

September 2022



Dear Club Members,

Our historical celebration this month isn't one that only happened in September, but it's one I wanted to mark at some point during the year. Throughout 1847, and in to 1848 *Vanity Fair*, the novel by William Makepeace Thackeray, was published monthly in 19 volumes. Serialisation of novels in this way was common at this time, a bit like the weekly release of the latest hit on subscription streaming services. The serialised editions were then collated and published as a single novel.

Vanity Fair was published in *Punch*, a British weekly magazine with an emphasis on humour and satire. This was an entirely fitting home for a novel which satirised society, pointing out the hypocrisy and snobbery that was all too common amongst the upper classes. At the time moral reformation was a frequent theme, with literary works almost seeming to lecture the reader in to becoming a better person. The book's subtitle "A Novel without a Hero" is entirely apt. Most of the main characters are shown with all their faults on full display. The main character, Becky Sharp is cunning, scheming, and often deceitful. Highly intelligent but with no family money she's forced to make the most of her opportunities. The story ends with a cloud over her actions. The fast living, hard partying, gambling, debt ridden main characters certainly don't set any sort of example that a Victorian matriarch would be happy for her daughters to be reading, but the storyline with many twists and turns captured the interest of the Victorian public.

To our modern eyes there's a lot to like about Becky Sharp, she's no insipid wallflower, instead she sees the society around her and works out how to manipulate it to her advantage. To quote Margaret Atwood, she "makes no pretensions to goodness. She is wicked, she enjoys being wicked, and she does it out of vanity and her own profit, tricking and deluding English society in the process".

The storyline has held interest throughout the ages, the novel has been made in to 4 silent films, 3 sound films, and 5 different TV mini series as well as 4 radio adaptations. To make sure we know that Becky has somewhat grey morals, and that we know that she's not afraid to use her looks and charm to manipulate men she's often presented as having a wardrobe that is a little too bright and bold. When she walks in to a room she wants all eyes to be on her. The promotional shots for any TV or film often show Becky dressed in red. We are clearly being told that this is a "scarlet woman", someone who will use sex to get ahead. In reality we have to read between the lines to find this promiscuity, and our modern eyes probably read more in to Becky's relationships with men than would have been implied the time. The term Scarlet Woman comes from the Bible, Revelation 17:5, describing Saint John's vision of a woman in scarlet clothes with an inscription on her forehead, "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." So your fibre this month is red, in celebration of Becky, a woman who was not afraid of being the centre of attention.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label
week

Further Reading-

Vanity Fair on Project Gutenberg-

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/599/599-h/599-h.htm>

Librivox Audiobook-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlqQajLqKeQ>

Fashion of Becky Sharpe-

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/vanity-fair/becky-sharp-changing-fashion/>

Vanity Fair- It's all about you

<https://rohanmaitzen.com/research/open-letters-monthly-archive/the-morality-of-vanity-fair/>

1935 Film-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxNfCEtvK24>