky to be in love with some peasant and tries to find out who it is.

Becky admits to being in love with someone but cannot disclose the man. She spends a great deal of time alone thinking of what life would have been for her as the wife of a baronet. She thinks back on the kindness of Matilda and wonders what will happen to the family now. Becky decides to write Matilda a letter asking her to accompany Becky to visit someone, who the narrator exposes as Rawdon Crawley.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Becky's marriage to Rawdon is very interesting. He has the potential to become very wealthy and elevate Becky's status. He is currently not wealthy, though, and relies entirely on his aunt's inheritance money. What will happen when the Crawley family finds out their favorite son has married the penniless governess? Sir Pitt himself married a working-class girl, and he also fell in love with Becky. He can possibly appreciate his son's looking past social status in his wife, but he is also in love with the same woman. Matilda told Becky months ago that Rawdon must marry a wealthy girl for the good of the family. It seems nobody can possibly be happy about the marriage but Becky and Rawdon, who are possibly actually in love with one another.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Rawdon's marriage to Becky is the one most honest thing he'll do in his life. He is infatuated with her, and she fills his soul with joy. Becky suspected Sir Pitt would propose to her when Lady Crawley died, and she confessed this to Rawdon. He agreed that Becky could not marry Sir Pitt, and as he was in love with her, they arranged for Amelia to secretly meet them and stand up for them before the judge. Rawdon is confident Becky has enough wit to make sure the Crawley family is not too outraged. Rawdon rents a nice house near the military barracks for his bride and him and stocks it with fine furniture, plants and clothing for Becky.

On the night Becky is to tell Matilda the identity of her husband, she spends the entire day buttering up to Matilda. She sings her favorite songs, reads her favorite books and is overly sweet and funny the entire day. Matilda is touched, still thinking Becky is in love with some pauper. She invites Becky to stay and live with her as long as she wants, insisting she cannot return to Queens Crawley as governess now.

Betty Martin, one of the maids in Matilda's house, is introduced briefly. Becky Sharp has just purchased a dress and shawl for the girl for services rendered. In the morning, Betty enters Becky's room and finds the bed still made and suitcases packed by the window. She finds a note and takes it to Miss Briggs. In the note, Becky confesses to Miss Briggs that she has run away to live with her husband who is, in fact, Rawdon Crawley. Mrs. Bute arrives at Matilda's house just in time to help Miss Briggs break the news. Matilda does not take the news well. She is furious and accuses Mrs. Bute of conspiring to help her husband get more inheritance.

Mrs. Bute is insulted and tells Matilda that Becky's mother was not French nobility at all but an opera dancer. She accuses Becky of having danced on the stage herself. Matilda faints just as Sir Pitt arrives insisting on dragging Becky back to Queens Crawley. When Sir Pitt learns the news he, too, is furious. He storms back to Queens Crawley and ransacks her things.

Meanwhile, Rawdon and Becky are comfortable in their new home. Rawdon is concerned his aunt will never approve of their wedding, and Becky assures Rawdon that she will provide security for them both.

Chapter 16 Analysis

This chapter does not divulge anything unexpected. One could determine from last chapter that Becky has married Rawdon and knows that both Sir Pitt and Matilda will be very angry. Matilda is enraged because Rawdon needs to marry a wealthy girl to secure the family fortune, and Sir Pitt is jealous because he thinks himself to be in love with Becky. This whole debacle allows Mrs. Bute to feel quite hopeful that Bute will inherit the

whole of Matilda's fortune after all. Throughout the chapter, flashbacks fill in details, introducing minor characters to show the careful extent of Becky's plans to make her escape.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The Osborne family butler is at a public auction, buying household items for the family from repossessed homes and estates. Becky and Rawdon bid on a piano against Dobbin, who wins the bidding war. The piano once belonged to Amelia Sedley. The Sedley family has gone bankrupt in the stock market, and the auction is being held in their old home. Dobbin is buying back Amelia's piano for her. It arrives that evening at a tiny cottage outside of town.

Rawdon and Becky would not think of visiting Amelia in her present housing, as the Sedleys no longer have anything to offer them. Matilda has not yet forgiven them, though a month has passed since the wedding. Rawdon is turned away when he visits, and his letters get sent back to him. Mrs. Bute has replaced Becky as nursemaid for Matilda. This causes a lot of anger for Becky and Rawdon. Becky thinks to herself that if Rawdon were just a little smarter, she could really turn him into something. The narrator says she is hiding her opinion of even him, laughing at his jokes and pretending to like his friends. Her behavior allows Rawdon to become very content. He stops gambling and drinking all night long.

The couple has not yet announced their marriage, and so they have not entered the London social scene. This also prevents the creditors from coming to their house to claim payment for the new things. Becky and Rawdon continue to live happily on credit, entertaining a few of Rawdon's friends who all adore her. The Crawleys discovered the auction printed in the paper next to a notice of George's promotion to captain. The chapter ends with the Crawleys talking flippantly about the Sedley situation, speculating that George will probably not marry Amelia now because of their financial state.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The narrator offers a lot of interesting and timeless social commentary in this chapter. He does not fault Becky for her fake devotion to Rawdon. He comments that many women act this way, calming angry husbands and energizing boring ones. He says many women play a servile role, and their husbands reward them for it. This leaves one to wonder why Becky agreed to marry Rawdon. She thinks he is unintelligent, and she knows he has no money. She does not seem to even like him very much. This can only lead one to believe that she will devote every ounce of energy into making Matilda accept their marriage so that they can live comfortably off of her wealth. In the meantime, there are overt hints that the good credit of Rawdon Crawley is soon going to run out, leaving them in a situation not unlike Amelia's. Perhaps they will live to regret not being kinder to her in her time of need. Through his discussion, the narrator foreshadows financial ruin and comeuppance.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

At this point in history, Napoleon has escaped from Elba and landed in Cannes. French King Louis the 18th flees his kingdom, and Europe is in an uproar, causing the London stock market to plummet. Four of Europe's great armies are called to war to dethrone Napoleon and reinstate Louis.

In the midst of this military struggle, the events that led to the Sedley's downfall come to surface. Things have been going worse and worse for Mr. Sedley, and he comes home late to his wife complaining of George's poor behavior. He has been around London for some time, ignoring Amelia while other men could be proposing to her. Mrs. Sedley picks up on the fact that Dobbin is in love with Amelia. Mr. Sedley waits for an opportunity to speak and finally tells his wife of their ruined state. They realize this news will break Amelia's heart. Amelia has grown very reclusive, as George ignores her and his sisters are very cruel to her. Becky also ignores her, and she is quite alone in the world.

John Osborne is very upset, knowing he owes his entire success to the earlier kindness of John Sedley. He knows his son George is supposed to marry Amelia, but he wants George to marry a woman of better fortunes. He decides to break off the engagement. However, doing so will make him look like a terrible person. To solve his problem, he comes up with a plot to ruin the reputation of the Sedleys. He commands George to stop all correspondence with Amelia immediately. He writes a letter to the Sedleys indicating that John Sedley has swindled the Osbornes and that he cannot allow George to marry Amelia. Instead of being crushed as her family expected, Amelia takes the news with grace. She simply returns to her room to wither away in loneliness.

John Sedley is furious and tells Amelia he would never have allowed her to marry George after this action. He commands Amelia to get rid of everything George ever gave her. This does not turn out to be very much.

Dobbin's sisters make fun of Amelia for being so in love with George and now being bankrupt. Dobbin is enraged, scolding them and reminding them that the couple was betrothed since birth and that Amelia is the sweetest woman on earth. He scoffs at his sisters' taunting suggestions that he go and marry Amelia, since she is now available.

Dobbin and George Osborne are about to go off to war. George is slightly sad at the thought of Amelia's situation. He is hurt that Amelia sent back the things George had given her. Amelia wrote a closing note to him, which ends by thanking him for returning the piano. Dobbin gets teary thinking of Amelia sad and readers discover he has been to visit the Sedleys. He does nothing to correct their misunderstanding about the piano. Dobbin tells George that Amelia is dying. This news softens George's heart, and he goes to Amelia to take her away and marry her after all.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Here the narrator cautions people to never expose true emotions, encouraging readers to try not to even have strong emotions. He says to be wary of everyone. It is interesting that George acts on impulsive emotions right after this speech. Years of ignoring Amelia and being uninterested in her are forgotten by one afternoon of seeing her house boarded up. This could indicate that he is a good man deep inside, but nothing shown so far indicates this sudden surge of emotion is anything but a temporary whim. It would seem Dobbin is the character who most takes the narrator's advice, as he has gone almost the entire novel building a love for Amelia and not acting on it or trusting her with his feelings.

Here the narrator is very clever. He never says negative things about the characters, but he allows their actions to portray them as complete opposites of the way he describes them. For example, he describes George's gifts to Amelia with such detail as if to praise, but it has the effect of creating sadness over the measly pile of things he has given her over the years.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Mrs. Bute is hard at work being kind to Matilda Crawley's house staff. Rawdon has never been particularly kind to them, and while the staff is more than eager to help Mrs. Bute, they only obeyed Rawdon out of obligation. Mrs. Bute steels herself for a battle of wits against Becky Crawley to win Matilda's inheritance.

Mrs. Bute knows Matilda really does like Becky and Rawdon better than the Bute children, and she is worried Matilda will miss them in her severe illness, which does not get better under Mrs. Bute's care. Mrs. Bute develops a plan to get Reverend Bute to speak to the dying Matilda about her spiritual health. She starts telling Matilda awful stories about Rawdon and then visits Miss Pinkerton to learn the history of Becky Sharp.

Mrs. Bute goes to Becky's childhood home and learns that her parents were only married a short time before her mother's death and that her father was always broke. Becky has danced herself in the operas and sat as a model for painters, and she has performed numerous other immoral acts. Matilda's doctors inform Mrs. Bute that her care is a bit overzealous and that Matilda does not need to be bedridden.

Later, the doctor and pharmacist are chatting, thinking Rawdon is a fool for marrying a governess and saying that Matilda is likely to have a stroke if she indeed goes out of bed. Mrs. Bute tries desperately to get the woman to alter her will so that she can take her out for a stroll in the park and bring on a seizure. Matilda agrees to the walk but not the will alteration. They run into Rawdon and Becky in the park, and Matilda refuses to acknowledge him.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Mrs. Bute is every bit as cunning and manipulative as Becky in this chapter. She worms her way into the affections of Matilda's household staff, fills up on secrets about Becky's past and has replaced Becky as caretaker of Matilda Crawley. While Matilda has not yet warmed to Mrs. Bute, the snub in the park indicates that Mrs. Bute is at least further ahead in the inheritance race than Rawdon and his wife. Through the discussions with the medical staff of Matilda, the narrator hints that Mrs. Bute may try to kill Matilda Crawley as soon as she has secured the inheritance money.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Dobbin feels strange to have been the cause of George and Amelia's marriage. George's heart is softened as much by Amelia's servitude to him as her strong feelings for him. He still feels as though he is making a great sacrifice in marrying Amelia.

Dobbin consults with Mrs. Sedley, who thinks her husband will never allow the marriage after what John Osborne did. Dobbin encourages the pair to elope. Dobbin presses George to act quickly, all the while wondering why he does so. Dobbin goes to visit with John Sedley, who is quite a broken man, to see if there is any chance that George and Amelia could get married with his blessing. They discuss Napoleon and the war abroad. Sedley blames the war, quite rightly, for his financial ruin, having bet everything on the strength of the French currency before Napoleon escaped from Elba. Sedley complains of Osborne's treachery, but Dobbin persuades him to allow the children to marry.

Back at the new Sedley house, George is making fun of Miss Swartz, a biracial heiress who is trying to get George to marry into her fortune. When he says how his sisters are nice to Miss Swartz, Amelia comments that they were always cruel to her. George says his sisters are only interested in money. He goes on to say he respects Rawdon for marrying the girl he loves and says money is not as important as character. The conversation ends when Dobbin returns to warn George of Sedley's arrival so that he can sneak out. Amelia barely notices Dobbin, who is simply glad to see her happy.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Only because Amelia is so pure of heart does she not see through George's pretended caring to his true self. She is so overcome by joy that George cares about her again that she really does not care about anything else. It will be interesting to see whether George's father will pursue the marriage to the extremely wealthy Miss Swartz. While she has always been raised in noble homes and is of extreme wealth, she has no more true friends than Becky Sharp does, because of her biracial parents.

Through the author's portrayal of more and more characters that should be content with their lives, he suggests that nobody is truly happy in Vanity Fair - the height of society. Those with no money always long for it, and once they get it, they long for friends and happiness again without the pressures of appearances that accompany a high status position in this London society.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

While George is reconciling with Amelia, his family is conspiring for him to marry Miss Swartz, and quickly before landed gentry come and sweep her up. John Osborne envisions George leaving the military and joining parliament after his marriage to such a wealthy woman. George tries to put him off by reminding him of his military obligations. John Osborne says George should resign and stay home a rich man, which George reminds him would equate the Osborne name with cowardice.

Miss Swartz continues to visit the Osborne house regularly. She is quite dull but fabulously wealthy, so the Osborne girls like visiting with her. One afternoon, Miss Swartz is looking through some piano music and notices it used to belong to Amelia. She asks after her, and the Osborne girls tell Miss Swartz that the Sedley family has become bankrupt. George speaks up to remind them that Amelia is not to blame, and they all get in an argument over George speaking of Amelia. Then, George thanks Miss Swarz for being kind to Amelia, and he tells her they are to be married. George and John have an argument which ends with George being cut off financially when he chooses Amelia over Miss Swartz.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Not surprisingly, the Osborne family harbors racial prejudice and only wants George to marry Miss Swartz for her money. The characters of the Osborne sisters develop as selfish and superficial. George's change of heart toward Amelia is still not quite believable. After so much time spent looking at him as immature, one cannot help but wonder if his newfound infatuation with her is only fueled by his desire to irritate his parents.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

John Osborne is pretty sure George and Amelia will not last long without any income from him and is not worried about the marriage. Meanwhile, Dobbin, dressed to the nines, waits for Georgein a coffee shop. George shows up and downs several shots to calm his nerves. They head to the church to meet Amelia. Jos and Dobbin are the only guests at the wedding. After the ceremony, Dobbin is too full of emotion to speak as he watches the newlyweds drive off. Dobbin is utterly depressed, walking the streets as children taunt him for his ridiculous clothes.

Jos Sedley looks wonderful as he eats lunch with Rawdon and George some days later. Jos and George are commenting on the beautiful women that walk by. Since they are bored at work during the current peace outbreak, they look to hang out somewhere amid attractive ladies. As the trio is about to set off, Jos's carriage pulls up containing Becky and Amelia. Jos insists he will make the ladies' husbands behave.

Amelia and George are taking their honeymoon at Brighton, where Becky and Rawdon happen to be staying, and Jos happened to turn up. Becky tells George she was only so rude at their last meeting because she feared he was being unkind to Amelia. George is impressed with her apology. The young couples commiserate on their family troubles. Both the Osbornes and the Crawleys are still upset about the marriages of their sons. Becky has also become quite skilled at convincing creditors to leave them alone and buy them more time to get Matilda's money. George is still able to live off the small sum he got from his father before falling out of favor. Amidst the fun being had at Brighton, Dobbin arrives to tell them that the army has been called to Belgium. They must all leave next week for war.

Chapter 22 Analysis

George's true self peeks out again in this chapter, as he spends his honeymoon time ogling other women while Amelia rides around town with Becky. The high spirits of Becky and Rawdon, who are living as nobility and generating no income at all, are transparent with the narrator's constant reminders of their financial position. Becky jokes about her skill at turning away creditors, but the narrator says they are stationed outside the Crawley apartment with as much diligence as the Crawleys stand outside Matilda's door, waiting for her to forgive them.

The chapter delivers a comical yet biting commentary on the enormous pressures to conform in this society. Young people are piling themselves into debt, choosing to amass enormous loans rather than live simply and appear poor. The clever narrator constantly alerts readers to the cracks in the smiles of the characters as they attempt to cling to their facades of happiness.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

A flashback chapter shows the events immediately following the Osborne/Sedley marriage. While George enjoys his honeymoon with Amelia, he leaves Dobbin at home to take care of his business affairs. Dobbin tries to get Jos and George more closely affiliated so that John Osborne might consider reconciling with John Sedley. Dobbin makes friends with George's sisters and tries to have everyone on his side to better argue with John Osborne. One of George's sisters becomes quite smitten with Dobbin as he tries to warm her to George's cause. George told Dobbin some time ago that his sister Jane would marry him if he asked. He is not there to see to his own love life and steers conversation back to George and Amelia.

One of John Osborne's associates, Mr. Bullock, comes to take the Osborne sisters to a flower show. Rather than be excited by the news of George's elopement, he can only comment that this blunder makes the dowries for the girls much higher so that the Osborne family can save face and still marry into noble and wealthy families. The girls harden their hearts to George's cause as they think of their newly elevated marriage prospects.

Chapter 23 Analysis

This chapter shows quite a bit of the greed and selfishness running rampant. Nobody can simply be happy for anyone else. Everyone in this story apart from Dobbin and Amelia is only concerned with raising his or her own social status. Every single action and friendship must be carefully calculated to make each person look better in society. People are willing to sell out their own brothers if it means better marriage prospects.

The return to flashback at this point heightens the suspense of the large revelation at the end of the previous chapter. Another chapter adds to the anticipation of the men shipping off to war while filling in the details of the action.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Still in flashback, Dobbin is unaware that the Osborne girls are not on his side. He heads off to visit Mr. Osborne at work, still feeling quite nervous because it was he who brought Amelia and George back together to start with. Osborne thinks Dobbin has arrived with news of George's surrender and thinks to himself that Dobbin is a bumpkin.

Osborne makes a speech to Dobbin about the great trouble he's taken to give everything to George. He insists George will come back a colonel and marry Miss Swartz and asks Dobbin to talk some sense into George. Dobbin is forced to admit that he did in fact bring the pair together and grows angry at John's insults to Amelia. Dobbin tells John that the couple is already married. Having nothing more to say, Dobbin storms off and asks John's friend Chopper to send him reports of the father's attitude regarding George.

That night at dinner, Mr. Osborne orders the servants to take away George's plate, which has been set every night in expectation of his return. John retreats to his study, the room where he maintains the expense books. Everyone in the family is terrified of this room, which also contains the family Bible. George's mother has long ago passed away, and nobody thinks of her much anymore. John locks his study door and beings to read through his box of George's papers - his school papers, letters, art projects and even tailor bills - saved up over George's whole life. After he reads everything, John seals and locks the box and takes down the family Bible. He removes George's name from the family record. He then takes a document from his desk and burns it, writes a letter for a servant to deliver and goes to bed.

Dobbin arranges to have dinner with Chopper the next evening. Chopper has made a list of all money given to George in the past three years, at the request of Mr. Osborne. Chopper does not pity Amelia for her situation, as Mr. Sedley did not pay very good wages to his clerks. During the day, Chopper and another clerk are asked to sign as witnesses to Mr. Osborne's new will. Osborne writes a letter to Dobbin and leaves the office early with Mr. Bullock.

The colonel of the regiment informs Dobbin of their marching orders to Belgium. Dobbin is sad that Amelia is his first thought when considering leaving for war. He thinks of her before his own parents and sisters. Dobbin spends a lot of time informing all the officers he meets that they must go off to war and that they should stop partying and say goodbye to their families. Dobbin eats dinner with Chopper and some soldiers. Chopper delivers a letter from John Osborne to George and reports on Osborne's new will and foul mood.

The chapter ends with a hopeful Jane Osborne waiting for Dobbin to come propose to her, which he does not do as he must say farewell to his own family and rush to

Brighton to tell George the news. A visibly shattered Mr. Osborne informs the family that Dobbin is never to be allowed into their home again, anyway, and Mr. Bullock begins to court Maria Osborne.

Chapter 24 Analysis

In the modern world, it is difficult to comprehend how enormously insulting George's marriage to a pauper would be for John Osborne. Thinking in terms of the social rigors, constant demands to keep up appearances in Vanity Fair, one can begin to understand how John Osborne would be so enraged he would disown his son, previously his greatest joy. Osborne says earlier in the novel that his entire life's work has been to give George a good future, one that George would not have to work for as John, who came from nothing, did.

The documents in Mr. Osborne's drawer remind readers that Sedley is George's godfather and that the Sedleys were instrumental in the Osbornes' success. This makes the situation all the more tragic, because a man should be glad to have his son married to his best friend's daughter. To think that a lifelong friendship and relationship would be shattered by bankruptcy and unfortunate times is quite disheartening. John Osborne deserves no pity for his actions, but one should remember the powerful pressures of society that would cause a man to disown a child in such a manner.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Dobbin tells the crew at Brighton that he fears the battle in Belgium will be quite intense, but he asks the men not to tell Amelia this. They agree to talk about the war as if it were just normal duty for soldiers. The narrator reveals that Amelia does not like Dobbin much. He lisps, is ugly and is awkward. She likes how much Dobbin likes George, but she does not care much for him. Dobbin knows how she feels about him, which makes him even more awkward. The narrator also hints that, in time, Amelia will quite change her mind about Dobbin.

Becky figures out how much Dobbin is in love with Amelia. She also does not like Dobbin because of how much he loves Amelia, and he does not like her either. Outwardly, of course, Becky is very polite to him as a friend of their friends. Rawdon does not have much time for Dobbin and considers him "underbred." Jos Sedley is not too kind to him, either.

After dinner, Dobbin gives George the letter from Mr. Osborne. It turns out to be written by the family lawyer. The letter informs George that he is no longer a member of the family and will get nothing from the Osborne's apart from one third of his mother's inheritance, which amounts to 2,000 pounds. George begins to yell at Dobbin for being a useless manager. He wonders what he is supposed to do with such a small amount of money and mentions that he has already lost 140 pounds at gambling to Rawdon. Dobbin suggests George learn to live on his paycheck, a statement which George thinks is ridiculous for a man accustomed to his lifestyle.

George rants that he did not grow up eating porridge and cannot start now. Dobbin thinks if George gets his name mentioned in the paper that John will reconsider, but George thinks the only way his name will make the paper is if he is killed or wounded in battle. Dobbin tries to end the discussion by saying he is not going to get married and will not forget his godchildren in his will. George repeats that it is impossible to stay angry with Dobbin and that ends the argument.

Rawdon and Becky are admiring one another and each other in their dressing room, discussing the war and how Amelia will handle it when George leaves. Becky teases that Amelia has already begun whining about it. Rawdon gets angry and assumes Becky does not care about his leaving. Becky insists she is going with Rawdon, as he is not meant for the front lines anyway. Rawdon is the aide-de-camp for the general. She nags Rawdon to get the money from George before they leave for war.

Becky works hard to be kind to George so that he will pay the Crawleys their money. Becky is delightful and witty at meals, and Amelia becomes morose. She has been married only a week, and already George is searching for entertainment from other women. She dwells on how kind it was for a smart man such as George to marry a dull

girl such as her. Amelia sits in a chair and sulks while Becky and George watch the ocean and Jos and Rawdon play pool.

The action flashes back to the day before, when Dobbin delivers the news of war. George is too preoccupied in his appearance to remember to tell Amelia that he must go. He tells her instead of the argument with his father and asks how she will possibly bear a life of poverty. Amelia is glad this is her husband's only concern and begins to sing for him. She foolishly asks him if two thousand pounds isn't quite a bit of money anyway and suggests that his father cannot stay mad for long.

Later, at dinner, George makes some reference to marching to Belgium and then realizes he has yet to tell Amelia of his departure. He then tells Amelia that she should come along to Belgium. Becky says that she is going after all. Dobbin tries to interject and say that Amelia shouldn't go because of the danger, but then he remembers they are pretending the battle is no big deal. They begin to discuss that Major O'Dowd's wife will act as chaperone and agree that Amelia should go to Belgium with the rest.

Becky takes Amelia into the house, and the plot flashes forward to the present. Amelia has gone off to her room to cry in jealousy, and Becky sends a note to Rawdon to remind him to get the money from George. She also mentions that Mrs. Bute has stopped playing sentry with Matilda Crawley. Rawdon gets the money, and Jos, Dobbin and George arrange to leave for London the next morning to get ready for war. As Amelia packs to leave, she thinks how jealous she is of Becky for flirting with her husband.

Matilda continues to ignore the Crawley couple when she sees them on the street. Rawdon suggests they might as well go back to London, but Becky says the company of the Osbornes and Jos and Dobbin is far better than that of the nagging creditors. Rawdon comments that the money from George will barely cover their hotel, but Becky asks why they should bother to pay for the hotel in the first place.

The servants and doctors of the Crawley house are no longer angry with Rawdon and Becky. Even Miss Briggs is no longer hateful, as Becky is not taking over her position any longer. They all are miserable with Mrs. Bute as a caretaker and secretly wish for reconciliation between Matilda and Rawdon. Mrs. Bute fires the servants and sends for her own daughters. Mrs. Bute is forced to leave when her husband becomes ill, and Becky takes this chance to go to the house.

Becky makes small talk with Miss Briggs, who is sympathetic. Mrs. Bute set up the many dinners at Queens Crawley in hopes that Rawdon would fall in love with Becky and marry her so that he would be disowned. Becky leaves with high hopes and has Rawdon write a letter to his aunt begging to see her before he goes to war.

Matilda immediately knows the letter is actually from Becky because Rawdon is always rude and has poor grammar and spelling. She agrees to see him anyway, but she refuses to see Becky. After Rawdon's visit, his aunt comments that she thinks Becky drives him to drink and makes him more vulgar. She has Miss Briggs write a note that

there is a letter waiting for them with Matilda's attorney. She then writes a letter telling Mrs. Bute not to return.

Becky and Rawdon return to London to find their house guarded by the sheriff's men, and they discover Matilda has given them only twenty pounds. Becky laughs at Rawdon and the ridiculous situation.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Both the Crawleys and the Osbornes find themselves in similar predicaments, having no hopes for financial stability upon their return from the war in Belgium. At least the Osbornes have not incurred the enormous debts of the Crawley family. It is a wonder they are able to save face in society with the sheriff's men stationed outside their home every day. They take their poverty so lightheartedly and continue to live as though they have an income when it becomes clearer every day how close to bankruptcy they become. The author and narrator do not even comment on this situation. The absence of narrator commentary on such an obvious social faux pas heightens the need for the resolution to this tension.

Unhappiness in both marriages is foreshadowed. Becky begins to show her true colors to Rawdon and treats him like a child, a pawn in her game to be queen. Amelia will let her own self-doubt blind her to George's true personality and also ruin her small chances at happiness with him. She spends every moment either (correctly) certain that he is infatuated with other women or moping that she is not as intelligent and interesting as the other women around. Another chapter is spent pitying Dobbin for being so kind and good and treated so badly by all around him.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

George rents a very expensive suite of rooms (the old funeral bed of a deceased royal) for Amelia and him in London, and Dobbin comments about their lack of funds. George responds with the same argument that he is used to living in this manner. Amelia goes off to see her mother, and George tells her he has business. He really goes to the theater, leaving Dobbin to see her off in the carriage.

Amelia and her mother celebrate her marriage, and Amelia returns to her old bedroom where thinks sadly of her life and jealously of Becky. She broods in her bedroom and dreads going to sleep in the funeral bed in the hotel. She then goes downstairs, does not think of George's coldness and visits with her family.

The next day, George sends Amelia shopping with her mother to prepare for the trip to Belgium. He goes to meet his father's lawyer and get his mother's inheritance, having spent all his money on gambling and the hotel. The people of London are going to Brussels thinking of parties rather than war. Every day, ships full of wealthy people leave for Belgium.

At the attorney's office, George is quite cocky and does not even realize that every man in the room is sneering at him. They all know the state of his financial affairs. The lawyer predicts George will be in the beggars' prison within two years.

Chapter 26 Analysis

In this chapter George leads a life much like the Crawley's, on borrowed time. The action begs the question of how quickly they will run out of money, but it does not raise concern for Amelia because she has lived in poverty before. George is even less endearing in this chapter and does not earn hope for his sake that his father will forgive him.

The narrator takes care to mention how unhappy Amelia is behind closed doors and yet contrasts this with her conscious thoughts of how angelic her husband is. She becomes a frustrating character. She is blinded by love for an unkind man, and she lacks the courage to react to his poor treatment of her.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Jos escorts Amelia back to the hotel, where Dobbin and several soldiers are waiting for them. They all comment on how lovely and nice Amelia is, and Dobbin likes them all the more for saying so. Amelia gets invited to a military party by Mrs. O'Dowd, who is to be her escort in Belgium. Mrs. and Major O'Dowd turn out to be a loud and jolly couple who have traveled the world with the military. They are well respected and liked, although everyone finds them crude and makes fun of their thick accents. Mrs. O'Dowd fills Amelia in on the gossip and life of a soldier's wife. Everyone likes her immediately, but the women become jealous when the men are so kind to her. The chapter ends with Dobbin watching the lights in George's bedroom later that night, staying awake until morning in his sadness.

Chapter 27 Analysis

As much as the military people like Amelia, they are all very wary for her. They continually mention to one another that they hope George has stopped playing "fast and loose," if only for her sake. Dobbin's character becomes sadder to readers as he watches and waits while the lights go on in George and Amelia's bedroom.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

The characters head to Belgium by sea, and Jos gets seasick. He does not have a servant when they embark in Belgium, so Dobbin secures Jos and Amelia's luggage as well as an English-speaking servant for the family. The town is swarmed with wealthy Britons, and Napoleon and his army prepare to wreak havoc.

The English soldiers are feeling quite confident, knowing the Russians, Prussians and Austrians are on their way to help defeat Bonaparte. George is ashamed by his vulgar associates in the military, but Amelia does not seem to mind them at all. She is really starting to like Mrs. O'Dowd. All the characters are enjoying the scene in Belgium, which is much the same as in London with gambling, dancing, drinking and constant parties. Jos wants to feel included and dresses in military-style clothing even though he is a civilian. George is quite pleased with all the splendor and takes Amelia out every evening.

George thinks he is getting along well with the Belgian nobility, who in reality think of him as second class. They will gladly accept his generosity, but they talk badly of him behind his back. By the end of the chapter, even Dobbin laughs at Mrs. O'Dowd's crude accent and foolish behavior, and Amelia's heart falls when the Crawleys arrive on the scene.

Chapter 28 Analysis

George Osborne is one of the most snobbish, ungrateful characters in the entire novel. The narrator really opens up in this chapter, showing George's dislike of anyone not behaving "properly" as well as his dislike for his own wife. In this chapter, he falls victim to his own brand of torture as the Belgian nobility completely take advantage of him and snub him behind his back. The narrator sets up the scene as one of aloof gayety and hints at disaster to come as the wealthy celebrate and vacation amidst a war.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

The Osbornes and the Crawleys meet in the park, where Becky and Rawdon are riding with the general and barely make polite contact with Amelia and George. George wastes no time telling Rawdon of his recent dinner with the Belgian nobles. At the theater, Becky introduces George to the general, and she has George escort her to the Osborne box. When they leave, the general is relieved. George is pleased with himself, thinking he made a grand impression, and Becky is happy because she thinks she is playing George and the general for fools.

The general watches Becky in the Osborne box, and she puts on a great show for him, which Dobbin picks up on. When he later comments that Becky is a snake, George counters that she is the nicest woman in the world, while Amelia hangs her head in shame as Becky bedazzles everyone around.

Amelia becomes increasingly jealous of Becky and acts cool to her. Becky picks up on this and comments on it to George. She asks George to have dinner with her, and George decides he is a lady-killer. George thinks Becky is in love with him, and he spends all his free time gambling with Rawdon and flirting with Becky while Amelia stays home and silently mopes.

The Duke of Wellington throws an elaborate ball that all the Britons are dying to attend. The main characters all secure tickets, apart from Jos, and George dresses Amelia to the nines and drags her to a ball where she knows nobody. George is embarrassed that Dobbin has managed to get a ticket and is confused when the Belgian noble snubs him at the ball. He parks Amelia on a bench, and she sits there alone and miserable the entire night.

Becky, on the other hand, is radiant. Her French is excellent; everyone assumes Rawdon swept her up from a convent or a French noble family. She rushes over to Amelia and begins to patronize her appearance and behavior. She tells Amelia to stop her husband from gambling, or it will ruin them. George comes over to the bench amidst this speech and takes Becky to dance. Much later, Becky decides to leave and sends George for her shawl and bouquet. Not bothering to say a word to his wife, George runs for the items and slips a note in Becky's flowers. Amelia asks Dobbin to escort her home.

Outside, there is chaos. Dobbin rushes back to the ball to warn George to stop drinking. The battle has arrived. George starts to panic about being killed at battle and leaving Amelia with nothing. He sits and writes his father a letter. Then, he goes to wake Amelia to tell her he must go to battle.

Chapter 29 Analysis

All of the desires of the characters to raise their social status continue in the midst of war. The full extent of the shallowness of this crowd is exposed as they rush to a ball while the army approaches. In Europe, there are new levels of high society and new social obstacles for them all to overcome. All are so involved in their own climbs that they do not notice the reactions of the other players.

Becky is taking her climb to new heights and seducing important men along the way. She makes the general fall in love with her so that Rawdon can gain status. She makes George fall in love with her so that he'll continue to lose money gambling with Rawdon. George is enjoying his new status as an entertainer of Belgian nobility and thinks he is winning Becky's heart. He writes her an inappropriate note in front of his own wife. The author pays close attention to the note, foreshadowing its great importance. Once again, only Dobbin sees past the facades and cares only for the true character of the people he meets.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

The couples say goodbye to one another. Mrs. and Major O'Dowd, who were not invited to the ball, decide to sleep and pack sensibly for the battle. Rawdon thinks of how crazy in love he is with his wife and how immeasurably happy she makes him. He is sad that his debts deter her from climbing in society the way she wants to. She is a bit colder to him and does not get sentimental. She just continues to plot about getting money. She even suggests Rawdon go into the church, a thought which makes him laugh out loud. Becky insists she is sad that he is leaving, and he details the state of their finances. He instructs her to sell the horses to people looking to get out of Brussels, as well as some of the furniture and jewelry. He wears his shabbiest uniform into battle so Becky can sell his good one if he is killed. Rawdon rides off with the general, and Becky locks George's note in her jewelry box and goes to sleep.

As Jos is in the civil service and not a military man, he does not march for war that morning. George does not think to wake him and say goodbye, but Dobbin does. He makes Jos swear to look after Amelia no matter what happens. Jos is confused why Dobbin is the one asking these things and not Amelia's husband. Dobbin longs for one more glance at Amelia before marching to war and is haunted by her despair when he sees her. George takes her back to bed to say goodbye and rushes off as the men begin to march away.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Even when the characters think they are being most supportive to their lovers, their true selfish feelings emerge. George is so concerned with which swords and clothes he packs that he does not say goodbye to his brother-in-law or see properly to his wife's state of panic. Becky does not comfort Rawdon or tell him how much she loves him, but rather she thinks only of her financial situation in the case of his return or death at battle. Dobbin, more and more in love with Amelia each chapter, thinks of her before all others and even oversteps appropriate bounds to look after her safety.

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

Jos quite likes the responsibility of being the man in charge when George and the others are gone. George is pretty mean to him, and Amelia has often had to beg her husband to not act so cruelly toward her brother. The servants are all glad George is gone and say so to Jos.

Jos receives reports of the battle. The Duke's army was crushed the night before. Jos does not believe the report that the Duke of Wellington could be defeated. Everyone advises the nobles to get out of Brussels while they still can. Napoleon is defeating armies all around Europe, despite often being greatly outnumbered. Jos runs into Becky, who has come to visit Amelia and check on her.

Becky pauses to flatter Jos, which the narrator interprets as her calculating to try again for his heart if Rawdon should die at battle. Jos thinks only of the constant snubbing by Becky the entire time they were in Brussels. She never invited him to their home all the times she entertained George and Amelia. Becky insists Rawdon is jealous that she once loved him and that he broke her heart. Jos is touched and completely forgives her. Becky thinks that she has secured a seat in a carriage to escape from Belgium.

Seeing Becky snaps Amelia back to reality. She remembers that she hates Becky for seducing her husband. She refuses to shake Becky's hand. Becky figures out that Amelia must have seen George give the note. Amelia starts berating Becky for coming between her and her husband. She then begins to speak like a crazy person, and Becky sneaks out of the room to tell Jos that Amelia is very unwell.

Becky tells Mrs. O'Dowd to look in on Amelia, who cannot leave her room even to eat. Mrs. O'Dowd is sitting down to dinner with Jos when cannon fire invades the town. There is chaos outside once again.

Chapter 31 Analysis

Even in times of emotional trauma, Becky is collected enough to look after her status. She knows she has treated big, awkward Jos Sedley poorly for years and convinces him this was because she was sad at his not asking her to marry him earlier. The overt narrator steps in during these schemes to inform the readers of Becky's thoughts while she puts on a false polite front. She is slightly thrown by Amelia's madness, but she sends in Mrs. O'Dowd to calm the sick woman while Becky can come up with a way to win back her favor. In this chapter, Jos appears quite tragic. He has been pretending to be in the military to fit in with the crowd. His constant stories about his time in India are understood as an effort to look important among men who must go off to battle.

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

Rumors are flying through Brussels about Napoleon's victories. Jos wants to pack up Amelia and get out of there, but Mrs. O'Dowd calls him a coward. She says she does not move until she gets the order from Major O'Dowd himself. A messenger arrives. The small Belgian forces were at the front of the march toward Bonaparte. They encountered the bulk of the French army and suffered great losses. They turned around and marched through the British troops before scattering, thus causing the chaos in Brussels. Amelia's maid's husband is a soldier in the Belgian forces. He escapes and brings news to the house that George's regiment has suffered major casualties against the French army.

Everyone is trying to escape at once. There are no horses to be bought to pull away the carriages. The Belgian nobles who snubbed George were also very cruel to Becky. She now takes advantage of this, since she has horses to sell. Becky refuses to sell them her horses at any price. She then sees Jos coming and decides to sell him the horses. She asks and receives an exorbitant price for them, as Rawdon instructed. Becky thinks immediately that she is now set for life with the sale of the horses and Rawdon's things along with his pension should he die in battle.

Becky does not think much of Jos for fleeing and leaving Amelia behind with Mrs. O'Dowd. It turns out that the rumors from the Belgian troops are incorrect. The British have been successful in battle and driven back the French troops. Amelia immediately demands to go examine the lists of the wounded. Amelia stops a carriage carrying wounded men and learns news of George. George, Major O'Dowd and Dobbin are safe. Dobbin was wounded in battle but carried a young solider to a cart and offered him money to tell Amelia that George was safe.

The British have defeated only one regiment of the French army. The rest of the French were off defeating the Prussians and now turn their concentration to the advancing English troops. Napoleon is headed for Brussels. The wealthy Britons again prepare to flee.

Becky sews her valuables into her gown and imagines a life for herself as the wife of a French noble while Rawdon, away at war, is thinking only of her safety. The next day is a Sunday, and while Mrs. O'Dowd is reading a sermon to Amelia and the wounded messenger, the cannons of Waterloo begin to fire.

Jos demands that Amelia must flee with him. Mrs. O'Dowd calls Jos a coward again. Amelia refuses to leave without George. Jos leaves, exasperated. On the battlefield, the English are fighting off the French forces all day long. The French slacken their fight and later resurge, but the British hold their position and defeat Bonaparte. Amidst the silence that night after victory, George is lying on the ground, shot dead through the heart.

Chapter 32 Analysis

The military wives' desire to remain in Belgium to look after their husbands seems honorable, but the narrator heightens tension by constantly reiterating that a war is being fought mere miles from the city. As cannon fire rattles their homes, they call Jos a coward for wanting to return to the safety of England. Becky, as always, thinks only of herself and her advancement, and she manages to turn even this grave situation into an opportunity for her imagination. Dobbin, as always, thinks of Amelia before all others even amidst gunfire in the battle of Waterloo. Readers are pleased to see Rawdon having loving thoughts of his wife, and these feelings seem more poignant contrasted with Becky's dreams of a more profitable marriage. Based on the patterns of earlier chapters, one expects several chapters in flashback or concerned with other characters after the cliffhanger ending revealing the death of George.

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

Back in Brighton, Matilda reads in the paper of Rawdon's gallantry in battle. He has been promoted, and his aunt merely comments that it is a shame he married so low. His new rank would have enabled him to marry quite well. Colonel Crawley is no closer to getting Matilda's money. Right after his promotion, Becky, acting as Rawdon, sends his aunt a box of war mementos. Becky (in Rawdon's name) asks to keep writing to her once the army marches to Paris.

Mrs. Bute is miserable at her defeat with Matilda. She fears for the inheritance when she reads of Rawdon's promotion. Sir Pitt has become a stumbling drunk since Becky's departure. He mingles with the peasants who rent from him, much to the embarrassment of Pitt junior. The two girls have been sent away to boarding school by Pitt junior, who now runs all the affairs of Queens Crawley.

Pitt junior is engaged to Lady Jane Sheepshanks, who comes from an interesting and scandalous family. The author spends a great deal of time detailing the Sheepshanks' family history and concentrates on the eccentric Lady Southdown, mother of Jane, who is obsessed with questionable medicinal practices and thinks herself quite a pharmacist. Pitt junior decides that he, too, would like Matilda's fortune and begins a plan to win Matilda's heart.

Lady Jane's mother is very well connected for this task, as Matilda is quite ill all the time these days, and Sir Pitt arranges for Lady Southdown to take over as pharmacist and health advisor for Matilda. She takes Lady Jane along to pay a visit on Matilda.

Chapter 33 Analysis

While the war in Europe is blazing, the civilians left at home are all thinking only of advancing their social stations. Even Pitt junior, who originally fought against Becky's ideas so desperately, has been taken in by greed. Matilda Crawley, it seems, has no true friends left to her in her old age and is only surrounded by people desperate to get her money.

Chapter 34

Chapter 34 Summary

Lady Southdown and Lady Jane come to leave a card not only for Matilda, but one for Miss Briggs as well. Miss Briggs is absolutely flattered and explains that she met Pitt junior and Lady Jane while out for a walk. Pitt junior and the two women have a very successful visit with Matilda, during which Matilda comes to like Lady Jane and Pitt very much. Matilda asks Lady Jane to come again and visit her.

The narrator says that in the autumn while Becky flaunts about Paris and Amelia sits in misery, Lady Jane and Matilda spend numerous pleasant visits. Pitt is very pleased with the way things are going and thinks he loves Lady Jane more each day.

Back in Queens Crawley, Mrs. Bute has heard of Pitt junior's newfound interest in his aunt. She and Bute try to figure out a way to get their children into Matilda's house for a visit. Matilda has never liked the children because, while well educated, they are ugly and poor. Their oldest child, James, is a student at Oxford and is now quite handsome. James visits Matilda while Pitt is over at the house. Matilda invites James to stay at her house. She makes a great show of being kind to him in front of Pitt.

Matilda insists on paying James's hotel bill and sends a servant to do so. James has stayed at a shady pub where he spent the previous evening gambling with some low-life characters in Brighton. He spends the rest of the stay worried he will be found out and feeling uncomfortable around the old ladies of the house.

After dinner, James and Pitt are left alone together. They drink a lot of wine and begin to talk about their lives. Pitt tells James that Matilda likes nothing more than when people speak their minds in front of her. James wonders why Pitt is marrying the daughter of an earl. They begin talking about blood and how birth status matters in all things. James thinks about how there is so much to drink at Oxford but the quality is not nearly as good as Matilda's wine. Pitt encourages James to drink a lot of it and ask Matilda for more throughout his stay.

James charged a great deal of alcohol to his tab at the pub, treating all his friends. The bartender is worried the bill will not be paid and tells the servant James drank it all himself. The servant reports this to Matilda, who hates drink, and particularly gin. The next day does not go well for James. His dog attacks Matilda's dog. He is boisterous and drunk during the evening. James seals the deal by smoking his pipe in the house and gets kicked out of the home and the family fortune.

Meanwhile, Becky and Rawdon are living it up in Paris on the carefully managed funds from the horse sale. In Paris, Becky is an actual success. The Parisian ladies think she is charming. One of them writes to Matilda to see why on earth she does not come to Paris to visit the colonel and his wife. Becky is even noticed by the king. Becky is

pregnant in Paris. Matilda is not moved but angry that Becky has been name-dropping in Paris to be accepted. Matilda writes back a scathing letter in English, but the lady who wrote it does not speak English and therefore has no idea the truth of Becky's character. Embarrassed to admit her poor English skills, the French woman thinks the letter must be full of flattery and throws it away.

The narrator comments that in Paris, Becky earns a place of honor in Vanity Fair as if her family had been there for generations. She is finally the height of society. She gives birth to a baby boy in March. The Crawley family learns of the news and is furious because Rawdon lists his son as his heir. Matilda writes to Pitt junior immediately and has him marry his fiancye, promising them a yearly stipend while she is alive and the bulk of her fortune after she dies. Pitt and Lady Jane and her mother all go to live with Matilda. Lady Jane's mother, Lady Southdown, becomes the household matriarch and soon whips even Matilda into subservience.

Chapter 34 Analysis

The characters' struggles to secure financial means to access Vanity Fair grow desperate in this chapter. They resort to trickery, name dropping and outright lying to one another to grow higher in society. The author employs a great deal of humor in this chapter to reveal the pranks of the characters. Pitt, who has always been portrayed as a stick-in-the-mud, even compared to an undertaker, finds the wit to trick poor James into acting like a drunk around his aunt.

Rather than band together and secure a small stability for a large group, the wings of the family bitterly face one another, even from far away, to vie for Matilda's money. Once the issue is settled and Pitt junior has the fortune, Matilda's power is gone. Nobody feels the need to be kind to her anymore, and she is left at the mercy of the boisterous Lady Southdown. She becomes a timid person in the midst of the strange and overbearing Lady Southdown. The narrator leaves the chapter with hopes that Lady Jane can gently guide Matilda through Vanity Fair.

Chapter 35

Chapter 35 Summary

The story flashes back to the Osborne family immediately after the battle. The news of George's death has reached the Osbornes in England. John Osborne is deeply shaken and crushed by the news, but he still will not speak of it. He orders the family into full mourning, however. Dobbin comes to call on the family, bringing the letter George wrote to his father before heading off to battle. The letter is very brief, not emotional. George asks his father to think of Amelia should he fall and admits to having spent his mother's fortune already. John Osborne is touched but does not forgive the dead son.

Months later, the family is in church when John asks them to switch seats. They look up and notice that someone has commissioned a great memorial to George in the church. Everyone wonders whether John will forgive Amelia as well. John Osborne heads to Brussels, where Amelia is still living. Dobbin has been promoted to major and is also still in Brussels, seeing over the many wounded getting treatment there.

John finds a sergeant from George's regiment and tours the battle sites. He also finds the burial site that Dobbin has arranged, after carrying George's body back to Brussels. John is initially angry that George is buried in a common cemetery, which Dobbin chose because George once mentioned it on vacation as a nice place to be buried. While touring the battlegrounds, John sees Amelia in a carriage. She looks miserable and ill, vacant and dead inside. John is shocked, but he is filled with hatred at the sight of her. He orders his carriage driver to drive faster.

Dobbin, who is riding with Amelia, realizes John Osborne has just passed and snubbed them. Dobbin rushes after the carriage and says he has a message from George. He tells John that Amelia is pregnant and ill. John gives a long lecture about George's lifelong carelessness and selfishness. John Osborne refuses to accept Amelia or her child, and that is the end of it.

When Amelia's baby is born, she finally returns from her grief. Her son, Georgy, reminds her of George every instant, and she can live happily again. Dobbin spends every day with Amelia looking after her in Brussels and later taking her to her parents' house in England. Dobbin is the baby's godfather and is the only person Amelia allows near the baby. Georgy became Amelia's entire existence. Amelia's parents can see how obviously in love Dobbin is with Amelia, and they like the fact that he visits every day. The Sedley's landlord's daughter nicknames Dobbin "Major Sugarplums" because he brings gifts for everyone each day. Eventually, Dobbin can stand it no more. He cannot bear Amelia not loving him back and comes to tell Amelia he is being sent away by the military. The baby grabs Dobbin's finger and laughs in his sleep.

Chapter 35 Analysis

Even through all of John Osborne's grief, he cannot see fit to forgive the son that was for so long his pride and joy. He is so full of bitterness at being snubbed and denied a chance for marriage into a better family that he cannot find room in his heart for his grieving daughter-in-law and his grandson. The narration shifts again in this chapter, not directly saying that John commissioned George's memorial in his grief, but strongly hinting toward it and an easing of his anger toward the end.

Amelia, who is totally devastated and incapacitated by George's death, transfers this obsession into the baby. She is completely blind to the overwhelming love of William Dobbin. She talks only of her angelic husband and his angelic son. Readers are left to wonder how much Dobbin will suffer in his love for this woman, after he spends hours every day visiting her. His pain is great as Amelia looks on him with love, but only for the kindness he shows George's child.

Chapter 36

Chapter 36 Summary

Three years later, Becky and Rawdon are still living in Paris with no steady, actual income. Becky still frequents the fancy parties with French nobility. Rawdon chooses not to since he does not speak French. He has retired from the military and spends his time playing pool and gambling, games at which he has become a master. Becky hates his gambling and nags him about it, even in front of friends. She cries and asks him to burn his IOUs when he loses. People begin to grow suspicious of Rawdon and learn not to bet with him because he most often wins. Becky grows tired of the routine in Paris and begins to scheme to get them back to England.

To fool the Paris creditors, they pretend that Matilda is dying. Rawdon rushes to England to be with her and leaves Becky and the baby behind until he can send for them. Rawdon really hides in Belgium because he owes more money in England than he does in Paris. Becky and little Rawdon go into false mourning and leave their hotel, sneaking out on the bill.

A flashback reveals that Becky has not been an attentive mother to her son. She sent him away for the first portion of his life to live with a nursemaid in a facility for babies. Rawdon has been a very active father, however, and visits his son every day. Becky cannot be bothered because the child ruins her gowns and makes her purses dirty.

Returning to the present, the narrator reminds that back in those days, it was easy to swindle entire cities. As long as people looked the part of wealthy nobles, they could get all the credit in the world for a time. The Crawleys skipped out on Paris and never even paid their nursemaid for her milk. Becky sneaks back to London to convince the creditors to let them back in the country. She sets up a payment plan with a small down payment, and they return to London.

Chapter 36 Analysis

None of the nobility is aware of the Crawley's financial situation. They go around to all the best parties and buy fabulous amounts of things on credit, and yet they are never shunned or looked down upon for being completely broke. As long as they appear to be wealthy and upper class, the people in Vanity Fair accept them. Society does not seem to care how or where people acquire the material possessions necessary to fit in, as long as they have them and carry them with style.

Using mini-flashbacks in this chapter, the author discusses home life for the Crawleys. It seems as though being a good parent is not in the picture for a high society lady. Quite to the contrary of the standard of the times, Rawdon remains a devoted father.

Chapter 37

Chapter 37 Summary

Becky and Rawdon rent a fully furnished mansion in London entirely on credit. Matilda's former butler, Mr. Raggles, has done quite well for himself since retiring form her service. He has purchased a fine mansion fully furnished at the public auction that he leases for extra income. He, in fact, owns the house the Crawleys move into. Mr. Raggles even comes out of retirement to act as butler for the Crawleys out of devotion to Matilda. Rawdon and his family, of course, drive the Raggles to ruin.

Rawdon and Becky make constant use of his aunt's good name for all their services from laundry to food shopping, so they never pay a thing and simply develop huge tabs wherever they go. They do not develop a bad reputation in London. Quite the opposite happens, and Becky becomes quite popular for her wit, but only among the men. Even the women Becky was quite friendly with in Paris snub her in London.

Rawdon is at first angry that women are so rude to his wife and wants to speak to their husbands about it. Becky convinces him he cannot bully her into popularity and keeps saying she has a plan for after Matilda dies. When Matilda finally dies, Bute is in a rage that the money has all been left to Pitt. Rawdon is polite about it and nice to his brother, and he and Becky remain in good favor with Pitt junior. Lady Jane begs Pitt to divide the fortune in half and share with his brother, but Pitt will not. Becky is not deterred and starts plotting for Lady Jane to be Becky's ticket into society events.

Becky asks Rawdon for a sheepdog. As they are having a party during this request, there is a lot of joking that Becky's shepherd is not enough to keep the wolves away. Rawdon, not up to Becky's cleverness, does not get the jokes and continues to play cards.

Little Rawdon begins to cry during the party, and Becky cannot be bothered to comfort him. Rawdon goes upstairs to do so, and the narrator says that he spends a great deal of time with his son. Little Rawdon is terrified of his mother at the same time that he longs for her affection. Rawdon is ashamed at how much he loves his son and tries to hide this from Becky.

One day, Rawdon and little Rawdon are riding a pony in the park when they meet an old war friend of Rawdon's, Corporal Clink. Corporal Clink is with an old man and a young boy about Rawdon's age who, readers discover, is Georgy Osborne. The old man is John Sedley. Rawdon lets little Georgy ride the pony, and they all walk together through the park.

Chapter 37 Analysis

As Becky continues her upward climb in society, she brings down more and more people in her path. In addition to ruining the finances and lives of the good working class people who trusted Matilda Crawley, Becky begins to abuse Rawdon's good heart. She makes fun of him openly in front of his friends at parties and is so clearly the woman of the house that people stop calling him Colonel Crawley and refer to him as Mrs. Crawley's husband. To make matters worse for Rawdon, he must hide his love for his son from a wife who cannot be bothered with the boy.

In an unusual use of symbolism, the author compares Miss Briggs to a sheepdog so that Becky can use the metaphor to confuse Rawdon. There is some confusion about this request for a companion because, in the end, Becky gets both a dog and a human companion. Readers are left to wonder whether they or Rawdon have been confused by Becky's latest plot. As usual, the chapter ends with a cliffhanger, and readers expect to flash back or visit other characters before delving into the life of young Georgy.

Chapter 38

Chapter 38 Summary

Fat Joseph Sedley and his sister Amelia return to the story. Jos, either ashamed of his flight from Brussels or recalled to duty, has returned to India. Away from men who actually fought in the war, Jos returns to his endless military stories and pretends he was a courier for the Duke of Wellington. Back in London, his family receives 120 pounds of his paycheck each year as their only means of support.

John Sedley has stopped working entirely, but he still goes into London each day hoping to reclaim his former job in the stock market. On Sundays, he takes Georgy for walks and treats him to candies and sweets until Amelia threatens to forbid their outings. Amelia is insanely protective of Georgy and gets upset when either of her parents try to feed him medicine or food she does not approve of. Amelia accuses Mrs. Sedley of trying to poison Georgy, and they never get over this argument properly.

Amelia constantly tells Georgy about his father and how alike they are. She tells him every last detail of her great love for George Osborne, even more than she used to blather into his love letters. As before her marriage, all men around her fall in love with Amelia for her goodness and innocence. This makes all the women around her jealous, and they still treat her badly. She turns down marriage proposals and spends all her time teaching Georgy to read and mourning George.

Dobbin, stationed in India, gets a letter written by Amelia for her father, advertising his new coal and later wine business. Dobbin convinces everyone in his unit to buy Sedley's wines and have them shipped to India. Dobbin ends up buying most of the wine from the soldiers since it is terrible, and the Sedleys receive no more business. Even Jos refused to buy it earlier.

Dobbin tells Amelia there is 500 pounds left from George's estate. Dobbin proposes to invest it, and John Sedley investigates, feeling slighted at not being involved in the transaction. He discovers George had no such money and that Dobbin has given Amelia the money himself. Dobbin tells Sedley the truth. George had run up debts all over the place before his death. Dobbin does not tell Sedley the money came exclusively from him, but he says it came from a group of George's close friends.

Nobody ever considers who paid for George's burial or Amelia's accommodations and travel back to London. Dobbin arranges for all of this himself. Amelia never suspects a thing and writes to him three times a year with news of Georgy. Dobbin sends loads of presents to them both, treasures which little Georgy loves. Nobody can understand why Amelia does not realize how in love with her Dobbin is.

Georgy begins to grow into a haughty and selfish, spoiled person, and people often comment that he is just like his father. Dobbin asks permission to pay for Georgy to go

to school and sends George's former tailor to fit him for clothing. Dobbin's sisters come to visit Amelia occasionally. They inform her that Dobbin is to be married, and Amelia is surprised to discover she is concerned with this news.

Chapter 38 Analysis

This chapter shows the extreme grief and selfish blindness of napve Amelia. She is inadvertently raising her child to be just as awful as his father and is completely blind to the obvious love showered upon her by Dobbin. Amelia is not the only character blinded by love in this chapter. Mrs. Sedley is so blinded by love that she does not realize that Mr. Sedley does not really work any longer and has long since become a bit of a joke. He concocts great schemes to sell products of low value and ends up losing his initial investments.

Readers grow steadily more uncomfortable reading the completely selfless acts Dobbin commits in his unrequited love for Amelia. He has now spent his life picking up after George's messes in hopes of even a small nod from Amelia. Great detail is spent analyzing Amelia's obsession with George and then Dobbin's selflessness. The painstaking detail heightens the emotions and serves as an equal cliffhanger to the exciting news that ends other chapters.

Chapter 39

Chapter 39 Summary

Mrs. Bute Crawley is enraged that her nephew finagled the inheritance money. She refuses to show disappointment in public, however. The family cuts extreme corners at home to put on a show of wealth in public, as befits members of Vanity Fair. Meanwhile, Sir Pitt has become a dirty, old drunken man who takes up with his servants and lets his property go to ruin. Pitt junior and Lady Jane have an embarrassing visit with him, in which Sir Pitt gives Lady Jane a handful of jewels. Sir Pitt puts his lover, Miss Horrocks, in charge of all the other servants and even dresses her in his dead wives' clothes. The only thing he will not give her is the jewelry, which he sneaks to Lady Jane. Miss Horrocks longs to learn to write so she can write her name as Lady Elizabeth Crawley.

Sir Pitt falls into a drunken sickness one night. It turns out to be a stroke. In the commotion, Mrs. Bute catches Miss Horrocks trying her best to steal the jewels. There is a squabble. Mrs. Bute redirects her energies to looking after Sir Pitt. Horrocks slips away in shame, and Mrs. Bute and her son sit watch over Sir Pitt.

Chapter 39 Analysis

Because the author has taken such care in character development, nothing about their actions seems shocking. Sir Pitt has grown steadily crasser as his ties to society (his children and wives and sister) grow apart from him. He is now free to drink as he likes and gallivant with the common folk, with whom he feels most comfortable. This behavior is, of course, most embarrassing to his brother and children, who long for nothing more than a climb in society. The theme of the book, social status and the race to get it, continues as the characters develop and snatch every opportunity to help their upward climb.

Chapter 40

Chapter 40 Summary

Sir Pitt does not regain control of his speech. Pitt junior moves into Queens Crawley again and takes over the business affairs of the estate. Sir Pitt passes away, and Pitt junior, now Sir Pitt, immediately begins scheming of ways to spend the money, update the estate and make good of the parliamentary seat.

Pitt's mother-in-law is appalled that they want to invite Becky to the funeral. Pitt puts his foot down and insists he is the head of the household. Lady Southdown is at last put in her place. Lady Southdown decides she would rather leave her daughter's house than stay in it while Becky is invited. Lady Southdown has nowhere to go, however, and no money of her own. She is left to sulk over the arrangement.

Rawdon is irritated by the letter bearing the news of his father's death. It will cost them twenty pounds to travel to Queens Crawley and back again. He consults Becky with the problem. She is ecstatic and immediately envisions Rawdon with an excellent career in Parliament. She knows they must sacrifice the expense to butter up to Pitt and Jane. They make plans to go to Queens Crawley.

Becky has gotten herself a companion after all, but not a sheepdog. She has hired Miss Briggs, Matilda Crawley's former lady's-maid, who now lives with the family despite warnings from the other former servants of Matilda. Miss Briggs has a small inheritance from Matilda and has lent Rawdon 600 pounds.

Chapter 40 Analysis

Pitt junior, formerly portrayed as a stick-in-the-mud, has come into his own. Finally in a position of power, he can make political decisions in parliament and put to use his oratory skills of the past. He has no problems with Rawdon and wishes to welcome him and Becky to his home. Becky immediately begins scheming a grand future with this new opportunity and is eager for Lady Jane to bring Becky to society events.

Becky and Rawdon continue to manipulate the Crawley good name by hiring, not paying and then draining Matilda's former house servants. Having now drained her business contacts and friends in Europe and London, they have finally breached into the walls of Matilda's home and taken her servants. There is now no one left to manipulate but the folks at Queens Crawley. Great financial debts are foreshadowed for Miss Briggs, and the action hints at disaster to come with the Crawleys.

Chapter 41

Chapter 41 Summary

Becky and Rawdon travel to Queens Crawley in the same public coach Becky rode in years ago on her first trip there. She comments on all the places she remembers and the memories the journey brings back. She feels as though she is "not an imposter anymore" and that she is traveling to her own family home. They are reunited with Pitt and meet Lady Jane, who welcomes them so warmly that Becky actually cries.

The two sisters, whom Becky used to be governess for, have also been summoned from boarding school for the funeral. Becky asks after their schooling, and the two girls are glad she does not forget that she was once just a simple governess. They are quite snobby in discussion with one another, and the narrator reminds readers that their maternal grandfather was a coal-scuttle.

Becky makes fast friends with Lady Jane and kisses up to Lady Southdown by asking medical questions, feigning illness and asking Lady Southdown to treat her with her potions. Lady Southdown will not leave the room until Becky drinks the concoction, and Becky, Rawdon and, later, little Rawdon have a great laugh at the story.

Rawdon works to make peace with his brother, who offers to pay for little Rawdon's schooling. Lady Jane gives Becky money to buy a gift for little Rawdon. Nobody grieves much for the late Sir Pitt. Becky begins to think she could live well as a country wife if she had five thousand pounds a year. She wishes she could pay everyone she owes. She looks back on her youth, swindling food while her father was an artist, and wishes she had married the poor young men who loved her then, reasoning that she could not possibly be any poorer than she is now. When they leave, she has mixed emotions. She is happy to stop kissing up to everyone but sad because she has gotten in touch with her humility.

Chapter 41 Analysis

For the first time, readers see a glimpse of a human side to Becky. It does not last long, but it is interesting to see that she really does feel some remorse for swindling so many people for so many years. The references to her rough childhood and constant poverty almost make her a sympathetic character, before one remembers she is a cold person who does not speak truthfully to anyone who has anything to offer her. Lady Rose Crawley's humble beginnings and the former Sir Pitt's love of blue-collar people are discussed. His daughters must work very hard to bury the memory of this socially unacceptable branch of their family.

The tender scene where Becky cries at Lady Jane's kindness is soon forgotten when Becky puts on a false front to win favor in the family. By the time the carriage is back in London, Becky has forgotten her remorseful thoughts and returned to her usual self.

Chapter 42

Chapter 42 Summary

Mr. John Osborne has not been well these last seven years. He lives an oppressively boring life, rejected by Miss Swartz, whom he tried to marry himself after George's elopement. He puts all his furious anger into trying to marry off his daughters. He barters aggressively over Maria's marriage to Mr. Bullock. She becomes scornful of her father and does not really welcome him to her new home. He grows angry with her, and the two become estranged.

Jane Osborne, the elder daughter, is practically a servant to her father at this point. They rarely speak, except when John yells or is rude. Jane has a secret, though. This secret is a man named Mr. Smee, a former student of the late Mr. Sharpe. He has an elicit affair with Jane during supposed art lessons. Mr. Osborne discovers the affair and kicks the artist out of the house. He forbids Jane from having any more relationships and says she is to stay with him to watch over the house, an old maid.

Dobbin continues to hope John Osborne will welcome Georgy into his heart. He sends his own sisters to visit the Osborne sisters in an attempt to make this happen. Amelia finally consents to let her son go off with Dobbin's sisters for the day. She spends the day writing to Dobbin and continues to push back her feelings of jealousy when thinking of his impending marriage.

The Dobbin sisters return, having taken Georgy to see Jane Osborne. Amelia is upset that Georgy has seen relatives of his father's, and when Jane reports, tearfully, to her father that the little boy looks exactly like George, John begins to tremble.

Chapter 42 Analysis

John Osborne is living in anguish over his guilt at his cold heart toward his son. He is cold to everyone in contact with him and almost ruins his daughters' marriage prospects with his behavior. Amelia, frightened and insanely protective of her son, has always been afraid that he might encounter his grandfather and that something awful would happen. The ending of this chapter foreshadows that her fears have not been foolish by hinting about what happens to a grandfather so sick with remorse over his wrongs to a dead son.

Chapter 43

Chapter 43 Summary

Dobbin's impending marriage is revisited at last. Dobbin and Major O'Dowd enjoy life in India. The O'Dowds in particular are doing well there and are quite popular. Mrs. O'Dowd has made up her mind that her daughter should marry William Dobbin. She and her daughter, Glorvina, constantly badger Dobbin to marry her and stop his infatuation with Amelia. She flirts, sings and prances around in new dresses, but nothing can shake Amelia from Dobbin's heart. He receives the letter from Amelia where she writes how happy she is for his wedding, and this puts him in a foul temper. He finally laments that he "drags on this wearisome life" because she will not love him. He cries that he loves only her, and she is "a stone" to him.

Glorvina dresses to kill in new gowns from London, desperate for the major to fall for her. Dobbin wanders around in a mope, and both long for what they cannot have. Dobbin gets another letter, this one from his sister. He waits awhile to open it because she usually saves up all the bad news she can find and writes in one letter, depressing him each time he gets one. In addition, he is angry with his sister for telling Amelia that he was to wed Glorvina when he was not. When he finally does read the letter, it says that John Osborne is being convinced to take little Georgy and that Amelia is engaged finally to the young reverend who has loved her for some time. William immediately asks for leave and sets sail for England.

Chapter 43 Analysis

In addition to resolving the cliffhanger of Dobbin's supposed marriage, Dobbin finally express his grief at years of painful doting on Amelia, to acknowledge the many sacrifices he has made for her as she selfishly thought only of George. Tension has been building throughout the entire book, and readers are glad to see a little break in Dobbin's emotions. Amelia has been so blinded for love of a man falsely created, with the help of Dobbin, that she cannot see the true kind man in her life has always been William Dobbin.

As Dobbin finally breaks down to his sadness, Glorvina O'Dowd steps up her flirting in a desperate attempt to marry him. The news that Amelia might finally marry someone else, and also lose her child to a meddling, grumpy old man, finally snaps Dobbin into action. The narrator hints that he might bare his soul when he finally returns to Amelia in England.

Chapter 44

Chapter 44 Summary

The Crawleys are completely renovating Queens Crawley. Miss Briggs and little Rawdon oversee the servants while Becky has been put in charge of selling and purchasing furniture for the estate. When Pitt conducts business in London, he stays with his brother, and Becky is actually happy to have him over. She even cooks for him and cleans his fireplace herself. In the evenings, she sews a shirt for her "dear little son." It is the same shirt she has been sewing for years when she wants to impress people with her domesticity. When Becky hints at money, however, Pitt grows uncomfortable, and she drops the subject.

Pitt realizes how poor his brother and his family are, and he keeps thinking he should give them some money. Then, he decides he should wait until another time to do so. Becky convinces Miss Briggs to take her money out of investments, and Miss Briggs is so swindled that she spends a large portion of her dividends on clothes for little Rawdon.

At this point, little Rawdon is eight years old, and Becky hates him. She hits him for listening to her sing for the wealthy marquis that Becky entertains regularly, and she and her son do not see one another after this incident. Afterward, the servants of both houses begin to suspect foul play between Becky and Lord Steyne, the marquis.

The family goes to spend Christmas at Queens Crawley. Becky brings little Rawdon only because Lady Jane begs her to, and Rawdon scolds Becky for being a bad mother. Young Rawdon confides in Lady Jane that he enjoys Christmas dinner with them because at home he must eat in the kitchen. Becky is so busy kissing up that she does not hear her son say this. Queens Crawley is the first place where the little boy is allowed to hear family prayers and stay up late with his parents.

Rawdon and his brother explore the improved property, and Pitt makes certain to emphasize that all their money is in land, repeatedly telling Rawdon that he cannot pay for the repairs until they get their dividends.

Chapter 44 Analysis

Pitt and his family feel awkward at his brother's poverty, and yet they are unwilling to share or help out as they have their own social climbing to do. Becky, in her usual and lifelong struggle to climb up, is developing a reputation for cruelty to her son that precedes her with the servants of whatever house she visits. The incidents of cruelty to little Rawdon and the revelation to Lady Jane receive heavy emphasis, foreshadowing this cruelty to Becky's child might soon come back to haunt her.

Chapter 45

Chapter 45 Summary

Pitt has also been hard at work restoring the family name on his estate. He visits with the neighbors, stops preaching at home, goes to church with his wife and even goes on a foxhunt as he tries to regain popularity. Becky encourages Pitt to keep up his political campaign and make a difference in Parliament. Becky truly impresses Pitt with her feigned interest in his pamphlets and speeches, and he starts mentally comparing Becky to his wife.

Little Rawdon becomes the leader of the pack of his cousins, while Pitt's son Pitt is a sickly child (mostly due to the constant draughts given by Lady Southdown). Lady Jane is very affectionate with her children, and this causes Becky to attempt to act likewise. She kisses Rawdon in front of all the ladies, and he asks why she never kisses him at home. Becky burns with silent fury at the child. Lady Jane and Becky do not get along quite as well after the two speeches from little Rawdon. Rawdon likes his sister-in-law for her affection toward his son, but Lady Jane begins to suspect that her husband should not be so friendly with Becky going forward.

Rawdon takes little Rawdon outside, and they witness the foxhunt go past, which is delightfully stimulating for the little boy. Pitt gives the Crawleys one hundred pounds and thinks he is being quite generous. Rawdon heads back to London feeling glum, and Becky and the ladies are eager to part with one another. Becky becomes obviously jealous of Lady Jane's goodness and caring. Lady Jane wins the affection of all the ladies and children. Jane is jealous of Becky for her intelligence and ability to converse with all the men in the room.

Pitt finds time every day to visit with Becky while Parliament is in session. She tells him he looks wonderful in his court robes and later draws a comical sketch of him which she gives to Lord Steyne. Meanwhile, Rawdon feels more and more isolated each day. He spends almost all his time with his bachelor friends at the club rather than participating in the dinners at his own house. He begins to spend a great deal of time with Lady Jane and the children while Pitt visits with Becky. Though Becky and Jane act very civil to one another's faces, they intensely dislike one another.

Chapter 45 Analysis

This chapter further develops the sentiments from the previous one. Becky becomes more and more of a cold and heartless figure while Lady Jane is presented as nurturing and loving. Rawdon becomes even more of a devoted parent as his lack of intellect forces him further and further away from his wife and brother. A rift widens between the two women as Jane suspects Becky's true self, and Becky burns with jealously over Jane's ability to truly show emotion.

Chapter 46

Chapter 46 Summary

Amelia manages to live fairly well on the tiny pension and money from Dobbin. She has finally relented and agreed to send Georgy to school, since she cannot master the subjects to teach him herself. He is very excited to go to school and be away from his smothering mother, and this joy makes her selfishly sad. She forever hates a young boy who Georgy gets into a fight with at school, but the young lad does quite well and flourishes away from her.

Jane Osborne thinks lovingly of her nephew and wishes she could see him more. Maria comes to visit occasionally and brings her own children to the Osborne house. Things are miserable for the Osbornes, who have to live with the miserable John Osborne. George's sisters are jealous of Amelia for her simple life away from this pressure.

Georgy finally meets his grandfather, and Amelia becomes dreadfully uneasy over an offer that she knows will come. John writes to say he would like to make Georgy the heir that his father should have been and provide an allowance for Amelia. He would even permit Amelia to marry again and keep her allowance. The catch is that the child must live entirely with the Osborne family in Russell Square or wherever Mr. Osborne selects and only sometimes visit his mother. Amelia is outraged. She refuses to even answer the letter.

Jos suddenly stops sending money to the Sedley family, and the household is in trouble. They have hardly any food to eat. Amelia is blind to this and can only see Georgy. She is about to spend her pension on clothes for the boy when her father intervenes and asks for the money for the house. Georgy is furious that he cannot have new and fashionable clothes. Amelia tries to sell her trinkets to buy him something to appease him. She starts to sell her gifts from Dobbin and buys clothes and books for her son. She meets her mother in the hallway, and Mrs. Sedley screams at her that the house has no food. They have sold most of their possessions to pay for their roof and food, including their silverware. She scolds Amelia for not taking John Osborne's offer. Amelia is shocked and has not noticed the poverty other than when she handed over her pension check. Amelia finally sees that her selfishness is spoiling her son and also denying him education and wealth. She is left with a terrible decision to make.

Chapter 46 Analysis

Amelia is becoming unlikable in her complete inability to see reality. She has completely forgotten George's poisonous behavior and thinks him a saint, looking down from heaven on their selfish, spoiled child who Amelia thinks is a god. She is so enamored in looking at Georgy and showing off his school papers that she cannot see their family falling into utter ruin once again. While the offer from John Osborne seems horrible and

crass, it might be the best thing for all parties involved because Amelia's obsession with her son is so unhealthy.

The author succeeds in his simple and obvious form of character development, still letting the narrator dictate the reader's emotion. He also subtly hints that the Vanity Fair lifestyle all the characters seek may not be so grand, when the sisters Osborne are jealous of Amelia's simple lifestyle away from the pressures of society.

Chapter 47

Chapter 47 Summary

This chapter opens by describing the great wealth of Lord Steyne, the marquis. He owns numerous properties and castles, including a block-long house on Gaunt Street across from the Pitt Crawley's London home. The Steyne family line goes back to nobility for hundreds of years. His wife is unpleasant and superstitious, and Lord Steyne is rarely seen with her. He does, however, force her to have dinner with unfavorable yet wealthy people. The Londoners suspect some great secret around the family.

There is a long discussion about family lines and debts and breaks with the Catholic Church. The narrator suggests these trifles are important in Vanity Fair and then continues to show the marquis's wife praying every morning for forgiveness for her separation from the Catholic Church in marrying Lord Steyne. It seems that mental disorders run in Lady Steyne's family, and one of the Steyne children has grown crazy. Lord Steyne is terrified that he will become like his son and lose his sanity. Although there are rumors and jokes about the sanity of the Steyne family, they are so wealthy and powerful that people bow to their wishes regardless.

Chapter 47 Analysis

Many names and confusing family relations emphasize how important such frivolous details are to upper class people trying to look good in Vanity Fair. They also show that even the most powerful of families have secrets to hide, and often such families become more uptight and snobby to make up for their secrets. The narrator patiently guides readers through the mass of names and details with little asides to remind the reader always of the struggle for social status in Vanity Fair.

Chapter 48

Chapter 48 Summary

For ladies in Vanity Fair, the greatest honor is to be presented to the king or queen at court. After doing so, the lady receives a certificate stating her honor and virtue. On the day when Pitt takes his position as High Sheriff for his county, he and Lady Jane take Becky to court to meet her king. Pitt, Jane and Becky are dressed in extreme elegance while Rawdon, only present at the urging of Lady Jane, looks shabby in his old military uniform that has become too small. Becky's dress is so magnificent that Lady Jane wants to tell her they could not possibly have afforded it. In reality, Becky found the lace and adornments in Sir Pitt's house when helping with the renovations and stole the bits and pieces to sew into her dress.

Rawdon asks Becky about her jewelry in the cab, and Pitt blushes, since he has given Becky some diamonds and not told his wife. Becky says they are all rented, but they really came from Lord Steyne. After meeting her ruler, Becky can talk of nothing else. She is forced to snub the few women friends she has because they are not of the most virtuous reputations, and Becky is now an officially virtuous woman. Becky's outfit makes the papers, and Mrs. Bute refers to her as the "daughter of a French rope-dancer" and scolds her own daughters for being ugly, though they have some of the finest blood in England.

Shortly after Becky's trip to court, Becky gets an honorable visit from the marquis's wife and the Countess of Gaunt. When Lord Steyne comes later, he teases Becky at displaying their calling cards too prominently and for rushing to put on makeup and primp for him. He tells Becky that without money, she will never be able to hold her own in Vanity Fair. He warns Becky for when she repays the visit in his own house, where he is always miserable. She must be on her guard against the wealthiest women in the country.

Lord Steyne speaks lightly of sex with Becky, and Miss Briggs huffs in the background. They ask her to take little Rawdon for a walk, and Becky tells Lord Steyne that she has taken all of Miss Briggs's money. He asks how much, and Becky names a sum double the amount. He is enraged at their financial state. He storms out of the house and later sends a check for a huge sum of money. Rather than pay off her debts, she buys Briggs a small present and pays two creditors each fifty pounds. Then, she hides the rest in her lock box with her other treasures.

Chapter 48 Analysis

The narrator has increasingly hinted that Becky is having a sexual affair with Lord Steyne but has so far presented no evidence. The servants of both households suspect

it. Nonetheless, something is bound to happen because the marquis so readily gives her jewels and money on a regular basis.

Becky not repaying her debts is far more upsetting than her swindling money from the marquis. She not only hides the money but does not even tell Rawdon about any of it. He is repeatedly left in the cold in every sense, from his fashion to his presence at dinner to his invitations to meet his sovereign. In her path to Vanity Fair, Becky has become quite a poisonous little climber.

Chapter 49

Chapter 49 Summary

A flashback reveals Lord Steyne has forced his wife and Lady Gaunt to invite Becky to dinner. They threaten to not come to dinner if Becky is invited, but he insists. The ladies then plan a way to make Becky feel absolutely unwelcome. At dinner, in the present, Rawdon is decidedly uncomfortable. He has never been very comfortable around women at all and now spends the majority of his time in smoking and gambling clubs away from refined people. Becky is introduced to Lady Steyne, and she mentions that Lord Steyne once purchased art from Becky's father. She says she has felt indebted to him since she was a child.

Becky then meets the rich noblewoman from Belgium who was so cruel to her. Becky makes a sassy comment about the horses. The ladies at dinner try to alienate Becky by speaking only in French, but Becky infuriates them by being more fluent than they are. The male noble guests at dinner think she is splendid.

Later, when the ladies are alone, Becky knows the games have begun. Lady Steyne asks Becky to sing and play the piano, planning with the other ladies to talk loudly and ignore her. Becky is so gifted, though, that Lady Steyne sits next to her and is brought to tears by the music. Lord Steyne storms in, sees the rude ladies and is for once happy with his wife for her behavior. Becky continues to sing, and all the men gather round to hear her. The women are left alone and defeated to sulk.

Chapter 49 Analysis

Here Becky gets her first chance to prove herself in the highest society with the loftiest people and see if she can hold her own despite having no money. Thanks to being well prepared by Lord Steyne and her talents, she succeeds in winning the men and, surprisingly, Lady Steyne. The rest of the women still hate her, but Becky is used to this and does not need their approval when she has won their husbands'. Flashbacks again catch up the details of the moment and reveal information about periphery characters.

Chapter 50

Chapter 50 Summary

Amelia racks her brain to come up with money so that she does not need to send Georgy away. She thinks she can perhaps take in sewing or do other work-for-hire. She tries to sell paintings, but she is a mediocre artist and makes no money. She tries to be a governess, but nobody sends their children for lessons. She writes letters to her brother begging for money. Jos had never stopped sending it, but the entire sum is going straight to the creditors. When Amelia tells her father of the letter, he breaks down and confesses the truth about the creditors. Amelia knows there is no hope, and she must send Georgy away.

Amelia decides to send Georgy away and then kill herself so that she and George can watch him from heaven. She has Georgy read the biblical story of Samuel, whose mother Hannah gives him away but who always thinks of him and loves him. She tries to prepare Georgy for leaving. She writes to the Osbornes of their financial destitution and that she has agreed to their offer.

John Osborne commands the family to prepare George's old room, untouched for ten years, for the boy. He sends Amelia one hundred pounds and says she is to want for nothing but may never set foot in his home. Georgy is excited by the news of his new home and the idea of being wealthy. Amelia is devastated that he is not sad to leave her. Georgy has not been allowed to have much fun or spend more than a few moments away from Amelia in his entire life. He loves his mother but is, as any child would be, excited at the prospect of something new. In a short time, Georgy has adopted the same haughty attitude of his father. Amelia begins to follow him everywhere. She lurks outside the house, church and school, spying on him and crying.

Chapter 50 Analysis

Amelia has finally made a mature decision for the good of her family. Though it is heartbreaking to see her suffer, one cannot forget how selfishly and naively obsessed she is with her son and how she smothers him. It is disappointing to see him so quickly become snobby like his father.

The narrator is very important in this chapter. He gently reminds the reader of earlier mentions of Amelia's mediocre talents and refreshes details of the Osborne and Sedley situations to steer emotions as the events unfold. This omniscient narrator is especially important in comparing Georgy to his father and helping develop clues of this behavior.

Chapter 51

Chapter 51 Summary

The dinner at Lord Steyne's gives Becky access to many popular parties and households in London. She begins singing at everyone's parties and becomes a regular guest at the French Embassy. She gets great joy in mocking the poor English of the ambassadors to Lord Steyne, who loves her sauciness.

One of the very best upper crust ladies chooses to acknowledge Becky by visiting her house. Everyone who thought Becky was low-class is silenced once she has been verified by Lady Fitz-Willis. Becky, having reached the height and attained her life goal, becomes bored.

Becky always makes a point to be polite to the artists and musicians at parties in front of everyone, so they are very gracious to her and give her free lessons or readily agree to perform at her parties. The famous singers think very highly of her for not forgetting her origins and carrying herself with humility.

People in court begin to speculate how the Crawleys get the money to host their grand parties. Some hint that the money comes from Sir Pitt, which makes them think less of Pitt and suspect him of having an affair with Becky. Others think it comes from Becky begging Rawdon's friends. In reality, the parties do not really cost her much. She gets food from the gamelands at Queens Crawley. She gets alcohol from Lord Steyne and uses his kitchen staff. The narrator warns against judging people for wanting to live beyond their means and suggests most of the nobility have had financial debts at some point.

Charades are the hip new thing to do at parties, a practice that comes from France. Becky encourages Lord Steyne to host some charades parties. Some wealthy people gather at Gaunt house for charades. Becky performs well in one of them. The people are shocked at how well she performs and that she would do such a thing, particularly since she has bare arms as Clytemnestra in the performance. Rawdon joins in the performance for the second play, and Becky performs beautifully again, this time singing "The Rose Upon My Balcony" in her performance. Everyone is delighted and a Royal Personage, a guest at the party, declares Becky perfection. Rawdon grows uneasy as Becky is further separated from him. As Becky drives away from the party, Rawdon is arrested for unpaid debts.

Chapter 51 Analysis

The author introduces the main obstacle for these characters, giving way to all the remaining tension in the rest of the novel. After slaving her entire life to be accepted by the upper crust, Becky grows bored with their lifestyle. She has dragged her husband into ruin, swindled people in three countries and estranged herself from her own child to

get to the top, and then she finds it boring. She decides she would be happier performing and starts doing so at parties, where people are at first shocked by her audacity and then shocked by her talent. Becky knows such behavior is shocking to the upper crust, and she only spends a few days basking in her glory before deliberately jeopardizing her position. The narrator foreshadows terrible things to come by ending with the cliffhanger of Rawdon's arrest. Things are about to change very drastically as Rawdon is hauled to debtors' prison.

Chapter 52

Chapter 52 Summary

A flashback shows Lord Steyne convincing the Crawleys to send little Rawdon to boarding school and offering to finance his education. Rawdon agrees, despite his great love for the boy, for the benefit of Rawdon's education. Lady Jane comes to their house to console Rawdon when his son goes away, and he is grateful that he can tell her of his feelings for his child. Jane and Becky see one another as infrequently as possible, each hating the other's attitude toward children. Becky does not even kiss her son when he leaves.

Every weekend, Rawdon takes his son and his friends to plays and dotes on them. This makes Becky feel contempt for her husband, and she gives him even more freedom to do as he likes. She cannot be expected to interrupt her social activities to spend time with her child. Rawdon, Lady Jane and the cousins all spend nice weekends together. As it turns out, the upper crust does not really enjoy having Rawdon at their parties anymore and rarely invites him.

With little Rawdon gone, Lord Steyne cannot understand why Becky does not send Briggs away, since he gave her the money to pay her off. He suspects Becky has done something else with the money and sets out to find out what. He discovers in the process that Becky has asked him for twice the sum she needed. He declares that all other conniving women are babies compared to her. He also suspects Rawdon had a hand in the ruse and is only pretending to be ignorant of the loan.

Lord Steyne confronts Becky, who is taken aback and blames Rawdon for forcing her to get and then spend the money. Lord Steyne arranges for Briggs to be taken care of in another house, and now people become truly suspicious of Becky. Pitt and Lady Jane tell Rawdon he should not let Becky go around unchaperoned anymore. They wonder what lies behind the marquis's generosity.

Pitt meets with Becky to discuss the honor of the family. They argue, and Pitt tells Becky that society is already speaking badly about her. She ignores him and continues to see Lord Steyne. Lady Jane wants to sever all ties with the marquis and Becky, but Pitt cannot since the king attends charades at Lord Steyne's house. Pitt and his wife stay only a little while, and Pitt reprimands Rawdon for letting his wife behave so.

Rawdon had already started watching Becky more closely before the charade night. She acted delighted to have him always around her. This made him feel guilty for suspecting her. He decides again that her only fault is not loving their son. The narrator tells this story to bring readers up to speed, flashing to the present at the moment of Rawdon's arrest.

Chapter 52 Analysis

The story flashes back to the events leading up to Rawdon's arrest and Becky's performance in the charades. It introduces an ever-building crescendo up to the moment when financial ruin will finally catch up to the Crawleys. Becky has somehow finagled great sums of money from Lord Steyne, and the public has finally begun to talk about the marquis financing Becky's child's education as well as finding a permanent place and pension for their maid. Pitt and Lady Jane have finally seen the light about Becky's true self, and only Rawdon is still fooled by her acts. This flashback allows an understanding of what has been going on in society since Becky grew bored with her station. One is left feeling smug when she finally receives excitement again, though not the type she sought.

Chapter 53

Chapter 53 Summary

Rawdon is hauled off to visit his creditors. This is his third visit there, and the prior two were examples of gallant civility orchestrated by Becky. He decides not to alert his wife of his imprisonment because he will just disturb her sleep. He writes to her in the morning asking her to sell some possessions to bail him out. He begs her to hurry since the next day is Sunday, and he will be stuck through the entire weekend if she does not get there.

Becky at last sends some money and a note saying she has not sold anything to get the money but has begged and borrowed it. Rawdon is outraged that she would not sell any of her jewelry to set him free from jail. He writes to his brother to send one hundred pounds to free him. Lady Jane comes, and Rawdon breaks down, saying she's changed his life and made him want to be a better man and father.

Becky says the news of his imprisonment makes her ill, and yet when Rawdon arrives at their house it is all lit up as if she were entertaining. When Rawdon gets upstairs, Becky and Lord Steyne are having an intimate dinner. She is dripping with jewels and holding his hands. When she sees Rawdon, she smiles and says she is innocent. Lord Steyne spits that he has paid for every trinket on her body and given her thousands of pounds which Rawdon has spent. He insults her mother and husband and says she is in no way innocent of anything.

Rawdon is angry and slaps the marquis twice across the face. He rips off Becky's jewels and throws them at Lord Steyne, cutting his bald head with the sharp stones. Becky denies having been given any money, and Rawdon demands her keys from her. He finds her secret lock box, full of love letters and trinkets and notes, some dated back ten years, for thousands of pounds. Rawdon tells the marquis he will pay him back at once, as well as Briggs. He then tells Becky he has always shared with her and leaves her. As he leaves, she repeats that she is innocent. After Rawdon leaves, Becky sits on her bed and considers killing herself. All her schemes and years of work have left her with nothing but a pile of clothes, trinkets and bankruptcy.

Chapter 53 Analysis

This is the climax of Becky's evil schemes. She has been hoarding money for years, money meant as gifts for her son, repayment of her family's debts and gifts to others, and she has let the family live in constant debt. She has been carrying on a scandalous, if not sexual, affair with Lord Steyne in front of her husband's nose, and she is finally brought down. She is so wrapped up in her own corruption that even after she is discovered, she still swears her innocence. She is in despair, not over the loss of her marriage, but at her loss of status. She contemplates her next move. Rawdon has left

her forever, and Becky is back at the drawing board to carve out a place in Vanity Fair once more.

Chapter 54

Chapter 54 Summary

Rawdon flees to his brother's house as the family is saying morning prayers and devotions. Rawdon attempts, unsuccessfully, to read and understand his brother's political papers. Rawdon looks so horrible that Pitt assumes he is drunk. Rawdon says he is not drunk but ruined. Pitt protests that the family money is not liquid, and even the hundred Jane took to free Rawdon was meant for the lawyers. Rawdon says he is not looking for money but asks Pitt to always look after his son. Rawdon tells the story and says there must be a duel which may end badly for him. Pitt agrees to look after his nephew, and he and Rawdon share a tender moment. Rawdon leaves the money for Briggs and more for Pitt to disburse. He takes the thousand-pound note for Lord Steyne, wishing he could wrap it around a bullet and shoot the man with it.

Rawdon heads off to find an old military friend to be his second in a duel. Captain Macmurdo has long been Rawdon's friend and second, and he listens patiently while Rawdon tells his sad story. The captain says he always knew Becky would do something like this, secretly shocked that Rawdon is only figuring this out now despite years of rumors about the woman. Rawdon is hurt that his friends never told him of rumors about his wife, but he is consoled. He confesses to being hopelessly in love with Becky. He is devastated to learn of her affair and that she did not even love him enough to give him a hundred pounds from her cache.

When Captain Macmurdo sends a servant to go get some clothes and things for Rawdon, who has been wearing his ball regalia for days, the servant reports that the house is a disaster. The creditors are all there turning the house upside down, and the servants are drinking and demanding their wages. The captain leaves Rawdon to freshen up and wonders at the fact the he is about to meet with a lord to discuss the situation as Rawdon's friend. He gets so dressed up for the occasion that his friends ask him if is going to get married.

Chapter 54 Analysis

For the first time, the author does not follow a climactic event with a flashback or a move to other characters. He lets the action unfold after the volatile incident the chapter before. Rawdon is a broken man. He has nothing left in the world but what he is wearing and thinks only of his poor beloved son. He discovers that he has been the butt of rumors for years and that none of his friends have ever told him that his beloved wife is a conniving schemer. At least, Rawdon finally unearths his true friends and kind relatives. They are there for him in the end, now that he has seen the error of his ways in trusting Becky for so many years.

Chapter 55

Chapter 55 Summary

Becky screams in vain for her French maid, paid for by Lord Steyne, to no avail. The woman has stolen the jewels left scattered by the marquis, packed her things (and many of Becky's) and left. A flash forward reveals that she eventually sets up a little shop in France under a false name and speaks so miserably of her treatment by the British that Lord Steyne always patronizes her shop out of compassion.

In the present, the other servants are rude to Becky and demand payment, especially Raggles, Matilda's former butler and owner of the house they have not been paying rent on for four years. They all wail that they never thought a Crawley would ruin them after Matilda's great goodness.

Becky storms off to her brother-in-law's house. Pitt is holding a newspaper and demands to know the truth. Becky confesses to being aware of Lord Steyne's fondness of her and taking advantage of his generosity. She admits to hoarding the money because Rawdon is careless with money. Lord Styne has arranged for Rawdon to be appointed governor of Coventry Island, she says, news which Becky has been supposedly saving as a surprise for her husband. Pitt is angry because Becky knows how badly he has always wanted a political position, and Rawdon knows nothing of politics. Becky says she must always look out for her own family first.

Lady Jane bursts in the room at this point, outraged that the evil woman would come into her home. She screams a tirade about Becky's cruelty to children and says that thinking of Becky makes her sick and tremble. Lady Jane demands that Becky be turned out of the house. Pitt protests, and Jane says he must choose between the women. Pitt sighs and agrees to search for Rawdon and try to smooth things over.

Rawdon eats with the men at the club, and one man comes to congratulate him for the news in the paper. Rawdon is at first angry, thinking the news of the affair has been publicized. While Rawdon reads the paper, two men gossip that the position is lucky and that Rawdon has not got a penny in the world. As Rawdon tries to process the news of his governor position, a messenger comes from Lord Steyne. Everyone is still confused about whether there is to be a duel or anything, but the messenger insists they all sit down while he delivers Steyne's message.

The messenger discusses the salary, climate and arrangements on the island and then insists that Becky and the marquis are innocent and that Rawdon is mistaken. He insists that he and his wife had both been invited to dinner with Becky that evening but that she could not attend. Lord Steyne initially wanted to duel anyway, but Mr. Wenham (the messenger) convinced him that Rawdon was rightfully suspicious and jealous.

Rawdon interrupts, saying he thinks the whole thing is a lie and that he will call the duel if Steyne will not. At this point, Captain Macmurdo intervenes and says Rawdon has hired him as the voice of reason. He tells Rawdon to hold his tongue, forget the incident and take the governorship. The men are chilly and polite to one another and agree to bury the hatchet. Rawdon gives him the money for Steyne.

Just then, Pitt comes into the club and goes to talk to Rawdon. He is overjoyed at the peaceful settling of the fight. Pitt now tries to convince Rawdon to go back to Becky. Rawdon says that the marriage is over. She lied to him to his face and hid money for ten years. Though the four men have agreed to never speak of the Steyne incident again, all the noblemen of Vanity Fair gossip about it in secret for days.

Nobody knows where Becky has run off to in the midst of all this. Rawdon leaves her a little alimony and leaves for the island, writing regularly to his brother, Lady Jane and his son. On holidays and weekends, little Rawdon spends his time at Queens Crawley and reads about his father's tenure on Coventry Island.

Chapter 55 Analysis

At this point in the novel, people stop being polite and finally speak their feelings. Nobody cares for Becky's schemes anymore, except for Pitt, and they are all concerned with correcting their own lives in the wake of her disastrous influence. Though the accusation and fight must have been a severe social blow for both Rawdon and Lord Steyne to shake off, they both realize it is in their best interests to forgive one another and for Rawdon to get out of London.

Finally, Rawdon has a real salary and can pay off debts incurred during a decade of Becky, and he has a familial relationship with his brother at long last. Pitt is hurt that he himself did not get a political appointment, but he is happier in the end as baronet of Queens Crawley, especially when his wife finally sticks up for herself.

The author plays with time a lot in this chapter to sum up the lives of minor characters and characters who are moving out of the mainstream of the novel. He flashes back and forth around the day of the discovery to give closure for certain characters so that he can move on to develop the crises for the remaining characters.

Chapter 56

Chapter 56 Summary

Georgy Osborne is even more spoiled than his father. John is every bit as proud and enamored of him as he was of George. John envisions a career in Parliament for the young boy. Georgy quickly decides that his grandfather is unintelligent and begins to boss him around and patronize him because he can. There is a lot of discussion of how spoiled the boy is, how he was raised to be worshipped in both households and now acts that way.

Amelia sometimes sends him small gifts of clothing that she buys or makes, but whenever he comes to visit, he is wearing much nicer garments with jewels. He brings his mother a present of a picture of himself, and she is overjoyed. George is pleased to have bought the gift with his own money. Amelia thinks her son is the most humble and generous person in the world and sleeps with the painting under her pillow. None of the other adults like Georgy at all, however. They find him rude and pompous as he shows off all over town with his servants and little friends. He goes to a progressive school where he bribes the teachers and goes unpunished for rude behavior.

Georgy's best friend at school is Mr. Todd, who becomes the godson of John Osborne. Their families become very close. They begin to dream about Georgy marrying the youngest Todd daughter someday. Georgy is such a snob that he is angry at having to go to his grandmother's funeral because it means missing a play. Amelia is left to console her father, who now has nothing but her. The chapter ends with Dobbin coming to visit Georgy at school along with a companion. Georgy remembers him, and Dobbin is glad.

Chapter 56 Analysis

Nobody is really surprised that Georgy is growing up to be spoiled and rude. His mother worships him. His grandfather also worships him and has the financial means to support his attitude. He throws money and attitude around town and demands respect from a city full of people who find him pompous and exactly like his snotty father. The ending of this chapter finally returns to the cliffhanger of Dobbin sailing away from England at the news of Amelia's supposed marriage, meaning the previous thirteen chapters have chronicled the time immediately following Dobbin's departure from India.

Chapter 57

Chapter 57 Summary

Georgy does not treat Grandfather Sedley very well, as John Osborne tells him evil stories of the bankrupt old man who lives on the kind allowance Osborne provides to Amelia. Some people might think it wrong of Amelia to take money from her father's enemy, but the narrator reminds his audience that she is simple and has led a miserable and hard life. She takes the crumbs where she can get them. There is much discussion of Amelia's mental state, and she questions her circumstances as a miserable widow.

The plot turns to Major Dobbin, who has traveled without rest from India to reach Amelia at the mention of her supposed marriage to a pastor. He is quite ill with fever, but he makes it through the journey. As it happens, his regiment is called back to England anyway, and he might have traveled with his friends if he had waited. His faithful companion on his journey home and through illness is Jos Sedley, who is privy to Dobbin's feverish ravings about Amelia for weeks.

Jos is as much a showoff as ever, still pretending to have done great things at Waterloo. Dobbin spends the voyage convincing Jos to take his nephew under his wing, send him to fine schools and be his benefactor. Dobbin discovers that both he and Amelia have been led astray in their beliefs that the other was engaged to be married. The news of Amelia still being single spurs him to recovery.

Chapter 57 Analysis

Amelia plays such a martyr role that she becomes very annoying by this point in the book. She has spent hundreds of pages pining after George, who was horrible to her. Dobbin is equally frustrating at this point, and he idolizes Amelia to the same extent she did George. While Amelia is certainly not a horrid, selfish, stuck up jerk like George, the object of Dobbin's affection is selfishly blind to the truth about George and about Dobbin. She does not even recognize the great kindnesses she has received for years. Readers almost cannot bear the suspense waiting for Dobbin to visit her in London. The combination of these feelings is a result of building tension through the careful character development. The narrator goes into extreme detail of the emotional state of the characters and allows emotion and anxiety to build throughout the book. Now that the action is pretty well settled with the Crawley families, one expects to spend a great deal of time relieving the suspense with the Sedleys and Osbornes.

Chapter 58

Chapter 58 Summary

Dobbin and Jos arrive in England with great fanfare. Dobbin wants to be on the road immediately, but Jos insists on staying at the grand hotel and getting a plush night's rest. Dobbin is restless and nostalgic on the journey and returns to the boarding house where he lived before going to war. The clerk reminds Dobbin that George Osborne still owes him three pounds from ten years ago. He changes his clothes and heads toward Amelia's house.

The landlord's daughter, who used to call Dobbin Major Sugarplums, answers the door and welcomes him into the house. Amelia is out walking, and Dobbin asks young Polly to show him to the park where she went. They encounter the minister with his new wife, the very same minister it was rumored Amelia was supposed to marry. Dobbin gets so excited that he starts shaking.

Dobbin sees Amelia at last, and they run to one another and hold hands. She asks about his wife, and he angrily says that it was a lie that he was planning marriage. He says that Jos has arrived home as well. Amelia invites Dobbin to dinner, and he spends the night staring at Amelia. Dobbin exaggerates and says Jos is returning to London to take care of his family, when really he has just been offered the chance to retire and had to be coaxed into forgiving his father for all the debts incurred.

As soon as John Sedley falls asleep, Amelia talks Dobbin's ear off about Georgy. She reads Dobbin an essay Georgy wrote about selfishness while Dobbin thinks how sad he is that Amelia could love only once in her life and that George never appreciated her. Amelia begs him to visit Georgy the next day, but Dobbin cannot, as he has not even visited his own family yet.

Chapter 58 Analysis

The reunion is just as uneventful as can be expected from such a shy and selfless person as Dobbin. Amelia behaves as usual, gushing about George and Georgy. Dobbin behaves as usual and does not reveal his feelings. The pair share a small moment when they reveal slight distress at the rumors of each other's marriages, but that is the extent of their romance. Tension is still high, and readers wait for an acceptable closure scene between Dobbin and Amelia.

Chapter 59

Chapter 59 Summary

John Sedley is very emotional at the pending visit of his son. He spends hours going through his papers about failed business prospects and gets up at six in the morning wearing his Sunday suit to wait for Jos to visit. Jos has grown accustomed to finery and spent the previous day at the tailor's getting fabulous suits made for him, arranging for servants and eating fine foods. He finally goes to visit his father.

Jos discovers that their mother has died while he was en route from India. The family cries about this news for awhile. Jos swears to take care of his family from now on. Amelia and Polly had an argument the day before when Polly suggested Dobbin was still in love with Amelia. Amelia said he was only George's best friend, and she could never give her heart away again after loving such an angel.

Dobbin forces Jos to hurry in his plans to take care of his family. They get a fine house and carriage, and the four are seen driving around the parks as happy as can be. The landlord and family are very sad to see them go, but it must be done. The only furniture Amelia takes along from the tiny house is the piano. Dobbin sees it and is glad. He tells her so, and Amelia says it's her most valued possession in the entire world.

Dobbin is about to tell her that the gift came from him, but Amelia proceeds to blather on about how George got it for her during her despair. She later comes to realize that George did not give her the piano after all, and it becomes worthless to her. She stops playing it. A while later, she decides to thank Dobbin for it and apologize for never thanking him sooner.

Dobbin finally confesses that he has always loved her. She is sad and asks how she could ever love another man except her husband. She says she loves Dobbin like a brother and that he has done a lot for her through the years. He says he will not change and does not want her to change. He asks only that he be allowed to see her often, and she agrees.

Chapter 59 Analysis

After decades of loving Amelia, Dobbin finally confesses his feelings to her, thinking that she will finally appreciate his sacrifice and great gift to her during her despair years ago. In the end, Amelia is still too blinded by love for a man who was cruel and did not care about her. Even though Dobbin presents evidence that George did not quite fill the large imaginary shoes Amelia sets him in, she still doesn't see the truth. Though William Dobbin has finally confessed his feelings, the situation has not changed. Amelia still thinks George is an angel even if he did not buy her piano back for her.

Chapter 60

Chapter 60 Summary

Jos buys a small house and furnishes it lavishly, employing a few servants to do double duty. Amelia is finally re-entered into polite society. Many people come visit her, including Dobbin's sisters and Georgy's aunts. Amelia entertains Jos's business associates and learns a lot about politics and local business.

Amelia starts to receive male visitors as well, and this makes Dobbin twinge with jealousy for a moment. Then, he remembers that he trusts her completely and that she is pure and innocent and good. Jos even gets acknowledged at court, and Jos and Dobbin beg for Amelia to be allowed to buy her diamonds for the occasion, saying that none are too nice for her.

Chapter 60 Analysis

Without trying or feeling smug, Amelia has made leaps and bounds in the social circles of Vanity Fair. She is a lady once again, with servants and wealth, and she is still the same good person, as are Jos and Dobbin in their continued climb in social stature. The one character in the book who has been unconcerned with social struggle certainly makes good use of the view when she reaches the top. The activity and break in her schedule of mourning and moping is good for her, and Amelia begins to ease out of her dreary shell a bit.

Chapter 61

Chapter 61 Summary

As soon as the Sedleys finish mourning Mrs. Sedley, John takes very ill and dies a peaceful death. John Osborne tells Georgy that Sedley was a better man than he. Osborne begins having business meetings with Dobbin since Dobbin is Georgy's guardian. Osborne discovers that Dobbin was paying Amelia's small dowry under the pretense that it was George's. When asked about it, Dobbin says he paid because the marriage and, thus, the poverty were his doing.

Mr. Osborne begins to try to reconcile things with the Sedley family. He has Jos over to dinner and shares the wine he bought at their auction years ago. He asks after Amelia for the first time. Dobbin tells him that it practically killed Amelia to give up her child, and the old man had never considered that she might be sad at giving up her beloved son. He agrees to reconcile with her, too. Before it can happen, though, he dies. He has a stroke and lives a few days, during which his son-in-law Mr. Bullock freaks out that he might leave more than half of the inheritance to Georgy instead of to his daughters.

In the will, John has left half of his money to Georgy and the other half split equally between his daughters. Amelia gets an annual pension and regains guardianship of her son. There is a clause in the will that thanks Dobbin for supporting Georgy and Amelia after George's death. Osborne leaves him enough money to purchase a military promotion to colonel.

Amelia, even after discovering that Dobbin was responsible for her marriage to George and supported her after George's death, still does not love him and only thinks of George. The reconciliation in the will gives Amelia social status again and the full respect of the servants and town people. Amelia tells George's sister that she can live in the old house in Russell Square as long as she likes, but the spinster refuses to live in the house where she was so miserable for so long.

The family moves to Richmond where the Bullock family, despite their bitterness at losing inheritance to Georgy, comes to visit him frequently. People who cared nothing for Amelia during her time of poverty come streaming to visit her in her new wealth. Before she can blink, Amelia finds herself at the height of Vanity Fair and socializing with peers and nobility. Mrs. Bullock takes Amelia under her wing, teaching her about new fashions and social protocols and telling gossipers to stop picking on her.

Chapter 61 Analysis

As is fitting the greed and shallowness of Vanity Fair, the moment Amelia's wealth is returned, she is automatically returned into the social circles. While she was married to George, she was too overcome with jealousy and sadness to appreciate her social position. Now, she timidly enters into circles of women who are nice to her face and

gossip about her lack of intelligence and former poverty behind her back. Yet, Amelia is wealthy and worthy of being seen with, so they all pretend to like her. The narrator is straightforward in this chapter, allowing the events and actions to speak for themselves without editorializing and dictating reader emotions. There are rapid changes going on, and based on former patterns, readers suspect that a dramatic event is to come.

Chapter 62

Chapter 62 Summary

The wealthy people of London have decided to go on a foreign tour again, similar to the exodus to Brussels but with no war. On a fantastic ship, young Georgy is rude to a messenger. Amelia and Jos are dining with the Belgian nobles who had been so false to George in Brussels. When the ship lands in Germany, the party sets off to visit the royals of Europe. Amelia, dressed in shabby mourning gowns as usual, is very happy during the vacation even if she does not dress elegantly like everyone else. She, Dobbin and Georgy explore small towns and travel around Europe together having a great time. Amelia sees opera for the first time and is enraptured. She begins to appreciate Dobbin more and more, and the two have the happiest time of their entire lives. The narrator says that they are unaware of it. People begin to mistake Amelia for Mrs. Dobbin. The first time this happens, Georgy bursts out laughing and corrects the error. Jos comments that he would like to stay in Germany for a while, and the narrator hopes Amelia and Dobbin will, too.

Chapter 62 Analysis

Ever so slightly, Amelia lets go of her selfish love of a false memory and begins to appreciate a kind and true suitor. Dobbin is extraordinarily nice to Amelia on their European vacation, and both of them are amazingly happy for the first time. The narrator steps in heavily in this chapter, as the action is minor. The narrator reveals many thoughts and interpretations of events to orient the audience to this change in Amelia's character.

Chapter 63

Chapter 63 Summary

Lord Tapeworm, the man who confused Amelia for Dobbin's wife, quite enjoys the Sedley family and hangs around them a lot. He begins to court Amelia, but she has no idea what is going on. She and Jos just think he is nice. Jos is announced at court and makes public his decision to stay in Germany through autumn. The nobility immediately begins to visit Amelia in droves, much to Jos's delight. She finally wears a pink gown, as mourning is not permitted in court. There is a lot of talk about the social scene in the town of Pumpernickel, near Cologne, where they are staying. George and Amelia both take music and art and language lessons. Everyone is very happy with the social scene, and even Jos starts dating a woman.

Amid the balls and dances in town, there is a gambling house where locals do not go, but which visitors frequent. One day Georgy sneaks in. As it is carnival, the gamblers and staff wear masks. Georgy sits at the roulette wheel by a strange woman in a low-cut dress and black mask who keeps losing, though playing very carefully. She recognizes him and begins talking to him. She gives him a coin and asks him to play it for her. He wins. Just then, Dobbin walks by and discovers Georgy unattended by his drunk and flirting babysitter.

Dobbin gathers Georgy and tries to get Jos and get out of the casino. Jos decides to stay, and Dobbin takes Georgy home. Georgy lies about having played. Dobbin lectures the boy on gambling in a way that would make his grandfathers proud and sends him to bed. Jos remains behind and gambles next to the strange woman. She asks him to sit by her and give her luck. It turns out to be Becky Crawley, staying in town under the alias of Madame de Raudon. She asks Jos to walk with her as old friends.

Chapter 63 Analysis

By this time in the novel readers have been wondering when Becky would turn up again. For the first time, there are no hints of her movements until the very end of this chapter, building tension as one speculates what schemes she has been cooking up. The chapter is dedicated to setting the social scene of Vanity Fair in Germany as one that would be perfectly suited to her tastes. Her shabby appearance and gambling to earn money is slightly shocking, but there is no doubt that she has followed the English nobles to where the social action is and will try her hand at rising upward once again.

Chapter 64

Chapter 64 Summary

The narrator is not going to talk about where Becky has been these months, as he does not like to speak of impolite things. He says that nothing she has been doing was pleasant and wants to leave it at that. Going against his own advice, he proceeds to reveal a few details through flashback. After the incident, Lord Steyne sends his man to tell Sir Pitt the truth about Becky's whole history. She and Rawdon go through divorce proceedings, and they send her out of the country to France with a small yearly alimony.

Rawdon and Becky's son is left to the guardianship of Pitt and Jane, although Becky does write him a letter when Pitt's son dies and little Rawdon is named heir of Queens Crawley. Rawdon, happy at last, tells Jane not to worry and that he considers her his mother. Becky spends a lot of time bitter with the English nobles for snubbing her and trying to find out where the social action is. She works very hard trying to appear decent again to overcome scandal.

Becky tours through Europe, avoiding old creditors and ogling the monument installed to George's honor at Waterloo. She acquires gambling debts and has to skip several towns in secret. She performs every now and then when she is really in need of money. She comes across her poor maternal grandmother in Paris and is not pleased to meet the destitute, grouchy woman. She secures an invitation to a ball in Rome and comes across Lord Steyne, who remembers his rage with her. Lord Steyne sends a messenger to tell her they are very aware of all her activities and that she will find herself deathly ill if she stays in Rome. The marquis eventually dies of shock after the French Revolution. Becky wanders on again without destination, constantly in search of Vanity Fair.

Chapter 64 Analysis

A lifetime of schemes and horrid behavior has finally caught up to Becky. Now that she is divorced and her scandal made public, people no longer have to gossip and spread rumors. They are free to snub her whenever they please. She finds herself sneered at and hated by nobility all through Europe as they remember her old money schemes and poisonous behavior. Still, she smiles as always and thinks she can reclaim her position atop society. The author manipulates time, and his narrator fills in the details of Becky's travels. For the first time, the narrator feels inclined to gossip about Becky, having taken great care the entire novel to always speak well of her until this point, when she supposedly crossed a line even for him. The chapter ends as she is wandering Europe, about to meet up with the touring Sedley crew in Germany, where she thinks she will finally concoct a plan to get back on top.

Chapter 65

Chapter 65 Summary

Jos does not tell the others that he has met up with Becky. He finds her living with the bohemians and enjoying her new life in modest accommodations, flirting with local students. Becky whines to him that all her friends were fair-weather friends and have forgotten her in her time of need. She tells him that George always wooed her, which made Amelia jealous. Becky says, though, that she never had feelings for George and in fact never stopped loving Jos. Her attitude to him always was a result of her husband's jealousy at his being the first to win her heart.

Jos is quite moved and agrees that she has been terribly wronged. He heads back to tell Dobbin the story and try to get her placed back in society. Dobbin says he has always distrusted Becky from the very beginning. They argue about it and finally agree to ask Amelia if the woman should be their friend again. They decide Amelia's decision will be final. Amelia refuses to see Becky, remembering the flirting with George in Brussels. Jos will not give up and keeps pressing until he convinces Amelia to go see Becky by telling a story about little Rawdon being forcibly removed from her arms. The thought of another woman losing her child is enough for Amelia, and she decides they must visit at once. Amelia showers Becky with pure kisses and forgives her.

Chapter 65 Analysis

Becky will stop at nothing to regain her place. She weaves a fantastic tale of lies to convince Jos, who has been in India so long he will believe anything. Despite their instincts, Dobbin and Amelia believe Jos's tale that Becky has been terribly wronged and is a worthy person. Becky stoops to the only thing she knows will get Amelia to come around - telling her that her precious child was taken from her. Amelia is unable to imagine anyone surviving such a monstrosity, having survived it herself only barely, and she rushes to Becky with open arms. The narrator intervenes again in this chapter by explaining the thoughts and emotions behind each character's words and actions, making it clear how each person feels about Becky and her clever plots.

Chapter 66

Chapter 66 Summary

Amelia wants to hear all about Rawdon being taken from Becky. Becky cannot even remember the age of her child or what he looks like when Amelia asks all these questions. Amelia begins to talk all about her Georgy, and Becky pretends interest, all along hoping Amelia will not sit on the brandy bottles or uncover other unpleasant items in her room. Becky tells another version of her separation with Rawdon, creating new lies and making Amelia believe horrible things about the marquis, Lady Jane and Pitt.

Dobbin, who escorted Amelia to the boarding house, waits downstairs in the bar. Two male students who Becky hangs out with come down and sit near Dobbin. They talk about Becky's poor German and how nobody will go to her musical concerts. Then they mention how she fooled a little boy into gambling for her the previous night. Dobbin remembers long ago how Becky was such a flirt and remembers George saying on his dying day that he had started an inappropriate relationship with Becky and hoped Amelia would never know.

Amelia finds Dobbin, and they leave to tell Jos that Becky is to move into their house with them. Dobbin is enraged and alludes to Becky's indiscretion with George in Waterloo. Amelia is very upset and runs to her room in tears, staring at George's painting and remembering him telling her with his own mouth that he had always been faithful. Dobbin begs Jos not to associate with Becky, reminding him how Rawdon always cheated George out of money at gambling and how she has always been too worldly for Amelia.

In the middle of Dobbin's speech, Becky arrives from her boarding house. She can tell immediately that Dobbin is on to her. Later at dinner, Georgy recognizes Becky as the woman from the casino. She tells him to hush and that his mother must not find out he was there, or else she will be angry with both of them as well as Jos, who was also there gambling. Dobbin sets out to find out everything he can about Becky, and he learns the whole history of her money swindling and scheming. He is shocked and cannot wait to tell Amelia of the demon in their house.

The next morning, Dobbin comes to the house and tells the Sedleys everything, in front of Becky. Becky protests and denies the entire time. Dobbin says he is too much of a gentleman to tell the whole truth in front of Amelia. Amelia says she will never forgive him for speaking poorly of George's honor the day before, and he is crushed.

Dobbin gives Amelia a long speech about wasting a lifetime loving a woman who cannot recognize an honest soul. He says that both their struggles are tiresome and wants to end his infatuation with her. While this speech is going on, Becky is listening at the door. She cannot believe how noble Dobbin is and feels badly that he has wasted a lifetime in loving Amelia, who could not recognize or appreciate him. Later, the servants get

Dobbin's carriage ready. Georgy wants to go say goodbye, but Amelia will not let him. He goes anyway, and Becky thrusts a note at him for Dobbin. Amelia is left feeling justified in defending George's honor and memory.

Chapter 66 Analysis

Becky is pulling out all the stops and making a fool of herself along the way. Living with the bohemians, she is unable to hide her real pleasures of drinking, flirting and gambling when her honorable friends come to visit. All but Dobbin are fooled by her stories anyway, and she convinces them to take her back to their house. Despite a lifetime of honest and good friendship, Dobbin is excluded when he speaks against Becky. He dares mention the flirting with George in Belgium, and Amelia is so upset at this insult to her perfect husband's memory that she is ready to end a lifetime of friendship over it. Dobbin has finally had enough of her selfish heart and blind eyes. She cannot even tell that he is her pure friend and that Becky is a liar. He ends their friendship and leaves the house.

The narrator shows Becky having an actual conscience as she listens to their argument at the door. Suspense builds around the question of what Becky says in her note to Dobbin that will convince him to return to Amelia. The narrator has hinted at references to the note from Waterloo but has not explained Becky's latest plot. Georgy has somehow become a nice and decent young man, perhaps because of his wealth and freedom, only doing occasional naughty things expected of teenage boys.

Chapter 67

Chapter 67 Summary

Becky has gone full steam into action working to please the Sedleys. Jos is enamored and drives around with her in a carriage, has parties for her and defends her honor all around town. She wins over the German women, and soon the Sedley house is a lively social hot spot thanks to Becky. Amelia is pretty much left out of the celebrations except when the bills come. Becky finds ways to trick her by discussing the situation with Dobbin. She tells Amelia that she behaved badly toward Dobbin. Amelia returns that she is married for life to an angel. Despite these surface reactions, Amelia enjoys hearing Becky praise Dobbin every day.

Everyone in the house likes Becky suddenly for trying to convince Amelia to marry Dobbin. They used to hate her and see right through her, but now the servants help her try to talk Amelia out of her obsession with George. Since Dobbin left, Amelia has grown more and more miserable, although she is able to stare at George's painting with as much zeal as ever. She takes long walks with her son while Becky and Jos are partying. She tells Georgy how they owe everything to Dobbin.

Becky has been ashamed of her shabby possessions and talks endlessly about her real things being lost and left behind. Amelia feels badly and gets Becky her own clothes. One day, the lost trunks actually do arrive, though they contain no clothes. One has her secret box that Rawdon ransacked to find the money. Becky has been carrying around a drawing she did of Jos decades ago. He is delighted, and they hang it in the house.

One day, Becky and Amelia read in the paper that Colonel Dobbin has rejoined his regiment. Amelia has begun to appreciate the lifetime of favors Dobbin has given her. She misses him and feels that he is truly gone. She is very sad that she is only now realizing what a great friend he has always been to her. William Dobbin thinks he is through loving her. He has shut his heart to her at last.

The Sedleys are on the move again as the nobles grow restless vacationing in Germany. Becky is brought along with them, firmly established with Jos and Amelia as a virtuous woman. This support is enough to silence the tongues of any gossips in any cities they might go to next. To her horror, some of Becky's cruder bohemian friends insist on visiting her at the Sedley house. Amelia and Georgy are uncomfortable with the visitors. Amelia wants to go back to England. She mopes around, and Becky decides she must do something to intervene.

Becky insists that Amelia cannot go around unmarried, or else Georgy will be ruined. She has to marry Dobbin. Amelia insists she cannot forget George. Becky spits out a long speech about how awful George was. She tells Amelia how Dobbin had to convince George to marry her and how he flirted shamelessly with Becky despite her protests. She tells Amelia that George made terrible fun of Amelia and had sex with

Becky the week after he and Amelia were married. Amelia shrieks that it is all lies, and Becky pulls out the note George wrote her the night of the ball long ago. He wrote to ask Becky to run away with him and gave her the note right in front of Amelia.

Amelia weeps for the loss of her fine memory, for the loss of her friend, for the people who hated George and for the realization that nothing ties her to this marriage any longer. She realizes she loves Dobbin and can marry him now. Becky consoles her and offers to help her write to Dobbin, but Amelia admits she already wrote to him that morning. Becky laughs hysterically.

Several days later, Amelia stands out in a storm with Georgy, hoping Dobbin will not cross the sea in bad weather. Georgy feels certain he will come no matter what, and sure enough they see the smoke of a ship approaching. Amelia gets weak in the knees when she sees Dobbin. Georgy heads for home to let them alone. They embrace at long last, and Amelia begs him to forgive her. Dobbin says that it is about time she sent for him. Jos is not awake yet, and Becky spies on the couple from her room. The narrator leaves them. William Dobbin has finally gotten what he spent his entire life longing for.

Finally doing something compassionate, Becky does not show her face to Dobbin and his new wife. She slips away until after the ceremony, when she visits Jos. Amelia is very glad that she wrote to Dobbin before discovering the truth about George. Dobbin insists he knew all along but would never hurt Amelia with such a revelation. Dobbin wonders what has become of Glorvina. She married another soldier, and the entire O'Dowd family is doing quite well with the regiment. Dobbin retires from the military after his marriage, and they buy a house near Queens Crawley.

The government has been reformed, and Pitt has lost his parliament seats. He is a bitter and sad old man, although Amelia and Lady Jane are friends. Amelia has another baby, who is baptized by Bute's son James, who has joined the ministry. Georgy and little Rawdon become close friends. The boys grow to love Lady Jane's daughter, and both try to woo her.

The families never mention Becky's name, but she has taken up with Jos and travels with him everywhere. His is infatuated with her and took out a huge life insurance policy naming her benefactor. Amelia begs Dobbin to go find him and make sure he is all right. Dobbin finds him terrified in Belgium. He is dreadfully ill and says Becky is the only one who can give him proper medicine. He begs Dobbin to come and visit him regularly.

When Dobbin refuses, saying he and Amelia cannot be around Becky, Jos insists on her purity and innocence. Dobbin begs Jos to get away from her, to go back to India or do anything to be free of Becky. Jos is scared to do so, thinking Becky would have him killed. Dobbin leaves begrudgingly, and Jos dies three months later. His properties have all been gambled away, and all that remains is his life insurance, split equally between his sister and Becky. The life insurance company refuses payment, thinking he has been poisoned, but Becky (who has started calling herself Lady Crawley) gets her

lawyers on the case and collects the funds. Dobbin sends the money back, refusing anything to do with Becky.

Becky continues to call herself Lady Crawley, though she never was a baroness. Rawdon dies of yellow fever on Coventry Island six weeks before his brother, Pitt. The entire estate is left to little Rawdon, who refuses to see his mother but sends an allowance to her. Becky has her share of enemies but has also gathered a crowd of supporters who agree that she has been a social victim. She busies herself for the rest of her days maintaining the appearances of a good Christian woman and clawing her way up the social ranks of Vanity Fair.

Amelia and her family encounter her at a charity fair. She looks down as they scurry away from her. Dobbin scoops up his daughter as Amelia thinks he likes their child more than he likes her. The narrator leaves readers questioning who among humans is really happy and says the puppet show is over.

Chapter 67 Analysis

In this action-packed final chapter, Becky does her one noble act of the entire novel. Knowing she will lose her newfound place among society again, she tells Amelia she had an affair with her dead husband anyway. Becky knows this information will break the spell that George's memory has on Amelia and that she will finally turn to Dobbin. Shockingly, Amelia has come to the decision to marry Dobbin on her own the day before, and the news does nothing but ruin Becky to the family once and for all.

A happy ending for Amelia and Dobbin seems inevitable when they finally embrace and form a life together, but the narrator shows that Amelia is her same old self with low self-esteem. She is jealous that her husband loves her daughter more than he loves his wife. She seems destined to never be happy, although William Dobbin ends the novel engrossed in his reading, infatuated with his child and married to the love of his life.

Jos Sedley meets a disappointing end, with heavy hints that he has been slowly poisoned to death by the ever-evil Becky. It seems that she is never happy even when she has money to play with, as she fools Jos into gambling away all his wealth and is left with nothing but the life insurance policy she convinced him to buy. The remaining members of the Crawley family and Georgy Osborne seem to be happy at the novel's end, but the closing image of Becky is exactly as she was at the beginning. She is still fighting to dispel rumors of her class and character as she claws and fights to stay afloat in the social circles of Vanity Fair.

The narrator serves as a helpful guide through the very end, even allowing readers to place the actions of the novel into universal context. When the narrator asks who is ever really happy, he does so having shown that each of his characters has come full circle, ending the novel in exactly the place he or she was at the beginning. Everyone is always fighting for something, and no one can be satisfied with what he or she already has. People are all in some way clawing to reach the top of Vanity Fair.

Characters

Mrs. Blenkinsop

The Sedleys' housekeeper, Mrs. Blenkinsop is loyal enough to stay with the family when they lose their money. She is also Amelia's trusted confidant.

Miss Briggs

Briggs is at first a maid for Miss Matilda Crawley and later a companion to Becky Sharp. She is good-hearted and naïve enough to loan money to Becky, which Becky, predictably, does not repay. Lord Steyne ends up providing for Miss Briggs.

Frederick Bullock

Frederick, a lawyer, is Maria Osborne's suitor and eventual husband. When Maria's brother George is disinherited, Frederick does not hide his pleasure that Maria is now likely to receive a larger share of the family's money.

Mary Clapp

The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Clapp, the Sedleys' landlords after they lose their money, Mary becomes Amelia's friend.

Mr. Clapp

Mr. Clapp is the Sedleys' longtime clerk, who takes the family in when they lose their fortune.

Mrs. Clapp

The Sedleys' landlady, Mrs. Clapp, nags Amelia about the rent when the family has fallen on hard times, but she changes her attitude when Amelia comes into money.

Bute Crawley

The brother of Sir Pitt Crawley, Bute is a reverend who is ill-suited to his position. He likes to eat, drink, and gamble (and therefore is in debt) and is happy to let his wife run their household and write his sermons. Like all the Crawleys, he hopes to inherit a substantial amount of money from old Aunt Matilda Crawley.

Mrs. Bute Crawley

The reverend's wife is overbearing, snooty, manipulative, and determined to win Aunt Matilda's fortune. She dislikes Becky Sharp, whom she recognizes as a smart and ambitious competitor. In the end, Mrs. Crawley fails to secure Aunt Matilda's money.

James Crawley

The son of Bute and Mrs. Crawley, James nearly charms Aunt Matilda into leaving him her money. When she discovers that he is a heavy drinker and catches him smoking in her house, he falls from grace and loses his chance at the inheritance.

Miss Matilda Crawley

Miss Crawley, Sir Pitt Crawley's half-sister, is old, unmarried, eccentric, and rich. The entire Crawley clan connives to get their hands on her fortune, and she is well aware of this. She is at first inclined to favor Rawdon, but he loses out when he marries Becky; Miss Crawley disapproves of the union because of Becky's low social standing. Although she dislikes Pitt (mostly for his extreme piety), in the end, Pitt's wife, Lady Jane, wins the old lady's affection through genuine kindness, and Pitt and Lady Jane end up with most of Miss Crawley's fortune.

Pitt Crawley

Pitt is the older son of Sir Pitt Crawley. He is overly pious, proper to a fault, and stingy. It is mostly due to his marriage to the sweet and kind Lady Jane that Pitt ends up with his aunt's fortune. His seat in Parliament is also inherited, and not won by any personal merit. However, Pitt does have some redeeming qualities. He welcomes Rawdon and Becky into the family, and when they split up, Pitt offers his brother kindness and takes care of their son (also named Rawdon).

Sir Pitt Crawley

Sir Pitt is a wealthy nobleman who is nevertheless uneducated, unrefined, unkempt, uncouth, and a penny pincher in the extreme. He has two sons, Pitt and Rawdon, by his deceased first wife, and two young daughters, Rosalind and Violet, by his second wife, Rose. Becky comes to his country estate, Queen's Crawley, to be governess to his girls. When Rose dies, Sir Pitt proposes to Becky (he likes her spunk), who must refuse him because she has secretly married Rawdon. Sir Pitt then turns his affections to his butler's daughter, Miss Horrocks, which horrifies his family. He dies and leaves his fortune, along with his noble title of baronet, to his elder son, Pitt.

Rawdon Crawley

Rawdon is the younger son of Sir Pitt Crawley and, eventually, the husband of Becky Sharp. When he is kicked out of Cambridge University, his aunt, Miss Matilda Crawley, who favors him until he marries Becky, buys him a commission in the Life Guards Green. Although somewhat dullwitted himself, Rawdon is a gambler who takes advantage of less clever men whenever he can and helps support himself and Becky in this way. He truly loves Becky and puts up with her increasing neglect and disregard for him. It is too much for him, however, when he is imprisoned for debt, and it is Lady Jane, not Becky, who comes to free him. Rawdon goes home to find Becky with Lord Steyne and finally leaves her. He takes a position on a faraway tropical island, Coventry Island, from which he sends money for Becky and their son. Eventually, he dies of yellow fever on the island.

Rawdy Crawley

Rawdy is the son of Becky and Rawdon. Although his father loves him, Becky shows no love or affection for him and sends him away to school under the auspices of Lord Steyne. Pitt and Lady Jane take care of him after his parents part ways, and Rawdy inherits Queen's Crawley when Pitt dies. Although he will not see her, he provides for Becky in spite of her ill treatment of him.

Miss Rosalind Crawley

Rosalind is the daughter of Sir Pitt by his second wife and Becky's charge when Becky comes to Queen's Crawley.

Miss Violet Crawley

Violet is the daughter of Sir Pitt by his second wife and Becky's charge when Becky comes to Queen's Crawley.

William Dobbin

Dobbin is the only truly noble character in Vanity Fair. He has few outward virtues□he is awkward and unattractive□and has little money; but he is selfless, loyal, kind, truthful, and generous. He spends his life providing support and service to undeserving and ungrateful friends, among whom the closest are George Osborne and Amelia Sedley. Although Dobbin loves Amelia, he feels that he is not a good enough match for her and so goes out of his way to ensure that George marries her. His dogged devotion to Amelia is finally rewarded when Amelia marries him long after George has died. In the end, however, Dobbin realizes that Amelia was never worthy of him or of the kind of love he has shown her.

Horrocks

Horrocks is Sir Pitt's butler.

John

The Sedley's groom, John drives Becky to Sir Pitt's home after her visit with the Sedleys. John is rude to Becky, chiefly because Amelia has given her some clothes that John hoped to have for his girlfriend.

Glorvina Mahoney

Peggy O'Dowd's flirtatious sister, Glorvina pursues William Dobbin, who is too fixated on Amelia to show any interest.

Colonel Michael O'Dowd

The Colonel is George Osborne and William Dobbin's commanding officer, a brave, experienced soldier who becomes a major general. He has an amiable relationship with his wife.

Peggy O'Dowd

The Colonel's wife is Irish, talkative, and genuinely kind. Her primary goal is to make a match for her sister, Glorvina.

George Osborne

George has longstanding relationships with the Sedley family and with Dobbin. He is a goodlooking, self-centered, prideful, free-spending, gambler. He has a certain amount of wealth but not nobility, and he courts the favor of all aristocrats who cross his path. It is George who ruins Becky's hopes of marrying Joseph Sedley by convincing Joseph that it would be inappropriate for him to marry a governess. George does this not out of concern for Joseph but because he is engaged to marry Joseph's sister, Amelia, and does not want a governess in the family.

While Amelia loves George, George is incapable of loving anyone as much as he loves himself. He nearly backs out of marrying Amelia (his father is against the union and in fact disinherits George over it), but Dobbin persuades him to go through with it. Then, just before going off to the Battle of Waterloo, George flirts with Becky and passes her a mysterious note. George is killed in the battle, and Amelia grieves deeply. She doesn't find out until many years later that George's note to Becky suggested that the two of them run away together.

Georgy Osborne

Georgy is the son of George and Amelia. His father dies before he is born. Although he is spoiled by his mother and seems destined to grow up to be even more selfish and vain than his father, Dobbin influences him for the better. His grandfather leaves Georgy half the family fortune, in spite of having disinherited his father, George, over George's marriage to Amelia.

Jane Osborne

One of George's sisters, Jane is a lonely, unmarried woman whose life is considerably uplifted when young Georgy comes to live at the Osborne family home.

Old John Osborne

Father of George, John is a mean, calculating, unforgiving man. He has encouraged George to love and marry Amelia throughout his son's youth, but when the Sedley family loses its fortune, John orders George to give Amelia up. When George refuses, John disowns and disinherits him and refuses to have anything to do with Amelia. After George's death, the old man remains hard toward Amelia but wants to rear his grandson, to which Amelia finally agrees. In part because of Dobbin's efforts, John mellows somewhat in his old age. He comes to love Georgy and not only leaves a substantial amount of money to his grandson, but also provides for Amelia.

Maria Osborne

One of John Osborne's three daughters, Maria is rather like her father. She welcomes her brother's disinheritance because it means more of the family fortune for her, and she marries a lawyer who is equally cold and calculating. When her father leaves Georgy and Amelia money, Maria plots to have one of her daughters marry Georgy so that she can control more of the family money.

Miss Barbara Pinkerton

Miss Pinkerton owns the academy where Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp meet and become friends. Miss Pinkerton dotes on Amelia because her family has money and hates Becky as much for her poverty as for her churlish attitude.

Charles Raggles

Raggles works as a gardener for the Crawleys and saves his money until he is able to buy a greengrocer shop and house of his own. Becky and Rawdon come to be his

tenants but do not pay their rent. They cheat him until finally they have ruined him, and Raggles ends up in debtors' prison.

Amelia Sedley

Amelia is the daughter of John Sedley, a businessman who is successful and moneyed as the novel opens. She is sweet, kind, malleable, naïve, and shallow.

Amelia's love for George Osborne is blind love. On the eve of the Battle of Waterloo, as George flirts with Becky, Amelia is deeply distraught at George's imminent departure for the battle. George is handsome, and Amelia doesn't see beneath the surface to the ugliness underneath, any more than she sees the nobility beneath Dobbin's unattractive appearance. Even after George's death, she remains as unaware of his lack of integrity and devotion as she is of William Dobbin's love for her.

Amelia is a loving mother to Georgy, the son born to her after George's death. She finally marries Dobbin but only after Becky awakens her to his virtue.

John Sedley

Father of Amelia and Joseph, John Sedley is, when the novel begins, a well-to-do merchant and a friend of John Osborne. Sedley is amenable to Becky's plot to marry Joseph, as he fears that the alternative will be an Indian woman; Joseph is on leave from his government post in India. Sedley takes unwise business risks in an effort to increase his wealth but instead loses everything. The family is forced to rent a lowly cottage owned by one of their former servants. Sedley then spends his time concocting schemes to regain his wealth, but he dies penniless.

Mrs. John Sedley

John Sedley's wife is sweet-tempered and loyal like her daughter, Amelia, but her good nature gradually is ground down by the family's ongoing poverty. Amelia takes care of her during her last illness.

Joseph Sedley

Joseph is Amelia's older brother. He loves nothing more than food, drink, and sleep. His father tells his mother, "if you and I and his sister were to die tomorrow, he would say, 'Good Gad!' and eat his dinner just as well as usual." He is fat and cowardly, yet conceited and a dandy. At Waterloo, he goes no nearer the battlefield than the women do and still shakes with fear, and yet he later tells such tales of his courage that he is given the nickname "Waterloo Sedley." He believes that Becky is genuinely attracted to him, when her only real interest is in his money, and plans to propose to her until

George dissuades him. When his father goes bankrupt, Joseph sends only a little money and is tardy even with that.

Joseph meets Becky in Europe after her husband has left her, and she charms him just as she had years earlier. Joseph and Becky travel together, but Joseph confides to Dobbin that he is frightened of Becky. Joseph soon dies of poisoning, and it is left unclear whether Becky has murdered him for his only remaining asset, an insurance policy whose proceeds are split between Becky and Amelia.

Becky Sharp

See *Rebecca Sharp*

Rebecca Sharp

Becky Sharp is the central character in *Vanity Fair* and Amelia Sedley's opposite. She is the orphaned daughter of destitute parents, and she learns early on to look after her own interests in all situations. Becky values money and social status above all and is thoroughly corrupt in her pursuit of them. Her most well-known (though often doubted) observation is that for five thousand pounds a year, she could be a good woman. Selfish, unscrupulous, manipulative, and ambitious, she is capable of appearing sweet, mild, and even timid when it furthers her aims to do so. She can blush and cry at will but cries genuinely only once: when she is forced to turn down the wealthy Sir Pitt's marriage proposal because she has already secretly married his son. Becky is helped in her relentless social climbing both by her wits, which are as keenly honed as her surname implies, and by her physical attributes, which are listed thus: "Green eyes, fair skin, pretty figure, famous frontal development." Nearly all the male characters in the novel are taken in by her, always to their detriment.

As the novel opens, Becky attends Miss Pinkerton's academy where she earns her keep by teaching French (learned from her mother). She becomes Amelia's friend and goes to her home for a long visit when the two leave the academy. There she tries to lure Amelia's brother Joseph into marrying her but is foiled by George Osborne. She then goes to work as a governess for Sir Pitt Crawley and marries his son Rawdon, a marriage that gives her status but not wealth. In a series of attempts to secure money, she sacrifices her marriage and ignores her child. Her vaguely defined relationship with Lord Steyne provides both money and position until Rawdon walks in on them and both men abandon her.

In the end, Becky has attained a measure of middle-class respectability□the place in Vanity Fair that she has so long and so ardently sought. Her status is made possible partly by money inherited from Joseph Sedley, whom she meets again after many years and whose death by poisoning she may have caused.

Becky's corruption does not render her incapable of recognizing or appreciating virtue in others, even though virtue is rare in Vanity Fair. She is able to see the noble character

of William Dobbin and, in an unexpected act of caring, helps Amelia to see it too, so that Amelia will marry Dobbin.

Lord Steyne

Lord Steyne is a wealthy aristocrat and lord of the Powder Closet at Buckingham Palace. He is unattractive in every conceivable way and considerably older than Becky, but she enters into a vague arrangement with him that earns her money, jewelry, and status until her husband walks in on Becky and him and throws a brooch at Lord Steyne, scarring him for life.

The Marchioness of Steyne

Lord Steyne's wife is a good woman, reduced to silence and superstitious religiosity by her husband's degeneracy. She comes to Becky's defense after Rawdon wounds Lord Steyne and both men desert her.

Wenham

Wenham is Lord Steyne's servant. He prevents Lord Steyne from dueling with Rawdon over Becky and turns Sir Pitt against Becky.

Themes

There is one clear, overarching theme in *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero,* and Thackeray telegraphs it in his title and subtitle. In the pages of *Vanity Fair,* all is vanity and all are vain. Some are more vain□more obsessed with self and with the ephemeral treasures of social position and money□than others, but none, in the author's estimation, can be called heroic.

The title is borrowed from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress,* in which Vanity Fair is a town that exists for the purpose of diverting men and women from the road to heaven. The town's residents are all mean and ignorant, and they all make their living by enticing passersby to spend what they have on worldly vanities□items that offer brief sensual pleasure but have no lasting value. Thackeray transports Vanity Fair to London in the early 1800s and peoples his version with characters, primarily from the middle and upper classes, who live only to obtain higher social status and more money, and who are happy to lie, cheat, steal, manipulate, and betray in the pursuit of these goals. It is worth noting, as well, that Thackeray's Vanity Fair, like Bunyan's, is explicitly a godless place; both authors believe that the unrestrained vanity they portray is possible only among people who have no concept of a God who sets, upholds, and enforces moral standards. In an often-quoted letter to a personal correspondent, written in July 1847, before *Vanity Fair* was finished, Thackeray wrote, "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 virtue."

Thackeray succeeded so well in doing this that the novel has been faulted, more often than for anything else, for the unrelenting baseness of its characters. The vainest of all is Becky Sharp. Becky is proud of the physical attractiveness and clever wit that allow her to charm men. Her ultimate effect on them is similar to a spider's effect on a fly, which finds itself trapped and consumed. As her first husband, Rawdon Crawley, goes off to the Battle of Waterloo, Becky muses that she will be free to marry a wealthier man if Rawdon is killed. When he is not killed, Becky makes the best of it, using his aristocratic pedigree to win entrance to the social circles she seeks and to help her avoid paying her bills. Meanwhile, she uses other men, especially Lord Steyne, to get what she cannot get from her husband (money), carrying on public relationships that humiliate him, and ignoring him and their son. After Rawdon has finally left her for a faraway island, where he dies of a tropical disease, Joseph Sedley has the bad luck to encounter Becky a second time, and the drama of the spider and the fly again unfolds. Becky seduces Joseph and soon talks him into taking out a life insurance policy with her as beneficiary. Within months, Joseph is dead of poison; whether by Becky's hand or not is left to the reader to decide. There is scant evidence in the novel that murder would be beyond her.

Most of those around Becky are not better than she is, they are simply less clever and less desperate. Joseph is lazy, gluttonous, dull, and uncaring. When his father goes bankrupt and his whole family is on the verge of starvation, he doesn't get around to sending relief until it is nearly too late. George Osborne, Amelia's husband, is unable to

love anyone but himself. George's father is mean, calculating, and unforgiving. Old Sir Pitt is a vulgar skinflint. Reverend Bute Crawley is not at all reverent and lets his overbearing gossip of a wife write his sermons. The list goes on and on.

Among the main characters, only Amelia Sedley and William Dobbin approach virtue. Amelia's fault is not so much that she is vain as that she is too blind and too shallow to recognize either vanity or virtue even at point-blank range. She idolizes George, the self-absorbed cad; she fails to see that Dobbin is a better man by far, even after years of his selfless attention to her. And Amelia is not completely above vanity. She is self-centered enough to accept Dobbin's devotion and his generous gifts without thinking of his feelings and without even expressing much gratitude.

Dobbin alone possesses real integrity and moral maturity, but even he is tinged with vanity. He is selfless, loyal, generous, and kind, ever content to give more than he takes. Dobbin's failure, similar to Amelia's, is his lack of discrimination about the characters of those around him. As a result, he gives people much more and much better than they deserve; in other words, he spends his life casting pearls before swine. And Dobbin's vanity lies in his dogged devotion to Amelia, who is, like the wares hawked at Bunyan's Vanity Fair, glittery but not golden. She is not a heroine, worthy of a hero; she is just a generally decent, conventional, sweet-tempered woman. Though he does finally realize that Amelia has not been worthy of the adoration he has heaped on her, as a character, Dobbin is weakened by the fact that it takes him half a lifetime to develop a realistic view of Amelia.

Style

Victorian Literature

It was during the Victorian period (1837-1901) that the novel became the dominant literary form. *Vanity Fair* is considered one of the classic novels of the era. It was common for novels to be published serially, in magazines or in stand-alone sections. *Vanity Fair* was first published serially, and the early parts were published before the later ones were written. This at least partly explains the novel's many irregularities. A character may be called by different names in different sections (Mrs. Bute Crawley may be Barbara or Martha; Glorvina may be Glorvina Mahoney, the sister of Mrs. O'Dowd, or Glorvina O'Dowd, the sister of the general). One name may also be shared by multiple minor characters, and both the narrative and the passage of time may jump and start in unexpected directions. In one particularly confusing instance, Thackeray relates the details of Joseph's visit to his family and then has Amelia receive a letter from Joseph informing her that his visit will be delayed. To put it simply, Thackeray made it up as he went along, without undue concern for consistency. The novel's generous length and enormous cast of characters are also characteristic of the time.

Thackeray and Charles Dickens were the leading lights in Victorian fiction, constantly compared and always uncomfortable around each other. Dickens was born a year after Thackeray but was well established by the time Thackeray began to attract notice. Thackeray's focus was on the middle and upper classes, while Dickens's was on the poor. Thackeray's works, including *Vanity Fair,* are considered less sentimental and more subtle than Dickens's.

Loose Structure

Vanity Fair is not only long, it is meandering. Thackeray knows where he is taking his readers, but he is in no hurry to get them to their destina- tion. Any slight forward movement of the plot may cause the author to stop, reflect, pontificate, digress. There are many long essays on everything from how to live with no visible means to how women treat one another. Other topics include how people comport themselves at estate sales, what the relationships between servants and employers are like, and what types of wedding and funeral ceremonies are practiced. Thackeray addresses readers directly, sometimes telling them what they can expect in the coming pages, sometimes telling them what to think of a character, and sometimes sharing his own musings and desires (one of which is for a rich, old aunt like Miss Matilda Crawley).

Many characters, including minor ones, also are given space to express their perspectives on other characters, story events, settings, and life in general. The story is told primarily from the point of view of a single narrator, but this narrator is often interrupted by story characters and by the author himself.

Thackeray's wanderings cover more than just philosophical terrain. Readers follow various characters all over England and to Brussels, Paris, Rome, the comically named, fictional German principality of Pumpernickel, and India, as well as to the British royal court and to an infamous debtors' prison.

Satire

Above all else, *Vanity Fair* is a satire. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* cites Thackeray among the principal satirists of the nineteenth century and *Vanity Fair* as a key work. It defines satire by defining its author:

> The satirist is... a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, ideals, and truth; of moral as well as aesthetic values. He is a man (women satirists are very rare) who takes it upon himself to correct, censure, and ridicule the follies and vices of society and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm. Thus satire is a kind of protest, a sublimation and refinement of anger and indignation.

As much as *Vanity Fair* meanders in terms of content, it remains steadfastly on point when it comes to tone; it is satirical from start to finish, and all characters, even the few virtuous ones, take their share of darts. The sharpest arrows, though, are aimed at the worst of the lot. When the ignorant, vulgar tightwad Sir Pitt proposes to Becky, he makes a tall tale of a speech that makes him out as a generous gentleman whose only fault might be his advanced age. He tells Becky:

> "I'm an old man, but a good'n. I'm good for twenty years. I'll make you happy, zee if I don't. You shall do what you like; spend what you like; and 'av it all your own way. I'll make you a zettlement. I'll do everything reglar. Look year!" And the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her like a satyr.

The humor is compounded when Becky responds with equal corruption. Although she is distraught only because she is already married to Sir Pitt's much less wealthy son, she does a good job of acting as if she believes Sir Pitt to be the prize of manhood and explaining that that is why she is in tears at having to turn him down.

Virtually every character in the book, starting with Becky Sharp, is satirized every time his or her connotation-laden name is mentioned. But the most obvious and outrageous names are saved for minor characters: the auctioneer is Mr. Hammerdown; the surgeon, Dr. Lance; the hanging judge, Sir Thomas Coffin; the gambler, Deuceace, to give a very few examples. Also on Becky's rain-drenched trip to Queen's Crawley, she passes the towns of Leakington, Mudbury, and Squashmore.

Thackeray's satire often takes the form of irony (figurative speech in which what is meant is the opposite of what is said). People who hate each other address each other as "my love." The degenerate Lord Steyne calls his house a "temple of virtue" and describes his long-suffering and pious wife as being as gay as Lady MacBeth. Of the warbeleaguered Belgians, the author writes, "For a long period of history they have let other people fight there."

Wide-Ranging Allusions

It would take a lifetime study of world literature and history to comprehend every allusion in *Vanity Fair.* References to Greek and Roman classics and the Bible are not unexpected. But Thackeray adds dozens of references much more obscure to modern Western readers. To name just a few: Ahriman, a Zoroastrian evil spirit; the Arabian nights; and a French opera performed in London at the time Thackeray was writing. His several allusions appear as represented in the following passage:

'Come, come,' said James, putting his hand to his
nose and winking at his cousin with a pair of vinous
eyes, 'no jokes, old boy; no trying it on on me. You
want to trot me out, but it's no go. In vino veritas,
old boy. Mars, Bacchus, Apollo virorum, hay? I wish
my aunt would send down some of this to the governor;
it's a precious good tap.'

James is quoting (not accurately) the *Latin Grammar* he studied at school; the main gist is "truth in wine." "Machiavel" is Thackeray's short form of Machiavelli and the author's nickname for Sir Pitt.

Historical Context

Napoleon and the Battle of Waterloo

The Napoleonic Wars began in the late 1790s, with Napoleon Bonaparte leading the revolutionary government in France. For the next several years, the British suffered military defeats at sea, several attempted invasions by the French, as well as the economic inflation and disruption that often accompany war. The British formed a series of alliances to fight the French, and the Fourth Coalition, comprising Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria, succeeded in routing Napoleon and exiling him in 1814. In 1815, Napoleon escaped from exile on the island of Elba and retook the French throne. It is this event that brings the major characters of *Vanity Fair* to Brussels and leads to the famous Battle of Waterloo.

At the news of Napoleon's return, the Fourth Coalition nations quickly committed a force of 150,000 soldiers to gather in Belgium and invade France on July 1, 1815. The British general, Arthur Wellesley, the First Duke of Wellington, was the chief commander of the coalition force. Napoleon responded by planning a secretive, preemptive strike against the assembling troops. He reached the Belgian border on June 14, with nearly 125,000 troops, and crossed it on June 15.

With the advantage of surprise, Napoleon succeeded in splitting the two sections of the coalition force and thus held the strategic upper hand. Four days of fierce fighting and desperate strategizing on both sides followed, culminating at Waterloo on June 18. On that day alone, 40,000 French soldiers and 22,000 coalition soldiers were killed; Waterloo was one of the bloodiest battles of modern times. Here is Thackeray's description:

All day long, whilst the women were praying ten
miles away, the lines of the dauntless English infantry
were receiving and repelling the furious charges of
French horsemen. Guns which were heard at Brussels
were ploughing up their ranks, and comrades
falling, and the resolute survivors closing in. Towards
evening, the attack slackened in its fury. They...
were preparing for a final onset. It came at last: the
columns of the Imperial Guard marched up the hill
of Saint Jean. ... It seemed almost to crest the eminence,
when it began to wave and falter. Then it
stopped, still facing the shot. Then at last the English
troops rushed from the post from which no enemy
had been able to dislodge them, and the Guard
turned and fled.No more firing was heard at Brussels□the pursuit
rolled miles away. The 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.

In the end, strategic errors by Napoleon and his generals and savage, fearless fighting by the coalition troops led to Napoleon's utter and final defeat. He was forced to give up the French throne a second time and was exiled to Saint Helena. King Louis XVIII was restored to the throne.

Vanity Fair is not the only work of literature to feature the Battle of Waterloo. British poet Lord Byron gives it an important place in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* as does Thomas Hardy in *The Dynasts.* Among French writers, Victor Hugo includes the battle in *Les Misérables.*

Victorian England

The Victorian Age began in 1837 when eighteen- year-old Queen Victoria ascended to the British throne, and ended with her death in 1901. Victoria and her husband, Albert, set the tone of English life and culture for most of a century. It was a time of social and moral conservatism; the family values of the time were similar to those touted in late twentieth-century America. Pragmatism was valued above romance, duty above pleasure.

The early Victorian period was a time of social reforms. Laws were passed governing working conditions of women and children (they could not work in underground mines, for example), and attempts were made to improve conditions in prisons and insane asylums. Efforts to broaden access to education (England had no public schools at the time) stalled because of controversy over the Church of England's role in expanded education. Writers such as Thackeray and Charles Dickens took up the cause of reform, using their writing to point out the need for prison reforms and educational programs and to expose the evils of industrialization and the class system.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, England was experiencing unprecedented political, industrial, and economic power, fueled by the Industrial Revolution and by the wealth from the colonies. All forms of transportation boomed; railroad ridership increased sevenfold, and the ship- building industry grew. Living standards of the working class and middle class were buoyed, and trade unions were formed to promote the interests of skilled workers.

In the late 1850s, after unrest in India, the British government abolished the East India Company and took over direct rule of the subcontinent. Queen Victoria was declared Empress of India in 1876, and the empire continued to expand, especially in Asia and Africa.

Critical Overview

Vanity Fair was published in several installments beginning on January 1, 1847, and reviews soon began appearing in London's magazines. Most writers who reviewed the early segments were not enthusiastic, nor was the public. The primary complaints of both critics and readers were that the novel was progressing slowly and without much action and that all the characters were unlikable.

Reception turned positive, however, after the first four installments. Once the whole of *Vanity Fair* had been published, it sold well (one 1848 reviewer wrote, "Everybody, it is to be supposed, has read the volume by this time.") and earned many glowing reviews. George Henry Lewes wrote in *The Athenaeum,*

> For some years Mr. Thackeray has been a marked man in letters□but known rather as an amusing sketcher than as a serious artist. Light playful contributions to periodical literature and two amusing books of travel were insufficient to make a reputation; but a reputation he must now be held to have established by his *Vanity Fair.* It is his greatest effort and his greatest success.In *Quarterly Review,* Elizabeth Rigby wrote,We were perfectly aware that Mr. Thackeray had of old assumed the jester's habit, in order the more unrestrainedly to indulge the privilege of speaking the truth... but still we were little prepared for the keen observation, the deep wisdom, and the consummate art which he has interwoven in the slight texture and whimsical pattern of *Vanity Fair.*

Charlotte Brontë was such an admirer of *Vanity Fair* that, on its merits, she dedicated the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to Thackeray, writing in her preface:

> I think I see in him an intellect profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognized... I think no commentator on his writings has yet found the comparison that suits him, the terms which rightly characterise his talent.

Even an anonymous reviewer for *The London Review,* who felt that the meanness of the characters defeated the novel, acknowledged, "*Vanity Fair* is a remarkable book, brilliant, entertaining," before adding, "but if we plunge beneath the sparkling surface, it is a dreary book. It gives the real, and utterly omits the ideal."

John Forster wrote prophetically in *The Examiner,*

> *Vanity Fair* must be admitted to be one of the most original works of real genius that has of late been given to the world. ... The very novelty of tone in the book impeded its first success; but it will be daily more justly appreciated; and will take a lasting place in our literature.

In his 1909 book *Studies in Several Literatures,* Harry Thurston Peck assessed the novel after sixty years. "*Vanity Fair* is one of the greatest books in English literature," he wrote, "but it belongs to purely English literature, and not to the great masterpieces which the whole world owns and to which it gives unforced admiration."

History has, to an extent, proven Forster and Peck correct. *Vanity Fair* is still read and admired but not as widely as the best work of Thackeray's contemporary Dickens. It is, however, Thackeray's most lasting work, the one that modern readers most enjoy. Robert A. Colby, in his introduction to a 1989 edition of *Vanity Fair,* wrote,

> We, it seems, are attracted to the very qualities that disturbed Thackeray's contemporaries□impersonality, cynicism, tough-mindedness. Indeed, its coruscating wit, ingenuity, and vivacious style continue to make *Vanity Fair* the most immediately attractive of Thackeray's novels to the general reader.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

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Thackeray made clear, both in his role as the narrator of *Vanity Fair* and in his private correspondence about the book, that he meant it to be not just entertaining but instructive. Like all satire, *Vanity Fair* has a mission and a moral. The first published installment had, on its cover, an illustration of a congregation listening to a preacher; both speaker and listeners were shown with donkey ears. Inside the book, Thackeray explains the illustration thus: "that Becky is allowed to live, and to live well, is perfectly consistent with Thackeray's view of life and morality. ... Losing is vanity, and winning is vanity."

My kind reader will please to remember that these
histories... have "Vanity Fair" for a title and that
Vanity Fair is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full
of all sorts of humbugs and falseness and pretensions.
And while the moralist who is holding forth on the
cover (an accurate portrait of your humble servant)
professes to wear neither gown nor bands, but only
the very same long-eared livery in which his congregation
is arrayed: yet, look you, one is bound to
speak the truth as far as one knows it.

Thackeray, then, portrays himself as a preacher. Like his audience and all human beings, he is imperfect, but he has truths to tell that others can benefit by hearing. There is a moral to the story.

The natural place to look for any story's moral is at its end: How do things turn out; and, espe- cially, how are the various characters rewarded and punished for their deeds? This essay looks at the fates of *Vanity Fair*'s major characters for evidence as to what truths, what morals Thackeray wanted readers to take from his tale.

The first to meet his fate is George, who is shot at the Battle of Waterloo. Structurally, George's death gives Thackeray an emphatic ending to the first part of his story. From a moral standpoint, the lesson of George's short life and violent death is surely about hubris, an ancient Greek word meaning "arrogance," or "excessive pride." Hubris was the downfall of many a classical hero. And while George is certainly no hero, he is thoroughly selfcentered and arrogant. He prides himself on his good looks and fancies himself the paragon of manhood. He receives Amelia's adoration not as a precious gift but as if she would be insane to feel otherwise. George is incapable of considering anyone but George, so it is easy to imagine that, as the French bullet sped toward his heart, George was distracted by thoughts of how he looked standing over the battlefield

or of how he would speak in light-hearted tones about his bravery in years to come. Arrogance is cut down. George dies young, mourned only by the empty-headed Amelia.

Many years and many episodes pass before Rawdon Crawley meets his fate. It is yellow fever that kills him, but Becky Sharp who destroys him. Thackeray makes clear through allusions to the story of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon what readers are to make of Rawdon's life and death. In Greek mythology, Clytemnestra kills her husband, Agamemnon, when her lover lacks the courage to carry out the deed.

Like nearly every man in the novel, Rawdon is charmed by Becky and entirely smitten with her. He marries her without noticing that she cares not for him, but for his aristocratic pedigree. He then spends years being manipulated, humiliated, impoverished, and ignored by his wife. At last, he discovers discovers both Becky's relationship with the degenerate, wealthy Lord Steyne (which he must have at least suspected before, and can't ignore any longer after walking in on them) and the hoard of money she has kept hidden from him. Rawdon stands up for himself, leaving Becky and planning to duel with Lord Steyne. Yet, there is no victory for him. Becky and Steyne ship his beloved son off to boarding school, and Rawdon is left alone, unloved, and destitute. He exiles himself to a remote island where he has been offered a government post arranged by Steyne. It is on this island that Rawdon dies. The moral is clear: A man who allows himself to be captivated by a bad woman has a miserable life and a pitiful end.

Amelia and Dobbin's fates are settled next□ by marriage rather than by death. Not deeply immoral like the others, they are nonetheless morally stunted. Sweet but thick Amelia has spent her life mourning George, whom she continues to see as worthy in spite of bountiful evidence to the contrary. Noble but plodding Dobbin has spent his life idolizing Amelia in spite of her steadfast lack of concern for him. Even when Dobbin finally declares his devotion, Amelia prefers her warped memories of George to Dobbin's genuine, living affection.

Oddly, Thackeray uses Becky to bring these two characters together. Only when Becky reveals to Amelia that George asked her to run away with him just before he died does Amelia finally give up her fantasies about George and marry Dobbin. And so, Amelia and Dobbin, the two characters who come closest to being "good," get their rewards. Amelia gets, finally, a man who is worthy of her love. Dobbin gets what he has wanted all along.

But in *Vanity Fair*, no reward is untainted and no victory is complete or final. By the time Dobbin has Amelia, he has finally realized that she is not worthy of the kind of love he has showered her with. She is not a goddess; she is merely a pleasant, conventional, shallow woman who happens to be a very poor judge of character. Thackeray's description of Dobbin's victory ends with a sting:

The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been
trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last.
There it is with its head on his shoulder, billing and

cooing close up to his heart, with soft outstretched
fluttering wings. ... Grow green again, tender little
parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling!

The shadow over Dobbin's victory is that having finally gotten what he wanted, he realizes that it is not what he thought it was. The shadow over Amelia's, of course, is that she knows that Dobbin knows. And yet, their coming together is a real reward; they do love each other, even if they are two imperfect human beings who love imperfectly. They have a daughter and are happy.

The moral of Amelia's story might be that providence will find a way to deliver wisdom and salvation to the good-hearted but dumb, even if that way is unexpected. The moral of Dobbin's story may be that perseverance wins the day; or that the meek shall inherit, if not the whole Earth, then a peaceful corner of it in which to retire. It is also worth noting that Dobbin is the one man who is never conned or charmed by Becky and the only one who comes to a happy end.

Joseph's story is a recapitulation of Rawdon's. Having escaped Becky's web in youth with George's unwitting help, he has the bad fortune to encounter her again years later. This time, Joseph ignores Dobbin's warning about the predatory Becky and soon loses his money and his life. Thackeray□the author, the narrator, the preacher□doesn't want this moral missed: A man who falls for a bad woman can come to no good.

And that leaves Becky. She has behaved the worst. How will she end?

She ends living in Europe, financially comfortable and respected. Her son owns the estate at which she arrived as a girl to be a lowly governess. This is not exactly hellfire and brimstone; one wonders what the preacher was thinking. Why does he let Becky off so easy?

One of his reasons is oddly modern: He blames her parents for her badness. "She was of a wild, roving nature, inherited from her father and mother, who were both Bohemians," Thackeray writes.

But that is a minor point. That Becky is allowed to live and to live well is perfectly consistent with Thackeray's view of life and morality. Death is not necessarily a punishment, and life is not necessarily a reward, because it is all vanity□ all empty. Losing is vanity, and winning is vanity. At the very end of the book, Thackeray asks, "Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?"

There's the rub. Even those who get what they want in Vanity Fair are not satisfied and therefore cannot be said to have conquered anything. At the end of *Vanity Fair,* Becky is in comfortable circumstances. That does not mean that she will be comfortable, satisfied, fulfilled, or happy. Becky famously says that if she had five hundred pounds a year, she could be an honest woman. Most readers have doubted her, as did Thackeray himself in a private letter. When the author leaves Becky, she is well provided for, but she is still depraved Becky, and she still lives in depraved Vanity Fair. Given what is

known about them both, readers who want a just outcome needn't worry that Becky has been too richly rewarded. Thackeray assures:

> If quacks prosper as often as they go to the wall□if zanies succeed and knaves arrive at fortune, and, vice versa, sharing ill luck and prosperity for all the world like the ablest and most honest among us□I say, brother, the gifts and pleasures of Vanity Fair cannot be held of any great account.

Source: Candyce Norvell, Critical Essay on *Vanity Fair,* in *Novels for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Peck explores "the relentless nature of Thackeray's onslaught on the middle class" in Vanity Fair.

This revolting reflex of society is literally true enough. But it does not shew us the whole truth. Are there not women, even in *Vanity Fair,* capable of nobler things than are here set down for them? (Robert Bell. *Fraser's Magazine,* 1848)

Everywhere we turn in the early reviews of *Vanity Fair* we encounter this kind of criticism; the reviewers are enthusiastic but appreciation of the brilliance of Thackeray's performance is always qualified by reservations about his view of human nature. Modern critics have, of course, moved beyond the moral quibbling evident in the early reviews. Essentially, criticism of the novel now follows one of three courses: there is appreciation of the complexity of its moral and social vision, or praise for Thackeray's handling of the narrative voice, or, and perhaps most persuasively, a sense of the disturbing darkness of his vision.

Barbara Hardy, identifying Thackeray as a radical social critic, takes the first approach, seeing the novelist as a wise and concerned social commentator. All of Gordon Ray's work on Thackeray, including his biography, was informed by just such a sense of the author's purpose and achievement. The second approach, focusing on the narrative voice, is more concerned with Thackeray's ability to tease and disturb the reader by means of a voice that is so full of twists and turns that it allows us no comfort or security. A. E. Dyson's essay, 'An Irony Against Heroes', sets the standard here, but the same principle underlies structuralist and deconstructive readings of Thackeray; the most sophisticated example is J. Hillis Miller's brilliant essay on *Henry Esmond.* It is a way of looking at Thackeray in which irony is always a central consideration. The third approach to *Vanity Fair,* seen at its best in an essay by Robert E. Lougy, focuses on the darkness of the novel, the frequent references to death, the sense that we live precarious existences in a world where death is ever-present. This idea also makes itself felt in feminist and psychoanalytic readings: for example, we might consider how Amelia, visiting her mother, looks at 'the little white bed, which had been hers a few days before' and contrasts it with 'the great funereal damask pavilion in the vast and dingy bedroom, which was awaiting her at the grand hotel in Cavendish Square'. The approach of Lougy, and those working along similar lines, differs from the social approach of critics such as Barbara Hardy in that the emphasis is on disturbing currents beneath society rather than on a critique of manners and morals in society.

What links all three approaches, however, is that, directly or indirectly, they declare themselves as moving beyond the moralistic fault-finding that features in the early reviews. It is at this point one hesitates: were the early readers wrong? Were their moral reservations really so simplistic? Or could it be that, whatever deeper patterns exist in *Vanity Fair,* its *épater les bourgeois* characteristics might be what really matter?

Hindsight has benefits, but it could be that we have lost a sense of what was central to *Vanity Fair*'s first readers, a sense of why the novel is so disturbing. Moreover, in distancing ourselves from this sense of shock, we might also have lost an awareness of the social and political relevance of the novel. *Vanity Fair* is obviously a multi-layered work, but I want to suggest that discussions of, say, Thackeray's irony surrender a sense of the impact the novel made in its time, an impact that was dominated by the issue of class.

There is no novel that thrusts us more quickly into a whole set of assumptions about class than *Vanity Fair.* By the end of the first scene we understand most of the niceties and pretensions of social gradation. The world of the school is a middle- class world, where characters are rebuked if their speech is not 'genteel' enough, where a girl must cultivate those 'accomplishments which become her birth and station', where '*industry* and *obedience*' are prized virtues, but where money is, in the end, everything. Below, we see a world of servants, of tradesmen, and even the mixed-race Miss Swartz, who is only admitted to the school because she pays double. Above is another world, glimpsed through the 'high and mighty Miss Saltire (Lord Dexter's granddaughter)'. It is sometimes assumed that *Vanity Fair* is entirely about middleclass life. It is not: there are clear divisions between the aristocracy, the gentry, the middle class and all those who fall below. But the world of the aristocracy, even of the gentry, is outside and beyond this school where even Miss Saltire is 'rather shabby'; generally, there is something shabby about the school's whole environment of middle-class respectability.

To say that class is central in *Vanity Fair* is to say nothing new. What is less commonly noted, though, is fine relentless nature of Thackeray's onslaught on the middle class. Some critics, indeed, suggest just the opposite; Robert Colby, for example, argues that the narrator positions himself 'as a solid member of the middle class'. What I wish to suggest, however, is that Thackeray, who is indulgent to the aristocracy and gentry, regards the middle class as an almost alien race. Everyone is now familiar with the idea of an 'other' in Victorian thought, whether it be woman, the Irish, people of colour, or the working class, but, in the case of Thackeray, even the middle class is perceived as a strange and threatening 'other'. We begin to see this with the middle-class merchant, Osborne. Described as a 'savage determined man', with a face that is usually 'livid with rage', there seems something animal-like about him, and indeed his fortune has been made importing animal skins from Russia. He is seen in an angry scene with his son:

> Whenever the lad assumed his haughty manner, it always
> created either great awe or great irritation in the
> parent. Old Osborne stood in secret terror of his son
> as a better gentleman than himself...

In confrontation, the father is reduced to spluttering incoherence; everything falls apart as he feels he is facing a gentleman. It is a penetrating representation of the drive, but also the limitations, of a middle-class businessman, yet, at the same time, Thackeray's patronising view of someone whom he considers less than civilised.

Initially something rather different seems to be conveyed in the presentation of Mr. Sedley, who, although a businessman, is 'kind to everybody with whom he dealt', but the novel offers some alarming hints about his cruelty. He is described as 'a coarse man, from the Stock Exchange, where they love all sorts of practical jokes', who has bred his daughter to marry George Osborne, and who has 'a feeling very much akin to contempt for his son. He said he was vain, selfish, lazy and effeminate'. Jos might well be all these things, but the strain in the relationship comes at precisely those points where the child fails to conform to the father's expectations, where the right kind of manly energy (or, in the case of daughter, the right degree of submissiveness) is not exhibited. Osborne and Sedley represent two faces of tyranny, the tyranny of the strong and the tyranny of the weak, for Sedley, especially when ruined, dominates his family just as much as Osborne. Like all middle-class men, they want their sons to be gentlemen, but are then torn between deference and contempt.

Contempt is, in fact, a central notion in the novel. When the bankrupt Sedley presents a servant with a half-guinea, the man pockets it 'with a mixture of wonder and contempt'. When, rather more noisily, George Osborne apes the manner of a man of standing, demanding an immediate interview with his father's solicitor,

> He did not see the sneer of contempt which passed all round the room, from the first clerk to the articled gents... as he sat there lapping his boot with his cane, and thinking what a parcel of miserable poor devils these were.

Such contempt, of one class for another, pervades the novel, including the fact that Thackeray looks down on the middle class with almost unrelieved disdain; for Thackeray, middle-class existence, entirely based around money, lacks culture, character, any kind of substance. Osborne, for example, sings the praises of life

> at our humble mansion in Russell Square. My daughters are plain, disinterested girls, but their hearts are in the right place... I'm a plain, simple, humble British merchant□an honest one, as my respected friends Hulker and Bullock will vouch...

It is a vain speech, but the only merit claimed is respectability. It would seem that Thackeray can only perceive middle-class life in these terms; his characteristic note is arrogant disdain, a belief that those below him on the social scale have no individuality, no intellectual life, no complexity.

But aren't all Thackeray's judgements just as jaundiced? Isn't he equally quick to condemn the aristocracy and the gentry, indeed everybody at every level of society? The fact is that he isn't, a point which starts to become evident if we consider something basic about our response to *Vanity Fair,* our impression of how Thackeray fills up the pages. Becky, obviously, makes the greatest impact. She wastes very little time on the middle class. She is grateful for a refuge in Amelia's house, having already decided that

she aspires higher than the Reverend Mr. Crisp. Her first target is Jos Sedley, who, as an employee of the East India Company, has taken a sideways step out from, and yet up in, British society. She then raises her sights to the gentry, in the person of Rawdon Crawley (although she misses out on the landed gentry, represented by Rawdon's father, Sir Pitt). Finally, with Lord Steyne, she aspires to the aristocracy. What we are most likely to remember from the novel are Becky's forays into the higher levels of society, but this can distort a true picture of what happens page by page; in the first third of the novel, before the characters move to Brussels, there is just one sequence where Becky works for Sir Pitt and one sequence in the home of Miss Crawley. Most of the time, episodes are set in the middle-class homes of the Sedleys and the Osbornes. The same is true of the last third of the novel.

But what we remember are the eccentrics, rather than the dull round of middle-class life. Sir Pitt makes an impression because he is larger than life; we are less likely to take notice of his wife, Rose. An ironmonger's daughter, with 'no sort of character, nor talents, nor opinions, nor occupations, nor amusements', Rose is invisible in the same kind of way that Mrs. Sedley is invisible. She has entered into a business transaction, selling her heart 'to become Sir Pitt Crawley's wife. Mothers and daughters are making the same bargain every day in Vanity Fair'. The hint of sympathy here needs to be set against the underlying assumption that the middle-class wife has no character, no individuality. By contrast, the gentry□the entire Crawley family□may be eccentrics, but another way of putting it is that they are conceived of as individuals with character traits that are all their own. Consequently, Sir Pitt might be disreputable but eschews middle-class respectability. Similarly, the women of the family, Miss Crawley and Mrs. Bute Crawley, have their ridiculous side but also exhibit strength and resourcefulness that is absent in the middle-class women.

It is this derision of middle-class characters that, more than anything else, created disquiet in the early reviews. The point could be demonstrated across the board, but is most clearly seen in the response of John Forster. His review is sophisticated and enthusiastic: he relishes Thackeray's 'witty malice' and his 'accomplished and subtle' mind, and delights in Becky and Steyne, seeing that it is with 'characters where great natural talents and energy are combined with unredeemed depravity that the author puts forth his full powers'. He then, however, voices his reservation:

> Nor is it so much with respect to these exceptional characters that we feel inclined to complain of the taunting, cynical, sarcastic tone that too much pervades the work, as with respect to a preponderance of unredeemed selfishness in the more common-place as well as the leading characters, such as the Bullocks, Mrs. Clapp, the Miss Dobbinses even, and Amelia's mother. We can relish the shrewd egoism of Miss Crawley; can admire, while we tremble at, the terrible intentness of Mrs. Bute Crawley... but we feel that the atmosphere of the work is overloaded with these exhalations of human folly and wickedness.

The sequence of names is revealing: the Bullocks, the middle-class family of the future, are grabbed from insignificance to lead Forster's list. He then picks out other marginal middle-class characters, before altering his tone for the gentry figures. More than anything else, Forster seems to resent criticism of characters who might resemble himself. Most novelists at the time presented their audience with an ultimately flattering reflection of itself; Thackeray does not, and, consequently, irritates and unsettles his critics.

Timing is of importance here; *Vanity Fair* appeared in 1848, when a sense of being middle class was still in a process of formation. Indeed, novels were serving a vital role in creating a sense of middle- class identity and self-worth. Defining middleclassness through fiction had, of course, been going on since the eighteenth century, but *Vanity Fair* appears at a significant juncture in a process of social change. Albeit reluctantly, Thackeray acknowledges a move away from a certain social formation, and searches for a new social dispensation to succeed that based upon property, rank and status. It is a brilliant move to set the novel at the time of Waterloo, for this enables Thackeray both to comment on the developing democratic order of his own day and to show the coming into existence of this new social order. Behind the giddiness of Regency life, there is a sense of social change, of society re-drawing itself along new lines.

The point is most interestingly conveyed through the character of the young Pitt Crawley, who reorganises his life along what are, essentially, middle-class lines in order to revive the fortunes of a gentry family that has been in decline. He assumes the orderliness, the earnestness, and also the social ambition, of a middle-class man. As is so often the case in the novel, therefore, Thackeray is astute in his sense of a new order taking shape in society. But the fact that has to be returned to is that Thackeray's judgements are simultaneously suspect, because he cannot see any real depth of value in the middle-class mind. Rather than finding a new moral energy in middle-class experience, Thackeray castigates it as mediocre and selfish. Even in his picture of Dobbin, as we will see, there is an inability to avoid condescension, an inability to take the character seriously. Middle-class characters, and middle-class values, remain for Thackeray alien and vaguely threatening.

Vanity Fair therefore, to a quite extraordinary extent, insults its readers, who for the most part are likely to resemble those 'vulgar intellects' that have always dominated Amelia's life. Middle-class life is seen as dreadful. The Osborne daughters are typical: 'all their habits were pompous and orderly, and all their amusements intolerably dull and decorous'. Maria is engaged, 'but hers was a most respectable attachment'. Jos's much-repeated slight stories provide a kind of parody of the limited number of things that happen in the lives of these characters. Life is so dull that even the most trivial deviation from correctness becomes an anecdote:

"Do you remember when you wrote to him to come
on Twelfth Night, Emmy, and spelt twelfth without
the f?""That was years ago," said Amelia."It seems like yesterday, don't it John?" said Mrs.
Sedley.

The impression is of pathetically empty lives and nervous deference to correctness. The topic that is always returned to in this world is money, as in a surprisingly eloquent speech from George Osborne:

"Ours is a ready-money society. We live among bankers and city big-wigs, and be hanged to them, and every man, as he talks to you, is jingling his guineas in his pocket... Curse the whole pack of money-grubbing vulgarians!

Perhaps George's eloquence stems from the fact that the sentiments are really Thackeray's own.

Yet as much as Thackeray mocks such lives, he also offers a disquieting sense of claustrophobic containment. We have already seen the reference to Amelia's marriage-bed; the Sedleys' bed is 'a sort of tent, hung round with chintz of a rich and fantastic India pattern, and *double* with calico of a tender-rose colour; in the interior of which species of marquee was a feather-bed, on which were two pillows, on which were two round faces. . . '. The characters are surrounded by material goods, yet also enclosed and trapped by them. In a similar way, they are trapped in their homes, trapped in their families, trapped in their class. When characters, such as George Osborne, attempt to move beyond their circle they simply reveal their crassness. At the same time, there is always a sense of fragility, that middle-class wealth can disappear as quickly as it has appeared, leaving the characters in smaller homes, locked into an even narrower round.

Thackeray provides his most cutting commentary on such existences through his use of two outsiders, Jos Sedley and Mrs. O'Dowd (we could include Becky here, but Becky is a quite exceptional case whereas Jos and Mrs. O'Dowd are representative figures on the margins of British society). With Jos, a lack of social confidence, slavish devotion to material goods, excessive consumption, pomposity and deference are carried to a ridiculous extreme. But behind it all is a sense of an empty life, for 'he was as lonely here as in his jungle as Boggley Wallah'. Jos represents a gross, distorted reflection of middle-class aspirants. Mrs. O'Dowd is used in a similar way, but with the added complication there often is with Thackeray's Irish characters. Initially, with her boasting about her family and connections, we are likely to regard her as just a vulgar Irishwoman, but she really provides an ironic echo of the grovelling and social deference that is so central in the lives of Osborne and his children. In the end, Mrs. O'Dowd is actually superior to the middle-class characters, for she is grand and theatrical, energetic and resourceful, rather than mean and mediocre.

Thackeray's patrician disdain is most obvious in his presentation of middle-class wives who, although a different note is struck at the end of the novel, are seen as insignificant ciphers. There is sympathy for them, as victims of their husbands, but they are primarily seen as empty women who could not play any active role in the middle-class accumulation of wealth. Mrs. Sedley, in particular, is an invisible character, with an 'easy and uninquisitive' nature, whose thoughts cannot extend beyond the home. Thackeray's heroines, especially Becky, are always formidable women, but in the case of his middle-

class wives he imagines concubines for domestic tyrants. There is something chilling in Amelia's deference to George:

crying over George's head, and kissing it humbly, as
if he were her supreme chief and master, and as if
she were quite a guilty and unworthy person needing
every favour and grace from him.This prostration and sweet unrepining obedience
exquisitely
touched and flattered George Osborne. He
saw a slave before him in that simple yielding faithful
creature, and his soul within him thrilled secretly
somehow at the knowledge of his power.

It is an astute passage, especially in its understanding of the victim's sense of her own guilt, but the picture is only achieved by imagining the woman as a nonentity, who tolerates exploitation and abuse. That would be acceptable if all Thackeray's women were like this, but one of Thackeray's distinguishing traits as a novelist is his strong women; in the context of this novel, even leaving aside Becky, we can see the energy of the gentry wife, Mrs. Bute Crawley, who takes action, even if she misjudges her tactics, while her husband fritters away his time. Similarly, Lady Jane, Mr. Pitt Crawley's wife, who seems innocent, even naive, can show the qualities of her class in standing up to and resisting Becky, and resisting her husband: 'you must choose, sir, between her and me'.

What is always apparent, then, is Thackeray's patronising contempt for the middle class. Dobbin is mocked at school because his father is a grocer, but it is Thackeray, throughout the novel, who can never resist telling us that a character's father was a grocer; for example, Miss Grits, who marries the Reverend Binney, bringing with her five thousand pounds. It is as if he can never believe that the children of grocers might be as interesting as the children of the aristocracy or gentry. James Crawley, who ruins his chance of inheriting Miss Crawley's fortune through smoking in her house, is simply laughed at; the middle-class children are always sneered at. Thackeray's contempt invariably becomes most apparent at just those points where he attempts to be most sympathetic. For example, after the dazzle of 'How to Live Well on Nothing a Year'. Thackeray moves to 'A Family in a Small Way', where he offers compassionate reflections on the vagaries of fortune, but then the carping begins: 'Had Mrs. Sedley been a woman of energy, she would have exerted it after her husband's ruin'. She is, however, a small-minded woman, who cannot rise above 'colloquies with the greengrocer about the penn'orth of turnips which Mr. Sedley loved'. Sedley, on the same page, is seen 'pompously' presenting his grandson as the child of Captain Osborne. We are left not with a sense of life's vagaries, but with an impression of the vulgarity and shortcomings of this couple.

Thackeray in *Vanity Fair,* as is true throughout his career, is the awkward outsider in the Victorian novel. Others, for example, Dickens, at this time in *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield,* were presenting the middle-class audience with a critical yet, in the end, flattering image of itself. Thackeray does not oblige. *Vanity Fair* is obviously a

funny novel, but the source of the amusement is usually someone acting inappropriately for a person of their class. Only Becky has the panache to carry it off, to humiliate others rather than herself. The stance in the novel raises the familiar yet teasing question of Thackeray's politics. The view that is generally held is that Thackeray was a liberal, even a radical, who by the late 1850s had moved steadily to the right. But what seems nearer the truth is that, fairly consistently throughout his career, he displays a familiar form of populism, resenting all those who possess money and power. There is, throughout *Vanity Fair,* the idea of an escape to a rural arcadia, such as the muddy yet happy life Becky's child enjoys in the French countryside when he is placed out at nurse. Informing Thackeray's populism is this longing for a traditional order; it is an impractical politics, lacking constructive ideas, motivated mainly by resentment, by a readiness to condemn those who seem to represent change, who undermine his sense of a more innocent order.

What complicates the picture, however, and complicates *Vanity Fair,* is his awareness that a fundamental change is taking place. He might have felt unhappy about it, but he could not ignore the fact that the initiative, not only economically but also politically and socially, was moving towards the middle class. There is a reluctant realisation that the middle-class position offers the only hope for the future. This is prepared for by a sense that permeates the novel of aristocratic decline; in addition, there is also a late and unexpected indication of a collapse of gentry power. The future of the aristocracy is conveyed in such details as the impoverished Bareacres family, the appearance of the brass plates of businesses in Gaunt Square, and the strain of madness in the Steyne family: the 'dark mark of fate and doom was on the threshold'. The position of the gentry seems less extreme: young Pitt has, after all, restored the family's fortunes, but then, less than ten pages from the end of the novel, Pitt loses his place in Parliament as a result of the 1832 Reform Act.

It does seem that the future lies with the middle class, and appropriately, the last third of the novel concentrates on Dobbin and Amelia. It is conventional to admire Thackeray's presentation of Amelia, the way in which he has made his sentimental heroine a selfish heroine, but it can be argued that she is simply another of Thackeray's small-minded middle-class women, presented with all his characteristic contempt. He has to bring Amelia to the centre of the novel, but proves incapable of taking a middle-class heroine seriously. Exactly the same problem is evident in the portrayal of Dobbin:

We all know a hundred whose coats are very well
made, and a score who have excellent manners, and
one or two happy things who are what they call, in
the inner circles, and have shot into the very centre
and bull's eye of the fashion; but of gentlemen how
many? Let us take a little scrap of paper and each
make out his list.My friend the major I write, without any doubt in
mine. He had very long legs, a yellow face, and a
slight lisp, which at first was rather ridiculous. But
his thoughts were just, his brains were fairly good,

his life was honest and pure, and his heart warm and humble.

A patrician voice encounters one of nature's gentlemen: the tone is extraordinarily condescending. The fact is that Thackeray cannot begin to comprehend a character such as Dobbin; he can only be commended on the basis of the way in which he combines upper-class gentlemanliness with a humble sense of his place. The problem with Amelia and Dobbin is that Thackeray requires them to carry the burden of a social and moral role, but is unable to give them the substance required. They remain members of an alien species, seen from a superior perspective, and evaluated in terms of how they compare to, and at times prove better than, their social superiors.

Thackeray's overt effort to point to the future through Amelia and Dobbin is, therefore, rather bungled. Yet the novel, none the less, offers a strong sense of a move towards a new order in society. By the end of *Vanity Fair,* most readers feel they have moved from Waterloo to a post-Reform Act world. This is more than a matter of chronology; a complex case about democratisation, about a shift towards middle-class values, is articulated in the second half of the novel. This sense of a change is not conveyed through subtle characterisation but through a mass of seemingly trivial details. This is entirely appropriate: *Vanity Fair* is, from the outset, a novel crammed full of precise details about the material and social world. In the second half of the novel we are offered an abundance of fresh images that combine to convey a sense of change. It starts when the characters return from the continent: at this point a different kind of detail begins to appear. There is less about what people spend their money on, and rather more about the ordinary, yet distinctively new, characteristics of middle-class life.

To begin with an example which should clarify what I am talking about, we hear a lot in the novel about the dull and pompous round of middle- class entertaining. As early as the aborted trip to Vauxhall, for example, Mr. and Mrs. Sedley have been to dine with Alderman Balls. But we have to wait a long time before we are offered a full guestlist for a middle-class dinner. Eventually, however, we encounter

a party of dismal friends of Osborne's rank and age. Old Dr Gulp and his lady from Bloomsbury Square: old Mr Frowser the attorney, from Bedford Row, a very great man, and from his business, hand-in-glove with the 'nobs at the West End', old Colonel Livermore, of the Bombay Army, and Mrs Livermore from Upper Bedford Place: old Serjeant Toffy and Mrs Toffy; and sometimes old Sir Thomas Coffin and Lady Coffin, from Bedford Square.

Thackeray conveys the tedium of the occasion. He also reminds us that social aspiration is always a factor, for it is obviously felt to be a coup when a judge can be induced to attend. But, as much as the passage might be designed to operate at the expense of Osborne, other impressions are conveyed as well. The linking of the characters with streets in the Bloomsbury area of London acknowledges the coming into

existence of a new middle-class locality, yet also points forward to other middle-class characters, such as the Bullocks, who make the move into more fashionable areas. Osborne's guests seem to be a generation of middle-class characters who have achieved status and respectability, but who, unlike the Bullocks, stop at this point. Yet they are far from insignificant people. All belong to a professional class, a class that would grow and grow in Victorian England. They are middle class but interested in more than money; they have opted for professions that reflect duty and social obligation. Thackeray sneers at such dull people, but at the same time there is a reluctant acknowledgement of a new, solid middle class. The precariousness of Sedley's existence seems a thing of the past; these are middle-class characters who have established secure roots in the social order.

There are other details in the novel that point to the rise of a new professional middle class. At the opening of *Vanity Fair,* the army is the only profession open to young middle-class men who are intent on bettering themselves. But as peace takes over from war, there is a growing sense of a professional class; indeed, young George is taught by a man who prepares his pupils for 'the Universities, the senate, and the learned professions'. We begin to encounter characters such as Wenham, 'the wit and lawyer', who acts on behalf of Steyne. Rawdon has, in the past, fought duels, but now the professional man Wenham negotiates a settlement. It is a shift towards a society where, as in the words of the newspaper report of Rawdon's job, 'We need not only men of acknowledged bravery, but men of administrative talents to superintend the affairs of our colonies'. We might begin to feel that Becky has been overtaken by events, that her kind of spectacular rise is no longer possible in a society where success is most likely for the diligent.

Middle-class confidence, too, is increasing. Even Jos develops 'a more candid and courageous self-assertion of his worth'. This is not entirely surprising, for he is presented at court; the narrator makes a disparaging comment, that Jos had 'worked himself up to believe that he was implicated in the maintenance of the public welfare', yet there is a sense in which this is true, for Jos, as a fairly senior colonial civil servant, is 'implicated'. The developing role of the civil service and the increasing importance of the empire in Victorian England was complemented by a growth in financial services. Banks could still collapse, indeed there was a banking crisis in 1847 and another ten years later, but in the latter stages of *Vanity Fair* we seem to have moved beyond the gambling of the Waterloo era, whether at the card table or on the stock exchange, towards secure banks, such as Hulker, Bullock and Co. and Stumpy and Rowdy's, with substantial reserves. It is middle-class bankers, such as Fred Bullock, who now seem in the vanguard of society. But financial services extend beyond banks; in the giddy world of *Vanity Fair,* it represents quite a shift towards sobriety when the narrator moves to talking about the fact that no Insurance Office will take on Rawdon Crawley as a client, because of the climate on Coventry Island. Everywhere the impression is of a more controlled society. The idea is even conveyed in a description of Pitt's study:

> with the orderly Blue Books and letters, the neatly docketed bills and symmetrical pamphlets; the locked account-books, desks and dispatch boxes, the Bible,

the *Quarterly Review,* and the *Court Guide,* which all stood as if on parade awaiting inspection of their chief.

The military imagery that is so common in the novel is called upon again, but is now at the service of a middle-class vision of order.

Nowhere is this sense of a new social formation better conveyed than in the different light in which middle-class women are seen in the latter stages of the novel. Thackeray's contempt never disappears, indeed it becomes more barbed as he is forced to concede that Maria Bullock and her circle are no longer the wilting middle-class women that have appeared in the novel up to this point:

Emmy found herself in the centre of a very genteel circle indeed; the members of which could not conceive that anybody belonging to it was not very lucky. There was scarce one of the ladies that hadn't a relation a peer, though the husband might be a drysalter in the City. Some of the ladies were very blue and well informed; reading Mrs Somerville, and frequenting the Royal Institution; others were severe and Evangelical, and held by Exeter Hall.

The tone is sarcastic, rather pathetically so, but behind the sarcasm we can see three remarkable points: these are self-confident middle-class women, taking a pride in their own rank and status; part of this pride can be attributed to their success in moving towards the centre of society, making the leap from trade to aristocratic connections; yet at the same time these are intelligent women, with a range of intellectual interests. These are women with minds and a justified sense of their own importance. No wonder Thackeray's tone is so unbalanced; he does everything he can to mount a case against Maria Bullock, dismissing her 'twopenny gentility' and mocking her 'scheming and managing' to attract accounts to her husband's bank, but she is likely to strike us as an active woman playing a role in the family business. The middle class remain people that Thackeray looks down on, but now that they are asserting themselves he sinks below contempt and is reduced to sniping abuse.

Yet it is this unbalanced animosity that gives the novel so much of its strength, for Thackeray's perverse and hostile stand represents a unique perspective on the re-drawing of the lines in society. He sneers, and, as the novel goes on, sneers more and more, but at the same time reluctantly concedes the presence and importance of the middle class. There is, however, one final twist: he might resist the impulse, but by the end of the novel Thackeray himself has begun to acquire something of a middle- class outlook. We see it in his revised attitude to Becky. Dobbin states the case against Becky, trying to persuade Amelia that she is dangerous. He then makes the same case to Jos: 'Be a man, Jos: break off this disreputable connection. Come home to your family'. Manliness, distancing oneself from anybody disreputable, and the family, are Dobbin's key points. Jos protests that Becky is innocent, and, indeed, it would be hard

to say what she has done wrong, but she stands as a vivid illustration of transgression, the kind of social deviant that was required if the middle class was to be convinced of the soundness of its moral codes. What is more curious is that Thackeray now seems to share this view of Becky. The point is underlined in his final selection of a detail to illustrate her villainy: she is involved in an insurance fraud, making a claim on Jos's life. It is a strange reversal of Thackeray's earlier celebration of Becky's vitality when he starts judging her from the perspective of an insurance company.

Thackeray makes one final protest against middle-class values: his late hint that Dobbin finds his marriage a disappointment is a gesture against the period's increasing reverence for the family. But it seems only a token gesture against the drift in the novel towards the family, towards private life. Yet, perhaps this is not entirely the case. Thackeray had to finish his novel. He also had to cater for, and to some extent satisfy, his audience. The steps towards a middle-class compromise might be simply steps he could not avoid in concluding *Vanity Fair.* His venom towards Maria Bullock seems closer to his true self. And the subsequent novels also suggest that he could never come to terms with the middle-class world, that he never had any time for, or understanding of, middle-class people. They remain an inferior breed, admirable in so far as they emulate the manners of their social superiors, but always condemned for attempting to do so.

Source: John Peck, "Middle-Class Life in *Vanity Fair,*" in *English: The Journal of the English Association,* Vol. 43, No. 175, Spring 1994, pp. 1-16.

Adaptations

Unabridged audio versions of *Vanity Fair* have been published by Audiobook Contractors (1987), Books on Tape, Inc. (1989), and Blackstone Audio Books (1999, in two parts, with Frederick Davidson as the reader). Abridged versions have been published by Highbridge Co. (1997, with Timothy West as the reader), Naxos Audio Books (1997, with Jane Lapotaire as the reader), and HarperCollins (1999, with Miriam Margolyes as the reader).

Films were made of *Vanity Fair* in 1911, 1915, 1922, 1923, 1932. The 1932 movie was directed by Chester M. Franklin, written by F. Hugh Herbert, and starred Myrna Loy as Becky Sharp. A new film is in production with Janette Day as the producer and scriptwriters Matthew Faulk and Mark Street.

Vanity Fair was made into a television miniseries in 1971, 1987, and 1998. The 1971 version, directed by David Giles III and written by Rex Tucker, is available on videotape. The 1987 version was directed by Diarmuid Lawrence and Michael Owen Morris and written by Alexander Baron. The 1998 version was directed by Marc Munden and written by Andrew Davies, and starred Natasha Little as Becky Sharp. It also is available on videotape.

Topics for Further Study

Do some research on Thackeray's life. Write an essay exploring some ways in which the author's life experiences are reflected in the characters and the story of *Vanity Fair.*

Compare and contrast Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley. Consider each woman's background, personality, values, strengths and weaknesses, and fate. What, if any, similarities do they share? What elements do you find that point to why they each turned out as they did?

Imagine that you are Miss Matilda Crawley. Write your last will and testament, telling to whom you are leaving your fortune and why.

Research the Battle of Waterloo. Give some possible reasons for Thackeray's having included it as a setting in the novel. Why is this battle a fitting background for these characters and their story?

How is the society in which you live similar to the one depicted in *Vanity Fair,* and how is it different? Present your answer in any form you choose, such as an essay, short story, or poem.

Compare and Contrast

Early to Mid-Nineteenth Century: People are routinely sent to prison when they are unable to pay their debts. Debtors' prisons are crowded, even during the relatively prosperous Victorian Age, and conditions are deplorable. Those who do not have family members or other benefactors to pay their debts sometimes spend years in prison. Charles Dickens and other authors write movingly of the plight of debtors, and reformers seek to abolish the prisons.

Today: Debtors' prisons have been replaced by bankruptcy laws, which allow debtors to have most debts forgiven and to make a fresh financial start. Even during the economic boom of the 1990s, millions of individuals and small businesses declare bankruptcy.

Early to Mid-Nineteenth Century: Although the former American colonies have won their independence, the British Empire still spans the globe. India, explored and exploited by the British East India Company, is now completely under British rule and is the "jewel in the crown." Britain also has colonies in Africa, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, South America, Canada, and the Caribbean.

Today: What was once the British Empire is now the British Commonwealth, a collection of former colonies, most of which are independent nations, with formal ties to Britain. Among the Commonwealth nations are India, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

What Do I Read Next?

W. M. Thackeray Library, edited by Richard Pearson and published in 1996, presents an array of Thackeray's writing, including short fiction and nonfiction, plus a full-length biography by Lewis Melville.

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë, was published in 1847, the same year in which the first installments of *Vanity Fair* appeared. Brontë's novel has some similarities to Thackeray's in that the main character is an orphaned English governess who becomes romantically involved with her employer.

Wuthering Heights, by Emily Brontë, also was published in 1847. Like *Vanity Fair,* it is considered one of the classics of Victorian literature. The novel is a story of romance and revenge.

Little Dorrit, by Charles Dickens, was first published serially in 1857. Another Victorian classic, Dickens's book tells the story of Amy Dorrit, born in the debtors' prison where her father lives. Major themes are social class, financial reversals, and romance.

Far from the Madding Crowd, by Thomas Hardy, was published serially in 1874 and also is ranked as a Victorian classic. It is the story of a female farmer and her three suitors. Virginia Woolf commented that this book "must hold its place among the great English novels." It has the distinction of being Hardy's only novel to offer readers a happy ending.

Red, Red Rose, by Marjorie Farrell, was published in 1999. It tells the story of Val Aston, the illegitimate son of an English earl who becomes an officer in the English army during the Napoleonic wars. Aston is noble in character if not by birth, yet his social standing is an obstacle to his marrying the woman he loves.

Further Study

Mitchell, Sally, *Daily Life in Victorian England,* Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996.

This comprehensive look at both city and country life in Victorian England covers social classes, morals, economics and finance, laws, and more. It includes illustrations and excerpts from primary source documents.

Pascoe, David, ed., *Selected Journalism 1850-1870,* Penguin USA, 1998.

This generous collection of the journalistic writings of Charles Dickens offers minute and gritty details of life in London in the mid-nineteenth century.

Peters, Catherine, *Thackeray: A Writer's Life,* Sutton Publishing, 2000.

This recent biography examines Thackeray's life and how his writing was influenced by his experiences and the world around him.

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *Thackerayana,* Haskell House, 1970.

This is an engaging, self-illustrated collection of anecdotes and observations, many of them humorous, about everything from Thackeray's childhood to his favorite literary characters.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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