

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

W.M. Thackeray
Vanity Fair

Read by **Jane Lapotaire**



NA512012D

1	Farewell to Chiswick Mall	8:10
2	Rebecca Sharp	7:25
3	The Collector of Boggley Wollah	7:24
4	Four Young Persons	5:29
5	A Visit to Vauxhall	5:42
6	The Effect of Rack Punch	4:01
7	Sir Pitt Crawley	5:55
8	Alone in the World	4:57
9	Relatives at the Rectory	4:47
10	News from Humdrum Hall	5:48
11	'A man of honour'	7:56
12	Miss Crawley's New Nurse	5:28
13	A Presentable Person	6:07
14	'Married; you're joking!'	9:32
15	The Great Crash	8:35
16	The Black-Browed Tyrant	6:42
17	Under the Hammer	1:48
18	Married and Happy	5:23
19	Dobbin's Secret	5:55
20	Miss Crawley's Joke	5:48

21	Peggy O'Dowd	3:56
22	Ostend	3:59
23	A Visit to the Opera	4:57
24	'A snake among the flowers'	10:18
25	Joseph in Danger	4:03
26	'Almost mad with grief'	2:60
27	'Pas de chevaux, sacrébleu!'	5:35
28	'Rumours went from mouth to mouth'	5:42
29	Two Births and a Death	3:36
30	Dobbin Delivers a Letter	6:28
31	Nothing a Year	5:26
32	Little Rawdon	4:28
33	News from India	4:36
34	A Funeral at Queen's Crawley	13:42
35	Glorvina	9:43
36	A Position in Society	4:10
37	'The finest boy in England'	5:47
39	In Arrears	5:38
39	Lord Steyne's Generosity	10:06
40	Starved Out	5:51

41	In the Hands of the Bailiffs	16:57
42	'I am innocent!'	6:33
43	Brothers	5:02
44	'We'll put a bullet in him!'	4:58
45	'Everything is against me!'	7:31
46	An Announcement in the Press	9:44
47	A Miniature	5:09
48	Dobbin on the Mend	3:29
49	England Again	3:04
50	Reunion	11:00
51	'Jos's carriage arrived one day'	5:52
52	Good Fortune Smiles on Amelia	4:19
53	'An honest feller'	7:21
54	A Summer Tour	2:27
55	The Lady in the Mask	7:18
56	'A vagabond upon this earth'	12:48
57	Old Tricks	7:13
58	Emmy Does Her Duty	8:55
59	'Un biglietto, eccolo qua!'	11:30
60	'It was time you sent for me'	11:46

Total time: 6:36:31

W.M. Thackeray

Vanity Fair

In its clear-eyed detachment, *Vanity Fair* seems to belong more to Henry Fielding's eighteenth century, than to the era of Dickens. Yet William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63) had more in common with his great contemporary than the differences in their work might suggest. Born within a year of each other – Thackeray in Calcutta, Dickens in Portsmouth – they both had cause to feel rejected by their mothers. Thackeray's father – a rich 'collector' – died before he was six: the widow promptly sent her boy to England to be educated, and soon remarried. Dickens's mother saw no injustice in sending her talented boy to work in a factory when her husband was jailed for bankruptcy.

After Charterhouse and Trinity College, Cambridge, Thackeray studied art in Paris, where he gambled away his inheritance. He then toyed with law, but was driven to journalism to support his family. Under a series of pseudonyms he wrote verse, burlesques and parodies for a variety of periodicals.

He had married at 25, but after four

years his adored wife became incurably insane, leaving him with three little daughters, and herself to maintain in a mental home. After his unhappy married life Dickens separated from the wife he had found dull company. Both he and Thackeray had mistresses, both lectured in America, and both died suddenly, leaving unfinished novels.

But here the similarities end: whereas Dickens was a true Victorian, Thackeray felt he had been born too late. All his novels, apart from *Vanity Fair*, are set in his beloved eighteenth century, and are underpinned by uncannily accurate historical realism.

Vanity Fair – the first novel he published under his own name – appeared in monthly installments in 1847-8. It is set in the Regency period, during and after the battle of Waterloo. As a child, when his ship called at St Helena en route for England, Thackeray had seen Napoleon walking in the gardens of Longwood: this memory surfaces in the novel.

Thackeray claimed he simply woke up one day with the title *Vanity Fair* in his head.

In the preface – The Curtain Rises – he invites his audience to ‘step in for half an hour and look at the performances’. He ends his novel with the words ‘Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out’. He may have been detached from mankind but never his marionettes. There is little sentimentality in his approach; any inconsistencies and awkward time shifts must be partly due to his having written the novel in serial form.

If the central character in Thackeray’s *Barry Lyndon* is a Fieldingesque anti-hero, Becky Sharp is no less an anti-heroine. Full of guile and treachery, outwitting her opponents as she climbs the social ladder, she clearly fascinated her creator as much as she delights and amuses the reader. This Circe breaks necks in her ruthless ascent, but she captivates in the process.

Thackeray’s *Book of Snobs* was a hilarious exposé of the hypocrisy of early Victorian society: a similar satirical view permeates *Vanity Fair*. Amelia Sedley is introduced as ‘a dear little creature’ but the author’s attitude to her is deeply ambivalent: he first praises her tenderness and devotion, then adds that ‘Vanity fair is yawning over it’. Incapable of appreciating the altruistic love of Captain Dobbin, she

finally becomes ‘our little simpleton’.

Before his death, Thackeray instructed his executors not to publish any biography. Most of his novels – he wrote six – are little read, and details about his life remain scanty. But in recent decades his reputation has begun to rise, thanks in part to Stanley Kubrick’s superb film of *Barry Lyndon*. In life, Thackeray never achieved either the fame or the fortune of Dickens. Perhaps, in these disillusioned times, his hour has finally come.

Notes by Betty Tadman

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

HUMMEL FLUTE SONATAS Lise Daoust, Flute/Carmen Picard, Piano	8.553473
WEBER CLARINET WORKS Kálmán Berkes, Clarinet/Jenő Jandó, Piano	8.553122
SCHUBERT PIANO WORKS FOR FOUR HANDS Jenő Jandó/Ilona Prunyi	8.550555
SCHUBERT SCHUMANN FANTASY PIECES/FOLK SONG PIECES/ ADAGIO AND ALLEGRO Maria Kliegel, Cello/Kristin Merscher, Piano	8.550654
SCHUBERT PIANO TRIOS Stuttgart Piano Trio	8.550132

Music programmed by Neville Jason

Cover picture: Becky Sharp and Lord Steyne, by Howard Pyle
in Harpers Monthly 1906-7. Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library.

W.M. Thackeray *Vanity Fair*

Read by **Jane Lapotaire**

Vanity Fair, with its rich cast of characters, takes place on the snakes-and-ladders board of life. Amelia Sedley, daughter of a wealthy merchant, has a loving mother to supervise her courtship. Becky Sharp, an orphan, has to use her wit, charm and resourcefulness to escape from her destiny as a governess. This she does ruthlessly, musing: 'I think I could become a good woman, if I had £5000 a year.'

Thackeray's story is set at the time of the battle of Waterloo, in which the Sedley fortunes are lost – and Amelia is back to square one – while Becky rises with contemptuous ease.



Jane Lapotaire's career has encompassed major roles in the theatre, TV and film, during which time she has twice won the Variety Club of Great Britain Award for Best Actress, as well as The Society of West End Theatre Award, the Plays and Players Award and a New York Tony Award. With the RSC, she has played Gertrude opposite Kenneth Branagh in *Hamlet* and Mrs Alving in *Ghosts*. Her films include *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Surviving Picasso* and *Shooting Fish*. She is Honorary President of The Bristol Old Vic Theatre Club and has been President of The Friends of Shakespeare's Globe since its relaunch in 1996.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-120-9

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Abridged by Betty Tadmán. Produced by Neville Jason
Post-production: Andy Karamallakis, Paul Libson Audio
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Engineer (speech): Alan Smyth, Bucks Audio Recording

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Total time
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