

VANITY FAIR




**THEIR WORLD.
HER RULES.**



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A man in a dark top hat, round glasses, and a red scarf is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the left. He is holding a large, thick book in his left hand. The background is a soft, hazy light. A quote is overlaid on the bottom right of the image.

*"This is Vanity Fair. A world where everyone
is striving for what is not worth having."*

William Makepeace Thackeray

Introduction



International actress Olivia Cooke leads a stellar cast in the new ITV adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.

Olivia, who plays Becky Sharp, is joined by a star-studded cast including musician and actor Johnny Flynn (*Genius*) as Dobbin, Martin Clunes (*Doc Martin*) as Sir Pitt Crawley, Frances de la Tour (*The History Boys*) as Miss Matilda Crawley, Suranne Jones (*Doctor Foster*) as Miss Pinkerton and Michael Palin as Thackeray himself.

The ensemble cast also includes Claudia Jessie (*Line of Duty*) who plays Becky's confidante Amelia Sedley, with theatrical titan Simon Russell Beale (*The Hollow Crown*) and Claire Skinner (*Outnumbered*) as her parents, and David Fynn (*School of Rock*) as her brother Jos.

Tom Bateman (*Murder On The Orient Express*) takes the role of Rawdon Crawley and Charlie Rowe (*Salvation*) plays George Osborne.

Gwyneth Hughes' adaptation of Thackeray's literary classic is set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars, and follows modern heroine Becky Sharp as she attempts to claw her way out of poverty and scale the heights of English Society.

Introduction continued:

Her story of “villainy, crime, merriment, lovemaking, jilting, laughing, cheating, fighting and dancing”, takes her all the way to the court of King George IV, via the Battle of Waterloo, breaking hearts and losing fortunes as she goes.

Vanity Fair has been commissioned for ITV by Head of Drama Polly Hill and the series will premiere on the channel internationally before premiering as an Amazon Prime Exclusive in the US.

Polly Hill commented: “Vanity Fair is the perfect classic to adapt for ITV, and Gwyneth Hughes’ stunning scripts bring the novel to life in a way that will really connect with a modern audience. The question was always who would be our perfect Becky Sharp and that is undoubtedly Olivia Cooke!”

Damien Timmer added: “Vanity Fair is a massive rollercoaster of a story and we’ve assembled an ensemble cast of real range to do it justice, from fast rising stars like Johnny Flynn and Tom Bateman to stage legends like Simon Russell Beale and household names like Suranne Jones and Martin Clunes, all orbiting Olivia Cooke’s irresistible Becky as she conquers the 21st century. We hope Thackeray would approve and with Michael Palin playing him, why wouldn’t he?!”

Morgan Wandell, Head of International Series, Amazon Studios commented: “We’re thrilled to be working with ITV on what is truly a timeless tale of navigating around hierarchical society and class, and the parallels that exist today. Olivia is joined by a renowned ensemble cast and we’re excited to be debuting this contemporary take to our customers next year.”

Vanity Fair is produced by Julia Stannard (*War & Peace*, *The Great Train Robbery*, *United*) with James Strong (*Liar*, *Broadchurch*, *United*) directing the series.

Mammoth Screen’s Managing Director Damien Timmer executive produces the series with Gwyneth Hughes, James Strong and Tom Mullens, and Victoria Fea executive producing for ITV.

Mammoth Screen is an ITV Studios production company.

ITV Studios Global Entertainment distributes Vanity Fair internationally.

Foreword

Gwyneth Hughes | Writer

So the phone rang one morning and a friendly voice began to ask: “Do you fancy adapting Vanity F....?”

He didn’t get to finish his question, because I was already bouncing off the ceiling screaming: “Yeeeeeees!!!”

I love this book. I love the freewheeling story. I love the vivid characters, every single one of them. I love the way Thackeray can make you laugh out loud on one page, and then drop you into piercing sorrow on the next. I love his extremism. And his talent for surprises. And, of course, his Becky.

In the character of Becky Sharp, Thackeray gave us the most vibrant and memorable of all the heroines of English fiction. Some might balk at describing the ambitious little minx as a heroine. But as the story begins, little Becky is only 19 years old, alone in the world, and will starve if she cannot haul herself out of poverty and into the world of Vanity Fair. Most modern viewers will think “go for it”, and interestingly, it seems that’s what most Victorian readers thought, too.

Today I imagine there are many readers out there who can’t get out of the foothills of Thackeray’s mountainous novel. It is long, very long, even by Victorian standards. For young people, in particular, the world may seem just too far away. Guys, you are the audience I resolved to convert, as I embarked on turning 800 pages into seven TV episodes.

First question: what to leave out? Perhaps surprisingly, that was never much of a problem! The second half of the book goes round the houses a bit, so I cut a lot there. Everyone has too many relatives, so a lot of them went in the bin. My goal was to reach into the heart of Vanity Fair, to follow the simple story of a friendship between two girls from different sides of the tracks. One starts out poor, the other starts out rich. Luck and hard work reverse their fortunes, more than once. Their ending is bittersweet and unforgettable.

Second question: is always about the “R” word.... Relevance. How can you make this old thing relevant to a modern audience? It’s a pointless question in many ways, because the very definition of a classic story is that it is always and forever relevant to the deepest concerns of human life. But I do agree that some classic novels manage time travel more easily than others. And at the top of that list stands Mr Thackeray’s Vanity Fair.

Foreword

Gwyneth Hughes continued:

This is a story in which everybody marries the wrong person, and regrets it. A story in which everyone has to learn to be careful what she wishes for. Above all, a story which asks questions: What is the best way to be a woman? What's the point of being good? In a world of materialism, selfishness and vanity, how can a person hang on to his soul?

Have we stopped asking those questions, in the modern world? I don't think so.

Classic adaptation goes in and out of fashion among broadcasters; though not, I think, among viewers. Most of us love a big old romance with beautiful frocks and handsome heroes. But I'm sure it's not just escapism we seek. I think we relish the chance to imagine the lives we might have led in a world harsher, clearer, and more unforgiving than our own muddled times.

Production interview
James Strong | Director



Production interview

James Strong | Director

Q: When did you start work on Vanity Fair?

"I started work on Vanity Fair about three or four months before we began filming. There's the whole process of casting, crewing up and finding all of the locations while the scripts are settling. The casting was interesting when you've got so many characters involved in seven episodes."

Q: Why make a new adaptation of Vanity Fair now?

"You never tire of these great books and bringing them to new audiences. It's been over 20 years since the last television adaptation, so we are due a new one - especially with something as good as Vanity Fair. I think it will be a great treat for the audience."

"Vanity Fair is a story with a strong female heroine who doesn't compromise and wants to be an equal in a very male dominated society. That feels very relevant to what's going on today. It's a universal story that feels more pertinent than ever before."

Q: What approach did you take?

"As a director it's a balance. Vanity Fair is set in the early 1800s and the costumes, production design, sets and locations are all completely authentic. But it also has to feel relevant and accessible to a modern audience."

"Sometimes a period drama can have a very reverential pace which can put the audience slightly at arm's length. But, of course, it's just what normal life was like back then. It's a brilliant story about a brilliant character that just happens to be set in 1812."

"In Vanity Fair we're at war with Europe, people are going bankrupt because they have overextended in the stock market and people are in love with the wrong people. As Thackeray writes, it's about people striving for what is not worth having. That couldn't be more relevant."

"That period was obsessed with social standing. Becky Sharp was trying to defy that. She believed by climbing the social ladder and becoming rich, successful and famous, that would bring you happiness. That's another relevant modern parallel. We're all striving for what is not worth having. It's a timeless truth."

Production interview

James Strong continued:

Q: What about screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes' adaptation of author William Makepeace Thackeray's novel?

"Gwyneth has done such a good job. It's a brilliantly deft and smart adaptation, and also modern and fresh. She has artfully filleted down a huge and sprawling novel to a manageable seven episodes.

"The book is funny. But to capture that comedy and make it accessible for a modern audience is really tough. She has done a masterful job."

Q: What was it like working with Olivia Cooke, who plays Becky Sharp?

"Olivia is a rising international talent, so it was a great coup to work with her. She was utterly committed to the role of Becky Sharp, who is one of the most iconic female characters in literary history. She is amazing in the role; it will cement her in the minds of the nation.

"One of the nice things about Vanity Fair is the leads are all young, in their 20s. So essentially, they are mostly unknown to the audience. That's incredibly refreshing. To have a core new set of faces the ITV audience won't generally associate with anything else but the characters they are playing is exciting."

Q: Was Becky Sharp simply trying to survive?

"In most of Becky's decisions you can see her survival instinct. Wherever she lands, she tries to make the best of it. Becky is clever, sharp and she is improvising. She just tries to better herself. And what's wrong with that? Who can blame her when she's come from nothing?

"But then when she's successful Becky doesn't know when to stop. She believes her own hype, if you like. It's a classic rags to riches story and then it all goes wrong. A lot of her aspirations and things she does you can identify with."

Q: What about Becky's friend Amelia Sedley, played by Claudia Jessie?

"Amelia Sedley is very much of her time, when most ladies were confined to their stations and accepted them. They didn't challenge them in the way Becky does. Becky goes against the grain, whereas Amelia is a product of her upbringing and her family.

Production interview

James Strong continued:

“Therefore when things start to go wrong for Amelia, she has no reference. No conception that she would not just leave school, get married and follow in her mother’s footsteps, raising a family in a nice middle class, well-to-do life.

“Amelia has a huge parallel inverted journey to Becky. Becky rises as Amelia sinks. There’s an interesting parallel with their friendship at the heart of the story. Both lives don’t unfold as you would have foretold when we first join them.”

Q: What about working with some of the well-known members of the cast?

“It’s key to have a smattering of treats in brilliant actors who bring a familiarity, a warmth and a recognition, in the likes of Frances de la Tour as Matilda Crawley and Simon Russell Beale as Mr Sedley. Martin Clunes is absolutely brilliant as Sir Pitt Crawley. Plus, Robert Pugh brings tremendous weight and power to the role of Mr Osborne.

“There is great talent all the way through the casting. It’s important to bring the heavyweights in alongside the young guns.”

Q: Michael Palin plays Vanity Fair author William Thackeray. What was the thinking behind that?

“In the book Thackeray’s voice is ever present. So we wanted to find a way to integrate our Thackeray but not make it feel that it took you out of the drama. He appears at the beginning of every episode, resets it all and reminds us this is all a fiction and he is in charge of it.

“We wanted someone you look forward to and trust and love. I don’t think you could do better than Michael Palin. He is perfect. Vanity Fair begins with him walking towards us as William Thackeray. He semi-narrates the whole thing but very subtly. He’s woven in and out of the series.”

Q: Where did you film?

“In part of the story they go to Brussels on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. We found that Budapest gave us the perfect period architecture. It also doubles for Pumpernickel in Germany which is a place they travel to on the European tour.

“The book is set very firmly in London, with the exception of the Queen’s Crawley. For me it was crucial we shot in London, in as many of the actual streets and squares Thackeray talks about.

James Strong continued:

"We used Fitzroy Square for the Osborne and Sedley houses. It's Russell Square in the book but it's the same architecture. We also filmed in locations like Lancaster House, Syon House, Osterley House and Marble Hill, which, again, give you that authenticity. They are the real thing.

"Our production designer Anna Pritchard did an amazing job in recreating the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens which is a big part of episode one.

"The novel moves around a lot and goes to different places. The challenge was to have the scope of all of these different locations and places."

Q: How do you set about depicting the Battle of Waterloo on screen?

"That was our biggest logistical challenge. In the book, Thackeray wrote very little about the battle. He chose to stay away from the fighting, and concentrate on the officers' wives. We thought the TV audience might feel short changed. So we decided to put the battle on screen.

"You start with the research, you look at what happened. You watch the Waterloo film and others. We had a great military advisor and historical advisor. So once you know how the battle was fought on the day, including the sheer scale of it, then you place our men into their respective units and tell the story of the Battle of Waterloo through our boys. Life could be cheap and fragile back then. Rank and privilege were no real protection. That battle was brutal and horrendous.

"We had 400 supporting artists, stunt men, 50 horses, special effects and drones with two to three units shooting every day. It was an amazing logistical experience to transform this farm in Reading, Mapledurham, where they shot *The Eagle Has Landed*. We were there for over a week and there was a massive camp site, including 200 men who trained in a boot camp to depict Napoleonic soldiers.

"There was a lot of planning and storyboarding to maximise what you get. Because there's no point in doing all of that and not capturing it all. And we got some amazing stuff."

Production interview

James Strong continued:

Q: Do you think vanity is prevalent in today's society?

"Appearances, social climbing and status are absolutely what was at the heart of Vanity Fair, and at the heart of our society at that moment. Whether it's how many likes we get for our Instagram selfie, how many friends we have on Facebook or whatever the barometer - the need to feel endorsed, loved and popular has never been more in view than it is right now.

"This was at the heart of what Thackeray was trying to skewer. He could see this vanity at the heart of society. It manifests itself slightly differently now but it's no less potent."

Q: Is this an exciting time to be working in television drama?

"Now is being called 'a golden period' for television drama, with channels and platforms for your work to be seen all over the world. The combinations and co-productions raise budget levels so you have the chance to make dramas at a level we haven't seen before.

"But, you have to ensure what you're doing is different so it stands out from the crowd – so that is what we have strived for.

"Vanity Fair works best as a television series because it's such a big story. You're able to reveal the joy of it over seven episodes. Productions like this don't happen every day. Our aim was to deliver the definitive version of Vanity Fair and I hope we have achieved that."



Cast interview

Olivia Cooke | Becky Sharp

Q: What was your immediate reaction when you got the role of Becky Sharp?

"I felt an overwhelming sense of gratefulness and excitement to do the job. But also, 'Oh, now I've got to do it. They've cast the wrong person. I don't have it in me to play this part. She is so iconic.' The pressure of all of that.

"Everyone has their version of Becky Sharp in their head. She is so beloved. So after the joy of getting the role I felt an impending dread of actually having to play her.

"You want to get it right. But you also don't want to repeat versions of Becky that have been done before. In collaboration with the way Gwyneth Hughes has written her screen version of Becky, you want to challenge yourself and do something you have never done before."

Q: Had you seen any of the previous screen adaptations?

"I was going to steer away from them because I didn't want to be influenced by them. I had read the book and, obviously, Gwyneth's scripts. So I just wanted to work with that. But then one night I caught up with the Reese Witherspoon version. I thought it was great. But I was relieved because we have both played her differently."

Q: How was the first week of filming in September 2017?

"When I turned up for the first day of filming I was really nervous. I was convinced I couldn't act and that I didn't know the character well enough. And then - as is the way with filming - we had to start in the middle of Becky's journey through society. The first week of filming was in Budapest. We started on episode four and then went to episode seven. So it was a real jump.

"You're putting on a corset for the first time, it was 35C and everyone was hot. But you're in this beautiful location overlooking a river in a village on top of a hill. It was really daunting but we had a very good first day and everyone was excited by the end of it."

Cast interview

Olivia Cooke continued:

Q: Who is Becky Sharp when we first meet her at Miss Pinkerton's Academy in Chiswick?

"When you meet Becky at Miss Pinkerton's Academy she's a young woman who is craving so much more than her life at present. She is in this position in society, stuck in a strict class system which it appears she can't penetrate. But Becky is fierce and ferocious in her confidence in herself. And she is determined to break through that glass ceiling.

"Times were very different then. She had no family and no money. The only option to better herself was to marry someone who was above her station because a woman can't go out and work to make her own money at that time unless she's a prostitute. That was just the way it was but Becky is incredibly modern in her tenacity.

"Becky is an expert charmer. She is completely manipulative and charming because she's had to be. Becky is very astute and perceptive, even though she can come across as quite unemotional sometimes. She can read most people because she has had to do that. Becky is a survivor. She has had to look out for herself."

Q: Are there consequences for the choices Becky makes?

"There are consequences for Becky. She is always planning but she doesn't fully think things through. Becky is a survivor so everything is on impulse. She has all of the goodwill in the world when she's making these decisions and when she's doing these things, but sometimes it's not the outcome she wanted."

Q: What approach was taken in filming this new adaptation?

"It is a modern approach but it still has huge elements of a British period drama. We've all pushed it with our performances which sometimes were quite broad and theatrical. The script is incredibly humorous at times. They have also cast a number of rather comedic actors and actresses.

"In terms of the style of Vanity Fair, the director James Strong and the director of photography Ed Rutherford have chosen really interesting shots. Very unconventional shots which you don't necessarily see in a period drama. There are a few looks to camera from Becky and there's an invitation for the audience with that.

Cast interview

Olivia Cooke continued:

“However, I’ve stayed away from looking at the monitors, so I’ve only got other people’s comments and my experience on set to judge.”

Q: What accent have you used for Becky?

“It’s RP (Received Pronunciation) but still accessible. I didn’t want to alienate the audience when a character has a very stuffy accent. I also wanted to distinguish Becky from some of the other characters who may have a more refined accent. Even so, she can turn it on and off at will.”

Q: There are scenes where Becky speaks and sings in French. Was that a challenge?

“I do not speak French or sing in French. So I had a couple of lessons. I think I fudged my way through it!”

Q: Tom Bateman plays Rawdon Crawley. What was it like working with him?

“It’s been wonderful. I could not have asked for a more perfect scene partner. Tom is incredibly kind and funny. He makes you feel really comfortable from the word go. Tom is also an amazing actor. Rawdon is sometimes dismissed as someone who is brawny but doesn’t have a lot of intelligence. But there is a real depth to Tom’s performance and a sadness, as well, towards the end, which he played really beautifully. He’s wonderful. We’ve had such a good time together.”

Q: You also worked with Martin Clunes (Sir Pitt Crawley) and Frances de la Tour (Miss Matilda Crawley). What was that experience like?

“It’s been amazing to work with Martin Clunes and Frances de la Tour. Being born in 1993 I feel as if I have grown up watching them.

“Martin is very kind and generous. Very easy going and a tremendous actor. He takes things as they come and nothing is a huge deal. But he is very good. We’ve had a ball together. Frances absolutely is brilliant too. I’ve been very lucky.”

Cast interview

Olivia Cooke continued:

Q: And Michael Palin as Vanity Fair author William Makepeace Thackeray?

“Michael Palin was such a gentleman. I don’t know what I was expecting but by the way he acted you wouldn’t have thought he was THE Michael Palin. Because he was just so sweet and kind. There was no ego to him at all. Everyone was a little bit star-struck. He’s a massive part of British TV and film history.”

Q: Tell us about the costumes you wear for Becky?

“I wore a corset in a film I did called The Limehouse Golem. But not for a six-month shoot. No wonder women wanted to be liberated. The corset is so stifling. You are strapped in first thing in the morning and then you are on set for 13, 14 hours.

“It restricts your appetite as well. I lost so much weight. How did people wear those things every single day? They are so uncomfortable. Women had to wear so many bits and bobs. So much faff which all seems really redundant.

“The costumes themselves are fantastic. Our costume designer did a fantastic job of focusing on the palettes of the characters. Becky’s palette gets brighter and more colourful as she ascends through society. Whereas Amelia Sedley’s (Claudia Jessie) costumes start out quite colourful in lovely pastel pinks, blues and yellows, and then slowly she is drained of any colour as she takes an emotional fall.

“The costumes transform you - both physically and mentally. Movement is always quite limited because you have a bonnet on and a shawl, which you’re scared might slip off. Then you have something called a reticule wrapped around your wrists. You do quite quickly get into the mindset of that character and are transported to that time.”

Q: What about some of the locations you filmed in?

“Scenes set at Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens were filmed at Syon Park. It was beautiful. They transformed the gardens into this fair with fire-breathers, tightrope walkers, different booths for people to eat in, with a band and a hot air balloon. It was really fantastical. Very magical to film.

Cast interview

Olivia Cooke continued:

“We filmed on a fairground carousel - we were on that carousel for a few hours. There’s so many pictures of us crying with laughter – it made the time fly by. That was one of the best days on Vanity Fair because it was so much fun. We felt a bit sick but it was counterbalanced with the joy of being together.

“We were all together and we all truly bonded. I’ve never met a funnier bunch of people. I’ve laughed so much throughout these six months.

“We filmed the Brussels Opera House interiors at Hackney Empire and Lancaster House. All of these locations are so beautiful and exquisite. They really enhance the way Vanity Fair was shot. They bring an extra layer of opulence.”

Q: Did anyone from your family visit the set?

“I was going to get my mum Lindsay in to be an extra in one of the Ball scenes. But I think she would have died of embarrassment. So I thought better of that. But she’s really proud. She says, ‘Everyone keeps asking on the street about Vanity Fair and what you are like. You’re just my Olivia.’ She’s proud but only as proud as any mum would be if her daughter’s successful in any field.

“I’m based in New York now so it was good to be back here. My mum came down for weekends in London. I didn’t go back home to Manchester too much because work on Vanity Fair was pretty full on. My mum lives in Oldham. And wherever you’re from, when you go back to your mum’s house after two days you feel like a 15-year-old again.”

Q: This TV drama is an adaptation of a 19th century novel set in the early 1800s. Does the story have relevance to today?

“Vanity Fair definitely has a relevance to today. It’s a story, ultimately, about female friendship and empowering each other. They’re talking about love, society and choosing the right man. But that was really all there was then for a woman to aspire towards.

“It’s a story about a woman’s strength and will. Strength of character. Trying to make something of herself in a hugely patriarchal society.”

Cast interview

Olivia Cooke continued:

Q: Have you learned anything from Becky?

“What I’ve learned from Becky is not to take what you think are dire, end of the world situations too seriously. To see the lighter side, to have fun and to be a bit cheeky and naughty sometimes.”

Q: What do you think Becky might be doing if she were alive now?

“Becky would be the CEO of a huge company. Perhaps she’d run a film studio. Or she’d be a performer because she’s an incredibly good performer when she has to be. When she has to play on the sympathies of other characters. She is very convincing at that.”

Q: Do you think vanity is prevalent in modern life today?

“There’s this idea today of a curated life. Where instead of actually living in the moment and having these experiences, people take a photo of it and they focus on getting the image just right so they can post it online. To make it look as if they are having the best time ever. But really they’ve gained no experience or inspiration out of that moment. They have felt no emotion towards it and created no memories, bar that snapshot. Which is upsetting.

“Would Becky be very active on social media today? Potentially. But the interesting thing about Becky is she is maybe the least vain person in the book. She can make herself really vulnerable. Becky is not afraid to beg or come across as desperate. Just to get whatever she wants.

“I think Matilda (Frances de la Tour) is the one who knows exactly who Becky Sharp is. Matilda sees herself as an older Becky. Or sees a lot of her younger self in Becky. She can see right through Becky and right through what Becky wants.”

Q: How do you reflect on making this new adaptation of Vanity Fair?

“It is a massive achievement to do seven hours of cinematic television in six months. There’s a lot of me in this one. I don’t know how I’ll feel when it comes to watching it myself. Maybe after it’s all been screened on ITV I’ll be able to revisit it. But I don’t know if I’ll be able to watch it in real time as people are digesting it.”

Cast interview

Olivia Cooke continued:

Q: Becky says at one point: “You won’t forget me.” Will you miss Becky?

“I will miss Becky. I’ll miss her mischievousness and her sense of joy. She’s never down for long. There’s always the next plan. She makes light of any situation which is a lovely quality. I’ll also really miss the cast and crew because they have been an absolute dream. I’ve had so much fun with them over six months.”



Cast Interview
Claudia Jessie | Amelia Sedley

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie | Amelia Sedley

Q: How did you learn you had the role of Amelia?

"I'd been to my third casting and just met Olivia Cooke, who plays Becky Sharp. We'd done a chemistry read together. I came out in love with Olivia and felt really excited that if I got the role I'd be working with her.

"My friend and I had gone to the pub when my agent called and said, 'So you know Vanity Fair, where you would play Amelia? Well...you're going to!' I burst into tears because I couldn't believe it. I felt so happy. I couldn't really say much to anyone at that stage. Not even my friend. So I just said to her, 'I've got a really great job. I can't say what it is just yet but let's celebrate.'

"I went back to Birmingham, where I'm from, and told my family I'd got a job. Again, I didn't tell them what it was. And then when it became OK to say things, they were over the moon. It was very emotional."

Q: Did you feel daunted in any way?

"You get really nervous. You audition for a role, you read it and you want it. Then when you get a call back, you think, 'OK, cool, I'm getting closer. There's a chance I could be doing this.' And when you hear you get something like this you, of course, go, 'Yes!' Then it's a case of, 'Oh my gosh, now I have to do it.' So I was hugely daunted."

Q: Had you read the book?

"I had read the book. After my second audition I was walking back to Euston Station to get the train back to Birmingham and walked past a second-hand bookstore in King's Cross. I went in and found one little copy of Vanity Fair in the corner of this shop, right at the bottom at the back. So I had to buy it. I got it for £1.50 and started reading it again.

"I listened to an audio reading of it and I'd seen the film with Reese Witherspoon. But I didn't want to overdo it because once I'd got all of the scripts I found our screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes really gave me another angle, another doorway into the book which made me understand it even more. William Thackeray had a unique way of writing. Little nuggets of information about people. I devoured the scripts and loved them so much."

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie continued:

Q: What is the story at the heart of Vanity Fair?

“It follows the life of Becky Sharp and her journey as she climbs the social ladder. Alongside her is her dear friend Amelia Sedley, whose life we also follow. They both start in different places, have completely different journeys and end up, essentially, in the same place.

“What I really love about Vanity Fair is it is such a beautiful expression of human nature. Seeking love and acceptance and success. I also love Thackeray’s - and screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes’ - satirical look at our human animality and our hunger. This idea that we’re constantly searching for happiness outside of ourselves. So even when we do get to the point we’ve been striving to reach, does it really bring us satisfaction?

“Certainly, for me, the truest form of happiness comes from inside out. Not outside in.”

Q: Can you describe the approach that has been taken for this adaptation?

“It’s quite a youthful production, in parts. The core six characters - Becky Sharp, Amelia Sedley, George Osborne, Rawdon Crawley, Jos Sedley and William Dobbin - are played by young actors. It’s going to look quite sexy and beautiful. Aesthetically it’s going to be magical. It’s an expression of young friendship, coming of age, finding oneself in the 1800s.

“We also get the glory of all of the sets and costumes, the jewels and the money and the tragedy. It’s all there. We all love a period drama, don’t we? We love to look back. In a story that also has relevance to today.”

Q: How is Vanity Fair relevant to today?

“It’s so interesting to see how Vanity Fair mirrors our lives right now. You might have someone with 250,000 followers on social media and many people get their currency through likes and re-tweets, follows and all of that sort of stuff. Our sort of satisfaction from outside of ourselves - looking at photos, other people’s lives, looking at celebrities and so on.

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie continued:

"In Vanity Fair all of that is happening but they just don't have a mobile phone or laptop. They have these Balls and dinners. There's a line when George Osborne (Charlie Rowe) takes Amelia to the opera. We walk into the foyer and just before we take our seats he says, 'Look around you, Amelia.' He says these are the sort of people we should be mixing with. That was their way of getting a thumbs up."

Q: How would you describe Amelia when we first meet her at Miss Pinkerton's Academy?

"Amelia Sedley is a star student at Miss Pinkerton's Academy. Everybody loves Amelia. She's terminally delightful and comes from a stable family background. She has grown up next to her childhood sweetheart George Osborne (Charlie Rowe) while the two families are friends and linked in business. Everything has been planned for her."

"Amelia is very optimistic, hopeful and easily shocked. So when she comes across someone like Becky Sharp, who has a thing or two to say to Miss Pinkerton before she leaves, it takes Amelia aback."

"There's a line where her mother (Claire Skinner) says "Amelia would cry over a dead canary." It's true. At the start of this story she is so sweet with a lack of real life experience. You could say she was naive. Amelia wants to see the world in a better light because that's how she is."

"Miss Pinkerton's probably produced many Amelias. These perfect little girls skipping out of school in their perfect pink dresses."

Q: How does Amelia view Becky?

"She has never come across anyone like Becky before. There's intrigue, awe and she also feels for her at the beginning. Amelia hasn't had this life and she meets this young woman who's had such a difficult start. The idea of that to Amelia is enough to want to help and support her."

"There's also a bit of desire there, for Becky to be so grown up, confident and strong. Which we can all relate to. The people we've all met in our lives where you think, 'Oh, I wish I was like you a bit. But I don't think I ever will be.'"

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie continued:

Q: Are Amelia and George destined to be together?

"It's always been assumed that Amelia and George will marry. So this defines Amelia to some extent. Amelia has a really turbulent journey in Vanity Fair and goes through a great deal. But she holds on to that idea of being with George for such a long time. That idea of what her life would be. We all plan. We all think things are going to look one way. And then they don't. Amelia can't let go of that idea."

Q: How does she feel about Captain William Dobbin (Johnny Flynn)?

"Amelia simply doesn't realise Dobbin has feelings for her. Johnny Flynn plays Dobbin so beautifully. Amelia is appreciative of Dobbin's support throughout her life. But she doesn't see him in that romantic light. I think people will watch and get so frustrated - as everyone around her does. 'Come on. He's been here this whole time. What are you doing?' It's a real will they, won't they? I'm so lucky I get to be a part of that story arc."

Q: Is there is a lot of wit and humour in this story?

"I don't think there is anyone better to carry the wit through a series than David Fynn as Jos Sedley. He's one of the most impressive people I've ever met. I really adore him. We've become great friends. Playing his sister was actually quite difficult because he's so funny. He would have all of us laughing, including the crew. We would really have to pull ourselves together just before a take. He carried the smile of the show."

"He also has a sweet storyline with Becky. Jos is a bit in awe and a little scared of her. We had a great family. Simon Russell Beale is my dad, John Sedley, Claire Skinner is my mum, Louisa Sedley, and David Fynn is my brother Jos. It's like the best family ever."

Q: Amelia is a great letter writer. Do you think it's a lost art today?

"When we wrapped I got Olivia a present. A beautiful writing set. And I said to her, 'So that you and I can continue this story together. Just like Becky and Amelia would write to each other.' Olivia lives in America. So it's going to be so exciting to receive letters from America. And she'll get one from little old Birmingham."

"My nan passed away a month before I started filming Vanity Fair. My mum was clearing out my nan's house and she found all of these letters my mum had written to my nan when my mum was away working in New York. We were just so moved. My nan had kept them all in a little box."

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie continued:

Q: You enjoyed one particular visitor to the set?

“This Morning’s Alison Hammond, who is also from Birmingham, came to visit us on set. It will mean so much to everyone around me in my Brummie circle. They’ll probably be prouder of that moment than me actually being in Vanity Fair. She’s the nicest woman in the world. We just couldn’t stop laughing. Alison is so funny and so infectious. And we were talking lots about Birmingham.”

Q: Amelia plays the piano on screen. Do you play yourself?

“Olivia and I play bits of piano ourselves. But we had a lovely woman who would come in and support us. We’d mime the keys. There were a few shots where she would do a big piece and we’d follow her hands. But in the scenes, it would be me and Olivia tapping away.

“I’ve got a piano. It was my grandad’s and he taught me how to play the piano and when he died he left it to me in his will. So I do play. My mum and my brother are quite musical. It’s been in our lives forever. Filming those scenes was really good fun.”

Q: Where did you film the scenes Thackeray set at Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens?

“We were so lucky. Our locations team and set designers are amazing. The Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens scenes were filmed at Syon Park over three consecutive nights. There was a big merry-go-round, lots of stalls, fire breathers, tightrope walkers, a monkey – all absolutely bonkers. It’s such a great opening to the series to see something so fantastical.

“The six of us were sat filming on the merry-go-round for what felt like hours. Going round and round. There was a point after a little bit too much spinning where we were all delirious. Laughing so much.

“We had the incredible Michael Palin there being William Thackeray. So it was all a bit surreal. ‘Merry-go-round, Michael Palin, a monkey.’

“We’ve also filmed in beautiful stately homes, members’ clubs in London, Hackney Empire, some amazing scenes in Budapest. All great locations.”

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie continued:

Q: What sort of costumes did you wear for Amelia?

“The costumes were wonderful. I feel like the corset does 70 per cent of the work. You have so much regency because it really straightens you up. Amelia has some beautiful dresses. The costumes change you so much.

“Amelia contrasts to Becky. At the beginning Amelia’s dresses are very pink, bright and quite young. While Becky doesn’t have a lot of money so she has quite simple and plain outfits with muted colours. Then as their journeys progress our very clever costume designer had a plan.

“Amelia fades away as her life crumbles. At the same time Becky’s life is soaring and she is climbing higher and higher in society. My colours become a lot more like silvers, greys and fair colours. Whereas Becky has bright and beautifully vivid colours - reds and oranges.

“I was also totally bonneted up. With shawls. And we carried tiny little purses called reticules. Lots of beautiful jewellery. It’s going to look so stunning. It was great because I got to play dress up. That’s my job. Play dress up!

“It’s funny. When you see the cast and crew outside of work. People say it’s so weird to see you in modern clothes. I’d say, ‘Well, I wasn’t going to wear a corset out today.’”

Q: Amelia has to make a heartbreaking decision. Was it a brutal world for some people?

“I cannot imagine having to make such a decision. There’s the potential for Amelia to be very soft and timid. But in the script Gwyneth Hughes really adds a lot of punch for Amelia with a lot of heart and strength. And that’s what I wanted for this character.

“People faced such difficult and sad decisions. But Amelia shows that human quality of resilience. Much better to be resilient than to avoid things. Amelia has a lot of heart as well as sweetness and emotion, along with that resilience that lies within the foundations of her being.

“It’s so there in the script and I really felt that. You can’t go through what Amelia goes through without developing a thick skin. Every human being isn’t just one thing. You don’t just get one emotion. Everyone is everything, aren’t they?

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie continued:

“We rank everybody as human beings. We judge, we rank and we put people into boxes. When none of us know what is a good or bad person. One of the supporting artists was saying that Dobbin and Amelia are the nicest people in the story. And I said, ‘Well, maybe. If you consider martyrdom and being really stubborn good qualities’.

“But you might think Becky Sharp is the nicest person in the book because she stands up for herself, follows her heart and she doesn’t care what people think. Because it doesn’t benefit her. In real life, actually, we’re all brilliant and we’re all a bit rubbish. Because we’re human beings. That’s what’s so good about Vanity Fair. Everybody messes up.”

Q: Some characters are parted and don’t speak for years. That would not happen with today’s modern instant communications?

“There’s no longing anymore. No holding out for something. Because you don’t have to anymore. Who knows? Maybe Vanity Fair will instil in all of us this want to wait. To slow down. And to be kinder to ourselves and each other. And to be okay with being unremarkable sometimes. To make time to speak to people. And realise that happiness can’t come from outside of ourselves. I hope so.”

Q: Where will you watch Vanity Fair when it is broadcast?

“The tradition is that whenever I’m in something, me and my mum always watch it together.”

Q: How do you reflect back on the making of Vanity Fair?

“This job came at a really interesting time in my life. I’ve never had an opportunity quite like this before. So firstly, I’ve been able to do it. Someone has given me this opportunity, believed I could do it and then I’ve completed it. That’s incredible.

“I’ve also met people I really love. We’ve got a little WhatsApp group and speak every day. I’ve come away with the hearts of the people around me. And I hope we make people feel loads of things because we felt so much making Vanity Fair.

“Spending five months of your life with the same people every day is no small feat. I think everybody did it really wonderfully. I have a lot of gratitude for this job. Not just in terms of my career. That will come behind the friendship and my heart being so warmed by these people.”

Cast interview

Claudia Jessie continued:

Q: Will you miss Amelia?

“There’s a part of me that is so similar to Amelia. And I think she has taught me stuff as well. She has taught me the art of letting go. It takes her a long time to do it. But there’s something noble in letting go, isn’t there?”

Cast Interview

Tom Bateman | Rawdon Crawley



Cast Interview

Tom Bateman | Rawdon Crawley

Q: How did you learn you had the role of Rawdon Crawley?

"I was in a pub with some friends on a Sunday evening when the call came in. I was very surprised. It happened quite quickly and I was very excited to get the role. I had read the scripts and Gwyneth Hughes has done an incredible job. Selfishly, I was aware of how wonderful the character was as well.

"I've never really done anything in this period before. So, for me, that was also a very exciting prospect. Getting to spread my wings in a different direction.

"It's such a loved book so you don't want to upset people who have preconceived ideas about how the characters are. At the same time one of the reasons I loved it so much is *Vanity Fair* is such a huge book with so many different characters in it. In a way that takes the weight off your shoulders. Even down to the smallest roles they are so detailed in what they are. We're all part of a big puzzle that tells this story.

"As soon as I got on set, even though it meant that myself and Olivia were in for the majority of the days, it didn't feel any less important when other characters came in because it's such an interesting and rich script."

Q: What approach has been taken to this adaptation of *Vanity Fair*?

"Because of the nature of the piece, to connect to the truth you have to connect with the period of the drama as well. I think in the editing and the camera techniques and style used, you will see it in a more modern way. While it has that modern pace, it will feel quite traditional as well.

"In terms of the scope they have really gone for it. We spent a long time doing these huge wide shots with hundreds of supporting artists. Boarding ships for the Battle of Waterloo, for example. That is really embracing the world we're in. If you're doing a story like this then you've really got to go for it.

"In terms of the performances, we weren't so worried about how you stand and walk and talk. It was more concentrating on the connection between characters which, hopefully, will feel accessible to an audience. Instead of them feeling they are watching something distant and far away."

Cast Interview

Tom Bateman continued:

Q: At its heart, what story is *Vanity Fair* telling?

“The reason *Vanity Fair* still appeals to a modern audience is because it’s a story about narcissism, human ambition and the lengths to which people are willing to go to elbow their way to a particular level in society. What morals they are willing to throw out of the window to get there. Every character wants to climb their way up the food chain.

“*Vanity Fair* still rings true today. We’re in a world today with people obsessed with selfies and Twitter followers so it’s not a million miles away at all.

“What I found very interesting reading the book before we started filming was how similar we are as a society still now. They would have these articles in the newspaper every morning saying so and so went to the party at so and so and this is who was there. It’s the same now. We see these magazines reporting who went to a party and so on.

“At its heart *Vanity Fair* is a story about what it is to be human in a society, in a group of people, and how that affects you. Where people start off and where they end up.”

Q: How would you describe Rawdon Crawley when we first meet him?

“Rawdon is a privileged, self-centered man about town when we first meet him. He’s completely obsessed with having the best time he can possibly have with the least amount of work. He is blessed because his very rich Aunt Matilda (Frances de la Tour) subsidises his lifestyle. Rawdon can also be funny. The book quite often discusses his guffaw, his laugh.

“He’s a military man but because of his position in society he could buy his way in. He didn’t have to start at the bottom. He’s already Captain Rawdon Crawley. He’s basically out for a good time. So as soon as he sees Becky Sharp (Olivia Cooke) he thinks, ‘Right, that’s going to be my bit of fun for the next few months.’

“Little does he know that she is much smarter and that, actually, he is the one who is about to be taken for a ride.

“Rawdon has an older half-brother called Bute which means Rawdon will not inherit the family estate. So he has to keep in favour with his aunt. Mathew Baynton, who plays Bute, is perfectly cast along with Martin Clunes as our father Sir Pitt Crawley and Frances de la Tour as Matilda.

Cast Interview

Tom Bateman continued:

“There is a feeling that Rawdon doesn’t actually belong there in this country house. They are not that bright or intelligent but Rawdon is very much a city man. When he comes back he’s a city man visiting his country roots. That’s the reason he’s Aunt Matilda’s favourite. She likes the fact Rawdon is this socialite as well.

“When we were filming one scene there was a question about whether he would be wearing something or other at that stage in the story. And the screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes said, ‘He’s Rawdon Crawley. He can do what he likes.’ Which was a nice thing to be told as an actor. But also, as an indicator of the character. Rawdon is by definition a rule breaker. He doesn’t play the same games that everyone else does.”

Q: How does he feel about Becky Sharp?

“Rawdon falls head over heels in love with Becky. He thinks she is one thing and that he can basically have a bit of fun with her. But he very quickly realises Becky is absolutely amazing, a lot smarter and very much his equal. In the story there are not that many characters that are equally matched. It’s quite a sweet thing to see. They are perfectly matched for each other.

“It’s heartbreaking as the story develops because you realise Becky could have been very happy with him. They are well-suited. But she can’t let her ambitions go.

“Rawdon is a man who knows who he is. But also knows what love is. Even though Becky is the smartest person in the room, her smartness is her downfall.

“The book says, ‘Vanity Fair - a story without a hero.’ Becky is effectively the protagonist, the hero we follow. But she is flawed. Becky is a subject of her own time. It’s not her fault. She’s not a Machiavellian character. Just someone who has no family, no money, no standing in the world and has to make her own way. I think that’s why we forgive her as an audience.”

Q: What was it like working with Olivia?

“Olivia is absolutely amazing. Very creative, sparky and perfect as Becky. We knew we had to be buddies because we had to work with each other in all of the scenes we do together. And very early on we became a bit of a team. I have nothing but good things to say about her.

“I was watching one of her scenes which I wasn’t in on the monitor and just the little shifts she can do is so Becky Sharp. When she takes her metaphorical mask off and then puts on another one. She is brilliant.”

Cast Interview

Tom Bateman continued:

Q: Rawdon is an expert billiards player. Did that require much acting?

“They say Rawdon is not really good for anything except for games. He can play cards and billiards better than anyone else. Rawdon is perfectly designed to take other people’s money.

“I’m okay at pool. Not the best but I’m all right. The first time we rehearsed the billiards scene, where I have to pot two shots, the cameras weren’t rolling. And I managed to pot them both. Brilliant shots. And of course, that never happened again. But it was a fun day.”

Q: Screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes describes herself as “assistant to the author”. What do her scripts bring to this adaptation?

“Gwyneth Hughes is amazing. She is one of the reasons why I wanted to do this. I knew the story of *Vanity Fair* but reading the scripts, she has really cut a lot of fat out of it. It moves along quickly. She manages to distil things very well. It was a pleasure for an actor to play.

“She really hits on the truth of what these people are going through. And it’s very funny as well. These little quick lines. She has really understood the characters and managed to flesh out each and every one of them, no matter how big or small. You really do get a feeling of these different people talking to each other. I’m in total awe of her.

“Gwyneth also appears on screen. She came in as an extra on one of the dancing days.”

Q: What was it like acting with Martin Clunes?

Martin is incredibly playful and brilliant. I was a little intimidated because from what I’d seen of him in *Doc Martin* I thought he might be quite grumpy. But he’s like a bouncy puppy and great fun. There was a day with Martin, Mathew Baynton and I where I couldn’t get through a single take without laughing. It was so funny.”

Q: And Frances de la Tour?

“The first day Frances arrived dressed in her costume, she just was Aunt Matilda. She looked and sounded perfect. I thought she might be quite intimidating with that powerful voice and presence. But she was a great team player. We got on very well.

Cast Interview

Tom Bateman continued:

“You also get to learn things from people like Martin and Frances who have been in this business for so long. You watch them effortlessly create their characters and it’s wonderful to then be acting alongside them.”

Q: What costumes did you wear for Rawdon?

“They are mainly military uniforms. Although I also had a very cool long black coat. Plus a nice floral thing. But the majority of it was full military costume. They’re actually very comfortable. It’s a bit like putting on your character - it makes you feel very different. The military costumes button right up to the collar. They’re very tight with these big boots.

“It helps you with a certain swagger of the time. And they look brilliant. When you had me, Johnny Flynn (William Dobbin), Charlie Rowe (George Osborne) and all of the supporting artists dressed in this big powerful red, there is something very intimidating and all encompassing about it.”

Q: What was it like filming the Battle of Waterloo?

“It’s a very shocking part of the story. Very heartbreaking. In the book Thackeray doesn’t really describe the battle too much. But so much plot happens on that battlefield so this adaptation just went for it. It looked amazing. There were a hell of a lot of people in those scenes.

“It was filmed just outside Reading. It looks brilliant. They were blowing the field up with explosions. It really was the business. A very important part of the story.

“It must have been terrifying with the French cavalry charging. But Rawdon is sat on a horse up on a hill with a telescope. They showed us some of the footage from down below and it looks amazing. It is very tense and dramatic.

“Before the battle Rawdon makes arrangements in the event of his death. It’s very of that time. Stiff British upper lip. Making a joke of it and the practicalities of it.”

Cast Interview

Tom Bateman continued:

Q: Can you tell us about some of the other locations?

“The scenes at Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens were filmed at Syon Park. The Pleasure Gardens were beautiful. Absolutely incredible. I just wanted to walk around the set for a few hours and very much wanted to have a party there.

“The Brussels Opera House interior was the Hackney Empire and we filmed a lot in and around London. There’s something quite wonderful about being out in places like Fitzroy Square, East and South London and having those actual London cobbled streets beneath your feet, looking up at historic buildings.

“Then when we filmed the Queen’s Crawley scenes, you smell the country air. It feels different. One of the joys of doing film and television is these wonderful locations. Lots of your work is already done for you and you get to sit there and breathe it in.

“We also filmed for a week in Budapest. It was very hot there. I was sat on a horse, with a big hat on and dripping with sweat. At that point in the story they do leave England and set up camp abroad. There’s something quite wonderful about art reflecting reality and thinking, ‘We’re all on the road here.’ There’s a different location, language, heat and energy to the place.”

Q: How were the dancing scenes with Becky?

“Rawdon is described as not being a natural dancer. That was one of those blessings in disguise. So I could try really hard and that would be exactly what Gwyneth Hughes has asked for in the script. Rawdon having more enthusiasm than skill.

“We had a wonderful dance teacher - Diana Scrivener - who was actually also my dance teacher at drama school. She’s the best in the business so it was fun having her back. She would say, ‘Tom, come on, I know you can do this. I taught you for three years.’ But it had all fallen out of my head. That was great fun.”

Q: Is there also heartbreak in Rawdon’s story?

“Without giving anything away for those who don’t know the story, when I took the role I remember my mum saying, ‘Oh, he’s the stupid one.’ It’s interesting that people look at him like that. Because I don’t see him as stupid. I see Rawdon as blinded by love. He might look stupid because he doesn’t see the ride Becky takes him for.

Cast Interview

Tom Bateman continued:

"I do think Rawdon and Becky fell in love. But those goalposts move once they start to climb through society and she sees what else she could have. Becky falls out of love with him while he falls still further in love with her.

"There is a point where Rawdon does become very wise. His belief in this love is his downfall. I'm biased because I play him, but Rawdon ends up a bit of a hero. He knows what the consequences are going to be of a decision he makes near the end.

"He arrives in the story as this cad about town on a horse. Just trying to have as much fun as possible. But by the end he has changed. He finally sees what a fool he has been. Rawdon is not stupid. Just blinded by love. And one of the more honest forms of love in the story is his love for Becky. There's a nobility about him at the end, accepting his fate. What a wonderful journey that is for a character."

Q: Can you watch yourself on screen?

"I'm not a fan of watching myself. I find that quite hard. I become a bit critical. But it's wonderful to watch all of the hard work from every other department. So I would quite like to see how it turns out. I will watch it but probably just turn away whenever I'm on screen.

"My mum is looking forward to this one a lot. I say that I do jobs for different reasons. I did an action movie - Hard Powder - recently with Liam Neeson for my brothers. And you've got to throw in a costume drama every now and again for mum and dad."

Q: Have you had time to reflect back on the making of Vanity Fair?

"I was reflecting on it as we were working. From pre-production, rehearsals and filming it's been a good six months. When I took the job I said to my agent very early on, 'There's a lot to do.' It's a huge book. They've adapted it into seven episodes. To shoot that was so ambitious. And right in the middle you've got the Battle of Waterloo which, in itself, could have taken a month to film.

"It was credit to the amazing crew. Being a period piece both we, and the audience, want it to look so beautiful and rich. I think it was an incredible achievement by every single department. While every actor hit the ground running.

"The hair department, for example, basically had to do a work of art on Olivia's head every day. A sculpture every day. I'm incredibly proud of every single person on it."



Cast interview

Johnny Flynn | William Dobbin

Q: What was your reaction when you got the role?

“It was thrilling that the producer Julia Stannard and director James Strong were keen on me to play the part. I loved my first meeting with James. Just hearing his excitement for how his take on the story would work.

“It was a really good chance for me to dive into the book which I realised is one of the most important novels in modern literature. Almost the birth of the tradition of 19th century novels.

“I had been playing quite dark and mysterious characters in film and on stage when this came along. It was so nice to realise that in the story Dobbin is, in a way, the character who has the most compassion for everyone else and has the biggest conscience of everybody in Vanity Fair.

“You feel a lot of empathy for Amelia (Claudia Jessie) because of what happens to her. But you really feel for Dobbin because he is such a loyal friend to George (Charlie Rowe). And such a loyal friend, companion and benefactor to Amelia. He has this tragic unrealised love that he feels for a lot of the story.

“So it was really nice to take on somebody that I felt a lot of empathy towards and to consider how to make that interesting. How to play that sadness Dobbin has that he pushes down. He pushes his own needs out of the way in favour of looking after other people. Which is a wonderful tension to hold.

“You can tell that Thackeray felt a lot for Dobbin. He delights in all of his characters. Especially Becky (Olivia Cooke). He celebrates her path through life and her wild choices. But Thackeray also highlights Dobbin with lines like, ‘Our wonderful Captain Dobbin.’ Every time he is brought back into the story there is this admiration for him which makes you feel quite warm towards him.”

Cast interview

Johnny Flynn continued:

Q: What does Dobbin want from life?

“Dobbin is a grocer’s son and was a scholarship boy. He feels lucky to be where he is. I relate to this because I was on scholarship to private schools myself. When I was a kid we didn’t have much money and we didn’t have a fancy house. In fact we didn’t own a house. We rented wherever my dad was working.

“If I went home with other kids for a weekend I’d be awestruck at what they had. But I didn’t reflect on what I didn’t have. I just felt, ‘Wow.’ I never really felt like I belonged in that wealthy world. It was like I was a tourist there. It wasn’t really me.

“You are always where you come from, in part. I think Dobbin carries his parents with him and the humility that life as a grocer’s son would have taught him. The dignity and hard work and all that kind of stuff. He would have gone into school and then become a soldier with that same attitude. You can tell from his actions.

“Dobbin’s behaviour reflects the sense that he is duty bound to honour his parents and their sacrifices in getting him to where he was at school and so on. He carries himself with excellent manners, dignity, graciousness and chivalry. But it’s real with him. He treasures those values. The chivalric code is a real thing for him. Because he doesn’t come from that, he doesn’t take it for granted. Dobbin is fundamentally a good person. Whoever he is talking to he accepts them in the way that they present themselves. He wants the best for people.”

Q: The world of Vanity Fair is one of a strict class structure. Do you think there’s still an element of that today?

“I’ve always believed we are all the same. When I went off to private school my best friends remained the guys who carried on at the local comp where I’d started in the village where I lived.

“I feel like I’m lucky to have seen that world of wealth and that it isn’t better in any way. Some of those people I encountered in those situations weren’t as happy as the people back in what I considered to be normal life like my family and friends. But it’s all relative, isn’t it?”

Cast interview

Johnny Flynn continued:

Q: How would you describe Dobbin's relationship with fellow officer George?

"Dobbin is committed to George no matter what. He is so far from looking after his own needs above other people's. He wants to make sure everyone else is okay. The people he has promised himself to in his heart - George, Amelia and their happiness."

Q: Dobbin loves Amelia, who remains unaware of his feelings. And yet he does everything he can to support her marriage to George. Why?

"His scruples and morals dictate that he must not get in the way of George and Amelia, despite his feelings for Amelia. So he decides he must ensure they are really happy together."

"I guess that's the thing about unrequited love. It's not real love in a healthy sense. It's a feverish, midnight, keeping yourself awake at night feeling. And it has nothing to do with the other person. It's all about how you feel."

"That is Dobbin's fault, really, that he allows that to fester. I don't know what else he could have done about it. And he tries to get away from it. He deals with it with honour and dignity but he is almost pathological."

Q: Do you think Vanity Fair is a story with relevance to today?

"What is good about the novel and something we can take into modern storytelling is this is a story where you follow your heart. It lands on a character and then they do something you find disappointing in terms of their morality. So you are challenged."

"We are challenged through the course of the story to think about how we would behave in those situations, how we feel about other people, how we feel about conflict and war and the idea of nationality and all of these things which are very modern and always prevalent topics."

"So it is a very modern story. It's been said many times that Becky Sharp is the first modern hero of a novel in that way. She is the protagonist but she's also this anti-hero because she does terrible things. But you're forced to understand it and realise where she has come from and where she is going, through the things that happen to her."

Cast interview

Johnny Flynn continued:

“Vanity Fair shows up the vagaries of wealth and ambition. It shows the fallacies of chasing things that just aren’t real - money, fortune and fame. That’s the modern conundrum. It’s definitely relevant to today. But it must have felt like rock ‘n roll when it was written. Groundbreaking.”

Q: One family in this story loses everything in a bankruptcy. But is being stripped of your possessions and having to live a simpler life necessarily a bad thing?

“There have been times in my life where I’ve been obsessed with doing just that, clearing out and simplifying things. I’ve got two kids with a third on the way. We’ve just bought our first house and we’ve got a car. These nice TV jobs I’ve been doing have afforded us not a wealthy lifestyle but, for London, we’re okay. For the first time in my life.

“I don’t come from much - we really didn’t have any money at all when I was a kid. My dad was an actor who wasn’t in work very often when I was little. Which meant he was around and he was a fantastic dad. But we didn’t need anything. I think he was pretty stressed because he wasn’t always bringing home the goods, but he was there.

“Now that I’ve earned a little bit I feel like I need to protect this for my kids. And then I have to keep remembering the best thing my dad ever taught me was that money wasn’t important. The best thing he ever gave me was nothing. When he died, when I was 18, I got his Casio watch. That was all I inherited from him. I’ve got the watch. It’s in my drawer. The fact there wasn’t any big inheritance has given me everything. And I don’t mind that at all.

“So I have to remember that my kids might be grateful for the same lessons. You don’t need anything to be happy. It’s good to clear out.

“There is an artist I really like who made a ceremony as a piece of art to ritually incinerate everything he owned. And the last thing he put through the incinerator was the sheepskin jacket his dad had wrapped him in as a baby. It was his dad’s jacket and his dad had since died. So this was a really precious totem to his memory. But he was saying that even that isn’t important really. And I love that idea.”

Cast interview

Johnny Flynn continued:

Q: What was it like filming the Battle of Waterloo scenes?

“Filming the Battle of Waterloo scenes went quite deep with me. We filmed it over the course of two weeks in fields near Reading, where they also made the film *The Eagle Has Landed* with Michael Caine. Because it has the same geographical layout as Quatre Bras and Waterloo.

“We had lots of horsemen, cavalry, and hundreds of guys in military uniform playing the infantry. They were re-enactors camping on the site and doing it for real with a drill sergeant leading them through all the manoeuvres.

“I had time to really think about what it would have been like to be standing on a field and expecting a cavalry charge. Or to form the gun lines and give the command to shoot. Knowing you were right in front of the French guns when you’re wearing a bright red uniform and you’re not allowed to move. Absolutely bonkers. The craziest thing dreamt up by aristocrats from the safety of their castles. Like a big egotistical game of chess.

“That red uniform was like a recruiting technique. A way of getting people to sign up because they could get the snazzy uniform, turn up at Balls and look like a cool dude. Which was all playing to the pitfalls of the male ego.

“Unlike the real soldiers facing this horror, I had the warmth of a trailer to retreat to when you had been out in the rain. I rode on horses. While that was fun, I just thought, ‘This would be absolutely terrifying if you were doing it for real.’

“The whole thing was exciting in terms of filming. But I’m a big advocate for peace and support a few movements that are in dialogue about conflict resolution. So this was a good time to meditate on all of that. It was a wonderful experience but also quite harrowing to consider what it would be like for real. For those real people who were actually at the battle.”

Q: Do you get recognised much?

“Sometimes. Because I play music as well, some people come up to me and say, ‘I’ve got your records,’ or ‘I love this song of yours.’ Which is lovely. To know that something you’ve made, you care about and you’ve crafted has affected somebody or touched them. People say lovely things about the music. Which I love.

Cast interview

Johnny Flynn continued:

“I was in America recently doing a play and, weirdly, I had no idea that this show I did on Netflix called Lovesick is quite a big hit over there. People in coffee shops or wherever would say, ‘Oh I love your show.’ At first, I didn’t know what they were talking about. But it was always Lovesick. That’s the one that apparently had made it into the consciousness over there.”

Q: You’ve been described as an in-demand actor. Do you take any notice of what is written about you?

“Obviously it’s lovely to have compliments thrown at you. But if you believe in them then you’re setting yourself up for a big fall. Every time I go to the theatre I think, ‘That woman or that guy is the best actor I’ve ever seen.’ I’m surrounded by people who I think are way more talented than me.

“I just feel very lucky to be in work sometimes. I’ve had an incredibly lucky run of fantastic jobs and Vanity Fair was one of them. This was a real joy, not least working with the rest of the cast and everybody making it.

“You do a job of work like anyone going to work. It just happens that what I do is visible. If you’re a car mechanic, you could be the best car mechanic doing the most amazing job. But there isn’t a global televised awards ceremony for car mechanics.

“The thing about having an actor for a dad and older brothers as well is there’s no bullshit around the family dinner table. I know it’s a great job. A lucky job if you can find opportunities to use your skills. It’s definitely a craft. One to be respected and to consider yourself a student of.

“But it’s not better or special or anything like that. If you believe it is special in any way then you are lost.”

Cast interview
Charlie Rowe | George Osborne

Cast interview

Charlie Rowe | George Osborne

Q: What was your reaction when you heard you had got the role?

“It was exciting to be playing someone who, at least on paper, reads as a pain in the backside. Something I hadn’t really done before. The opportunity to work in the UK and with such brilliant English actors was also hugely appealing.

“I was filming season one of Salvation for CBS in Canada and I jumped for joy by myself in my Toronto hotel room. I had been away from home for about six months and still had more to film on Salvation. Then Vanity Fair came through and it was exactly what I wanted and needed.

“American network television is an entirely different world. I’d been working in America mainly for the past three or four years. So it was really wonderful to be back in London.”

Q: Had you read the book?

“I hadn’t read the book. I knew about Vanity Fair as I studied English at A-level - so I knew of Thackeray but I’d never actually dived into the book. I also knew there had been previous film and TV adaptations.

“Obviously when I got the job the first thing I did was buy the book. I read it over the next couple of months and loved it, laughed out loud and got a copy for my dad and my mum. But I stayed well away from the 2004 film and the 1998 BBC adaptation.

“I didn’t want to see other people’s interpretations of George. In a way he’s a bit of a villain in the story, but it was my goal to change that. I wanted George to want to do the good thing. I hope we don’t hate George completely and realise he just doesn’t understand anything else.”

Q: Who is George Osborne?

“George is like a petulant child. He is completely entitled, has been spoilt his entire life. He has a father who has told him what to do every single day and has given him everything he has ever wanted. George knows nothing else.

“Nothing has ever gone wrong for George. Ever. So when things start to go wrong for him in Vanity Fair it is particularly interesting. I don’t think George means to be a terrible person. He just lacks experience.”

Cast interview

Charlie Rowe continued:

Q: Does George love Amelia (Claudia Jessie)?

“George does love Amelia. He has been told all of his life to love her and she loves him too. They have been able to see their future for a long time. It’s almost like an arranged marriage. They have been in each other’s houses since they played together as children.

“When his father tells him not to marry her, that’s when everything starts to go wrong for George. He doesn’t understand and it’s like his entire life falls apart in front of him.

“George stands up to his father which is an extremely difficult thing for him to do. That’s the moment where everything changes for George. When he realises he can stand up to his father and can finally be with the person he wants to be with.

“There’s one scene with Robert Pugh as George’s father where they have a confrontation. You’re left with the impression that George and his father will never speak to each other again. George’s father is a cut-throat businessman and he is no different with his son, which is pretty terrifying!

“But it’s very exciting for George. He’s going to live his own life. When I was reading the scripts and then filming the scenes I felt very pleased and pleased for George. Taking that step and standing up for himself and realising his father isn’t very good for him.”

Q: What does George make of Becky Sharp (Olivia Cooke) when they first meet?

“George can see right through Becky. This girl coming from a different class and social upbringing. An orphan from Miss Pinkerton’s school in Chiswick. He suspects Becky is there for the money which, of course, she is. He doesn’t give her the time of the day. But George later changes his mind.

“When she arrives back at the house with the Crawley family in this lavish horse and carriage, George realises Becky is getting somewhere. Maybe she isn’t who he thought she was? Becky is also a flirt. She’s giving George all of the looks he thinks he deserves. It gets him very excited and confused. She smells of money and Becky is suddenly very desirable.

Cast interview

Charlie Rowe continued:

“Becky knows where she wants to be. She wants to be wealthy and in the upper class. I really respect Becky’s brashness and boldness. She climbs society brilliantly well, especially considering the conditions of those times were nothing like they are today. Becky had to get to where she wanted to be as a matter of survival.

“Olivia is so strong in the role of Becky. I remember doing scenes with her and being hugely impressed.”

Q: How would you describe George’s relationship with Rawdon Crawley (Tom Bateman)?

“Rawdon is a powerful figure. Tom Bateman is huge compared to me. Rawdon sees George as weak and the only reason Rawdon hangs out with him is to take his money. Beat him at the billiards and cards’ tables.

“But George is excited because he’s with someone of a higher rank and he confuses it with friendship. All the while Rawdon is simply taking all of his money, which is sad. Thankfully I didn’t have to be very good at billiards as George loses. In fact, I was pretty terrible at it.”

Q: What world do we see in Vanity Fair?

“Vanity Fair is this place where money rules over love. You see all of these relationships burn down. Everyone confuses money for love. Then you have Becky who wants to be like these people who are drenched in wealth and upper class. That’s her dream. But all of these people around her who already have that are failing and falling every step of the way.

“Vanity Fair is a story of a brilliant female character making a mockery of everyone around her.”

Q: Thackeray describes Vanity Fair as ‘a world where everyone is striving for what is not worth having’. Do you think it is a story with relevance to today?

“Vanity Fair is totally relevant to today. I think a lot of young women will identify with Becky. Period dramas can alienate people, so I’m very excited by how modern this adaptation looks and how modern it felt, while still retaining the traditional elements.

Cast interview

Charlie Rowe continued:

“Becky’s story is very relatable to how people think of success today. The way people use social media and can gain thousands of followers to become these online entities. To have this unique personality online that is different to who they are in real life.

“I think of that as a modern Vanity Fair. That’s where Becky Sharp would be today. A person that can craft this genius story online and appear at all these different events.

“People today expect fame to be this thing that when they get it they have arrived. But in reality life continues and all the thoughts in your head are exactly the same.”

Q: Are you wary of the negative aspects to both fame and social media?

“I’ve got a lot of good people around me who won’t let me get an inch from the ground. A lot of good friends from home who just constantly take the mickey out of me, which is very helpful. And a mother and father who are constantly making sure that I am who I am.

“I grew up with social media. I was working when I was 14 and I was on social media then. In a way it has helped because I feel like I’ve grown out of that phase now. I don’t really spend too much time on social media anymore as I know it can become unhealthy. But you have to accept the fact that it is a different world, and for what I do, it can be extremely useful. So I need to know why it’s useful and why it’s not.”

Q: What does George look like on screen?

“He’s mainly in military uniform with different stages of military uniform. When he goes to the opera he puts on his white satin trousers and he pops his collar on the red uniform to show the gold lining. It was very peacock-like. ‘I’m going out so I put my colours on and I let my buttons shine.’ It’s a strong look. But try going to the bathroom in a costume like that!

“I found getting dressed in the uniform each morning extremely important. There were so many layers and buttons and you’re starting from scratch each day. By the end you really felt as though you had built George Osborne. Stepping out of the trailer you felt ready. You stand a couple of inches higher and your chest pokes out. You feel regal. Getting dressed was a very important part of my day.

Cast interview

Charlie Rowe continued:

“George also has sideburns. They were not mine. I can grow them but our director James Strong didn’t think mine were proficient enough. So what my brilliant make-up artist decided to do was stick them on hair by hair. I’d spend over an hour in make-up every morning getting these fake sideburns put on, a couple of hairs at a time. I could totally imagine George really crafting these things on his face and really caring about them. So that also became quite a useful part of the morning in terms of getting into character.”

Q: How would you describe ‘assistant to the author’ Gwyneth Hughes’ scripts?

“Gwyneth’s scripts are fantastic. They are beautifully crafted. And they retain the wit of Thackeray which is insanely hard to do because in the book there are these long rambles of his funny thoughts and commentary. Gwyneth has managed to retain that aspect but within a delicate drama. You can tell talking to her just how much she loves *Vanity Fair*. It’s a story very close to her heart.”

Q: What was it like working with the director James Strong?

“We shot the Battle of Waterloo in a field near Reading with 400 supporting artists, 50 stunt horses, three units and somehow it felt calm and collected. That was James’s ability to make us all look fantastic and feel comfortable at the same time and to beautifully link these units together. It was a good crew and they did a great job.”

Q: Can you tell us more about those Battle of Waterloo scenes?

“George doesn’t expect to ever go into battle. It’s a mixture of naivety and ignorance. He simply doesn’t think about it. George is too busy thinking about what tie he is going to put on and who he is going to go to dinner with. But then he finds himself going into battle.

“Filming the Battle of Waterloo was one of the most exciting weeks of shooting I’ve ever had. We were lying flat on the ground as this army of French Napoleonic soldiers walked through the smoke towards us. Your heart starts to race. It was completely terrifying. I’ve never felt that before and I was genuinely scared. And that was just filming the battle. You can only imagine what it would have been like for real.

“The weather was brutal when we were filming. It was raining and the wind was so strong that the rain was coming down sideways hitting the sides of our faces.

Cast interview

Charlie Rowe continued:

"I did all my horseback scenes myself. I had a number of horse riding lessons. First of all just getting comfortable on the horse, trotting, cantering and galloping. And then the next few lessons were target practice - hitting objects with swords while cantering around on horses. I felt like a little action man.

"The horses are fantastic. They are so composed and know what they are doing. They can even cope with all the sound of the gunfire. The trainers had such amazing relationships with the horses."

Q: George dances with Becky at a Brussels Ball. How was that for you?

"It was lovely. I can move, but I couldn't cha-cha for you. Olivia and I had dance lessons. I went training with the choreographer and learned all of the moves, so we were prepped and ready. These jobs are a dream because of the things you get to learn. The horse riding, the waltzing, sword-fighting."

Q: What were some of the other memorable locations?

"We filmed the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens scenes at Syon House. It was extremely loud as we were right next to Heathrow on the flight path. There were planes flying over us every 50 seconds.

"They built this entire world there, with a huge fair, fire breathers, jugglers, dancers, a little monkey dressed as Napoleon. It was fantastic. And Michael Palin was there too as Thackeray.

"My favourite location, excluding filming the Battle of Waterloo, was shooting in Fitzroy Square where the Osborne and Sedley homes were located. It was so thrilling to be filming in London and in such a historic square."

Q: How do you reflect back now on the making of Vanity Fair?

"I loved working on such a long shoot with so many characters in a story that spans a number of years. It was really exciting for me. And to play a character that felt very different to who I am.

"There are dark aspects of the story. And I found playing this angry character made me angrier in my day to day life. Although George's absurdity is quite funny. His dislike for everything. But we did have a lot of fun making Vanity Fair. We all got on really well and had a little gang. I miss them all - they were all golden."

Cast Interview

Martin Clunes | Sir Pitt Crawley



Cast interview

Martin Clunes | Sir Pitt Crawley

Q: What was your initial reaction when you were approached about *Vanity Fair*?

"My initial reaction was, 'I wonder who let them down?' Then just deep joy. Years ago I remember seeing *Vanity Fair* by a theatre company called *Cheek By Jowl* and going, 'What? Wow.'

"Becky Sharp (Olivia Cooke) is probably the best female or male character in British literature. She's phenomenal. I love her. *Vanity Fair* is brilliant because it isn't tied to a dated plot, like how well will someone marry. It's much more interesting than that.

"I find all of the characters have incredible dimensions. Nobody is just what they are presented as. There isn't a fop or a demure woman. They've all got facets and they all confound you a little.

"I love Sir Pitt for that. He comes on like a predatory bully but he actually sees in Becky something that he respects."

Q: Who is Sir Pitt Crawley?

"Sir Pitt is an MP. He's got a bit of attitude and one of the things I was overjoyed about in the script is that drives his own horses, which I do. So I was immediately drawn to that and I started carriage driving again.

"I like the fact Sir Pitt is a man of the country. He is titled, landed and very wealthy, but gets amongst it. Sir Pitt is the real deal. Very straightforward."

Q: How does Sir Pitt view Becky?

"He thinks she is very pretty. Then she works her magic on him. There's a scene where he tries to take a candle away from her at night because he's so mean. And she says, 'Well, if I haven't got a candle I can't help you with all your work.' He likes the way she manipulates him back and rather than resenting it, he thinks, 'You're all right girl. I like you.'

"Sir Pitt sees Becky Sharp as an opportunity and a possibility for his next wife. He views marriages almost like business transactions."

Cast interview

Martin Clunes continued:

Q: Do you think Sir Pitt and Becky share certain characteristics?

“Yes, I think Sir Pitt and Becky Sharp do have similarities. I was talking to the writer Gwyneth Hughes, who wrote this screen adaptation of *Vanity Fair*, and she thinks Sir Pitt is the only character who really gets Becky.”

Q: Tell us more about the carriage driving?

“I’ve got a couple of Clydesdale horses and I drive them so they were happy for me to drive the carriages in some of the *Vanity Fair* scenes. But there was a high-speed sequence they didn’t want me doing for obvious reasons. That was fine by me as well!

“I hadn’t driven my boys for over two years so before we filmed those scenes I got them in front of the cart again and they were absolutely fine.

“All of the horses and carriages are provided by this outfit called *The Devil’s Horsemen* in Buckinghamshire. I had to go there for an assessment and drove a pair of Hungarian horses. It completely fired me up. I don’t like my old cart anymore so I’ve ordered a state of the art new wagonette which is being built in Germany.

“The first time we see Sir Pitt driving the horses, it’s a very nice modest carriage with a pair of horses. Sir Pitt’s sister Matilda (Frances de la Tour), has a beautiful carriage with a team of four horses. Then there’s a scene where I take everybody out for a ride in a wagon.”

Q: Is *Vanity Fair* still relevant to today?

“*Vanity Fair* is absolutely relevant to today. It’s all about what people are really like. Because of the dimension Thackeray gives to each character and the way nothing is what it’s presented as - I think that is as applicable now as ever. These things don’t become classics for no reason.

“It’s always worthwhile with something as good as *Vanity Fair* to introduce a new adaptation. I’ve stopped saying I’m doing *Vanity Fair* for ITV because the number of people who have said, ‘Oh I love that magazine.’ Not everyone knows this story so I just say I’m doing a costume drama.”

Cast interview

Martin Clunes continued:

Q: Do you think social media today has led to an upsurge in vanity?

"T'was ever thus. I suppose it's a facet of human nature. I don't engage with social media, but people seem to love it."

Q: What was it like working with Olivia Cooke?

"Olivia is fabulous. She's a great actor. So focused and strong. It was a treat to work with her. In fact, the entire cast are a treat. Some fantastic talent. Really terrific."

Q: And Frances de la Tour, who plays Sir Pitt's sister Matilda?

"I had never met Frances before. It was just delightful to work with her. She's hysterically funny and really sweet as well."

Q: Sir Pitt dances with Becky. How was that to film?

"I'm a lovely dancer and everyone knows it!"

Q: He has a dog called Gorer who you already knew?

"I've actually worked with that dog before. He came down and did an episode of *Doc Martin*. We have a dog in that all the time and various other dogs come down. The worry is that you'll lose filming time because of them, but the dog was brilliant. We lost more time due to me rather than him."

"The highlights of *Vanity Fair* for me have been the animals, as much as I appreciate the other cast. But I'm very happy working with the horses or playing with the dog."

Q: What sort of costumes did you wear to play Sir Pitt?

"Really annoying breeches, tights, waistcoats, shirt, cravat and all of that stuff. Uncomfortable and annoying to wear. Sir Pitt also pops a wig on for special occasions."

Cast interview

Martin Clunes continued:

Q: Where did you film for Sir Pitt's country estate of Queen's Crawley?

"We filmed at West Horsley Place in Surrey and Mapledurham near Reading. The surroundings definitely help get into character. West Horsley was my favourite of all of the houses we visited. Freezing but beautiful. It's colder inside than out. But it is really pretty. And it looks real, lived in and a bit wonky."

Q: What do you make of the world of television drama today?

"It has changed, and for the better. Look at the amazing TV drama being made today. Everyone has to pull their socks up."

Q: What's next?

"I've been filming the ITV drama *Manhunt* about the police detective who pursued serial killer Levi Bellfield. That's been quite daunting, but it's a story worth telling. And it couldn't be more different from *Vanity Fair* or anything else I've ever done."

Cast interview

Frances de la Tour | Miss Matilda Crawley



Cast interview

Frances de la Tour | Miss Matilda Crawley

Q: How would you describe Matilda Crawley, who is introduced to viewers in episode two?

“Matilda is vain, snobbish and fierce, but it turns out she’s less snobbish than she first appears. She takes on young Becky Sharp (Olivia Cooke) who is ambitious and not of her class. So her snobbishness is more surface than deep. There are underlying things that make Matilda more interesting than just being a fierce snob.

“She is also vulnerable and frightened of dying. In a way that’s what makes Thackeray such a great writer. He doesn’t just write a harridan, he writes a harridan that is multi layered and it leaves you wondering what she was like when she was younger. Matilda probably was a little bit like Becky Sharp when she was younger.”

Q: How does she view the rest of the Crawley family?

“Matilda thinks they are appalling, dreadful and vulgar...because they are. Although she appears to be all those things, the very fact she can label the other members of the family as being more so shows she is really quite bright and aware of the difference between class and vulgarity. She would claim for herself that she is classy, but she is pretty vulgar herself as well.”

Q: Does she have a different view of her nephew Rawdon Crawley (Tom Bateman)?

“She has an entirely different view of Rawdon. Matilda doesn’t have children of her own. You take it at face value that he’s the son she never had. He is very charming and dashing and he has always been pretty good to Matilda. Whether it’s because he wants her money we don’t know. But I think they both have a fondness for each other, although she is much more genuinely fond of him than he is of her.”

Q: Why is Matilda charmed by Becky?

“Because Becky appears straightforward. She says what she thinks. She seems to be incredibly caring about Matilda and wanting to amuse her. She talks straight to her. Becky is not manipulative and vulgar like her relatives. She is a straightforward, honest - or so Matilda thinks - girl. That’s why Matilda takes Becky completely into her confidence. I think Matilda is the one character who really understands Becky the best.

“Sir Pitt (Martin Clunes) may recognise something manipulative about Becky because he’s manipulative himself and not really a desirable character. Matilda is much more understanding of where Becky is coming from. They are almost two sides of the same coin.”

Cast interview

Frances de la Tour continued:

Q: Why does Matilda feel betrayed by Rawdon and Becky later in the story?

“Because he acts behind her back. Matilda behaves like his mother while she realises Becky feigned affection for her. In other words, Becky and Rawdon aren’t sincere so her hurt goes very deep.”

Q: Is Becky a product of her background and this world?

“It’s a big question of women’s role in society which has not been resolved, even now. But then it was pretty awful. Unless you had money or married into money you weren’t even sure of having somewhere to live. Women didn’t own anything. If you wrote a book you didn’t own it - it belonged to your husband. Everything you possessed belonged to your husband. It was a pretty unfair world.

“So Becky schemes. Either you were going to be a victim or you schemed or you were lucky. There weren’t a lot of choices around. Many women just remained victims because they didn’t want to scheme, didn’t know how to or didn’t think it was right to. If they were righteous women they had no chance. You had to be a schemer to win. Which is very sad. Or you were a victim.

“It was all about money which makes it not so different to today. If you’ve got money you’re okay. If you haven’t got money, you aren’t. Even today the entitled remain entitled and the poor remain poor. It’s not very different.

“Except women have a voice today. But they’re only just beginning to have a voice. The movement where women said, ‘No more,’ could have happened 400 years ago, but it’s only just happening now. Which shows just how backward we still are.”

Q: At its heart, what story is *Vanity Fair* telling?

“Like a lot of great writers, Thackeray recognises the world for what it was. That it was tedious and unfair. But also, like Oscar Wilde would do, he would make fun of these people as would Chekhov. When he was writing *The Cherry Orchard* he was saying, ‘Can you believe these monied and entitled people are such fools?’

“There’s a radical side to a lot of these great writers like Thackeray. I think they would have quite liked a social revolution because they were so critical of the way it was. But there hasn’t been a social revolution. There have been all sorts of revolutions but not a real social revolution. At least they are saying, ‘It’s absurd. They’re absurd. And we’re to feel no sympathy for them whatsoever.’

Cast interview

Frances de la Tour continued:

"It's quite harsh because he's saying, 'And don't have sympathy for Becky Sharp, either.' Because all she is trying to do is get into that world. Whereas a real social revolutionary would not want to be part of that world. They would want to change it rather than be the one that wears the big hats."

Q: How does Matilda look on screen?

"The look is vain, snobbish and fierce! She is overdressed, very grand and very monied. So it's expensive, very big hats and so on. Matilda shows off. It's a bit over the top how she looks but that gets broken down as the story goes on. It always helps when you're in those costumes. It helps you say the lines in the way it's been written."

Q: What approach has screenwriter Gwyneth Hughes takes for this adaptation?

"Thackeray has a certain brilliance about him. Gwyneth Hughes' adaptation is pretty faithful to Thackeray. He is very funny, so from that point of view I think the audience will enjoy it."

"There is enormous enjoyment to be had. And it's relevant in as much as women are still fighting and monied people are still monied. There will always be a way that an audience can relate to it. But it still remains a period piece."

"We have a very good cast but you can't really know how good it is until it comes out. Other people may know, but I think actors are normally the last to know."

"I hope for the sake of all of the hard work we put into Vanity Fair that the audience will enjoy it because we did do it for them. In the end you do it for the audience. If people come up to you in a shop and say, 'You've given me great pleasure,' it's a nice thing to hear."

Q: How do you reflect on the experience of making Vanity Fair?

"I did love working with Olivia Cooke, Tom Bateman and Martin Clunes. In fact I liked working with everyone. It was a really nice and friendly cast and that made it easier. When I think how young Olivia is and she worked incredibly hard every day. The role of Becky Sharp is a big ask and she really delivered."

"I take my hat off to actors because we sometimes work in cold and difficult conditions. You put as much into it as you would if you were playing Hamlet on stage."

Cast interview

Frances de la Tour continued:

Q: Do you think vanity is prevalent in today's society?

"There's that thing of 'me, me, me' today. I hate that expression - 'selfies'. It says it all, really."

Q: One of the characters is a prolific letter writer. Is that a lost art in today's text world?

"I've kept many of the letters I've received over the years. It's very sad that today younger people in general don't know what a book is for because they don't read. They don't know what a phone is for. They actually don't talk on the phone. It's interesting that they now have this perpetual access to people but they don't actually talk to people. They text."

"They certainly don't know what a pen is for because writing is now text writing. So I think they are missing out enormously. A lot of it will fade so I don't think one should be too fearful."

"They said when films came out there would be no more theatre. Well that didn't happen. And the same was said when television came along and that didn't happen either."

"People say now, 'I wish I had an ordinary phone.' So I think it depends how it evolves. It's basically just happened in the last 10 years. It's a great loss."

"And in terms of the news and current affairs - it's almost like we've all got blinkers on now. At a time when through the internet we were able to see the whole world, it's had a reverse effect where you ignore the world and just concentrate on self."

Q: What are your thoughts about television drama today?

"Today, to get an audience to stay with you when there are so many choices - although some of the choices are dreadful - is a very risky business. I think the risk value is much greater than it used to be. Some of us spend months and months doing a series and you never know what happened to it. They disappear."

"When you've finished filming, you can tell the writing is good and the actors are good, but you can't tell the whole until it is broadcast."

Cast interview

Frances de la Tour continued:

“There have been some wonderful television dramas recently, including a lot of good things out of America. But we only see the good stuff from there. And in the UK there have been some very good television series as well.

“Reality television is so bad that it’s unwatchable! Then you get some really good television drama series. So it’s contradictory. I think it was very interesting the way audiences leaned towards Scandi drama, something that wasn’t English, ahead of voting for Brexit.”

Q: What has your choice of profession as an actor given you over the course of your career?

“It’s given me a lot of opportunity to see how other people live because that’s what plays are all about. How do other people live? And how do they live in other countries? So that’s been a privilege.

“But as is often the case, there’s been much less good stuff, unfortunately, than bad. There’s a lot of stuff you do because you’re bringing up children and you need the money and the quality goes a bit out of the window. And when it has been really good quality it’s normally been extremely good. So there are a lot of things to rejoice about.

“I don’t think I’d want to go through it all again. It was extremely hard work. Particularly in the theatre. The public mainly know you from television but they don’t know the half because they don’t know that stuff you did night after night after night. Which is a killer physically. You might have been performing on stage eight times a week for months and because you’re not on television a taxi driver will say, ‘Oh, have you retired?’

“You see amazing performances where actors have given blood, sweat and tears for three hours. It’s like asking someone to do the marathon twice in one day. I think there has been an underestimation of what actors actually go through.

“It’s a very hard craft. It’s very difficult for people not in the business to actually understand and I can’t blame them for not understanding it.

Frances de la Tour continued:

“What’s important is that you give your all, but it isn’t your all. Your all is also your family and your friends. My life is my family and has been ever since I was quite young. Except I balanced it. You had to do both and you had to do both 100 per cent. The only way you got away with that was because you were young but when you get older and you can’t give both 100 per cent, you then have to decide.

“There’s a lot of work I didn’t do. I would have hated to have been a film star because the work they put into not just the work but into presenting themselves on red carpets and things is a job in itself. And having to look great. Maybe have a facelift or two. Their whole lives are dominated by their work. Their work is half the job itself and the rest is presentation.

“So I’m with the actors who go, ‘Well, forget the presentation.’ Let’s just do the work. The rest of the time it was with my children and now it’s with my grandchildren.”

Character biographies

Becky Sharp played by Olivia Cooke

Becky Sharp wants nothing more in life than to climb up the ranks of English Society. Resilient and strong-willed, she is obsessed with status and wealth and will stop at nothing to make her mark on the world. Becky can be deceitful and cruel but is endlessly resourceful and determined to succeed.

Amelia Sedley played by Claudia Jessie

Bonny, gentle and popular, Amelia Sedley is good-natured and only wants to be married and happy. She is naïve and blindly loyal to George Osborne, the man she has planned to marry since childhood, despite his many faults.

Jos Sedley played by David Fynn

Jos Sedley is Amelia's brother and is exceedingly vain and self-important. He is a bachelor on service in India as the collector of Boggley Wallah. Whilst he has made a considerable fortune in India and wears ridiculously extravagant clothes, Jos is hopeless around women and an utter coward.

George Osborne played by Charlie Rowe

George Osborne has been promised to Amelia Sedley since childhood. Confident, selfish and snobbish, George gambles and squanders his money away. Whilst he loves Amelia, the lack of chase bores him and he loves himself far more, taking advantage of her unceasing affection.

William Dobbin played by Johnny Flynn

William Dobbin is tall, gangly and impossibly shy. Selfless and sincere, Dobbin is hopelessly in love with Amelia, but would never admit it. He wants to do everything in his power to make sure that she marries George who is his best friend.

Rawdon Crawley played by Tom Bateman

Rawdon Crawley is Sir Pitt's dashing youngest son. He is a good-natured soldier and very fond of women, horses and gambling. Rawdon is not very bright but is wealthy Aunt Matilda Crawley's favourite nephew and soon falls for Becky's charms.

Character biographies

Sir Pitt Crawley played by Martin Clunes

Sir Pitt is an ignorant, boorish and disreputable baronet and owner of the Queen's Crawley mansion in darkest Hampshire. His finances are in a state of disrepair; he is stingy and dirty and treats his wife with total indifference. But it does not take long for him to become very fond of Becky.

Miss Matilda Crawley played by Frances de la Tour

Miss Matilda Crawley is Sir Pitt's unmarried sister who has inherited her mother's large fortune. She is everyone's favourite aunt – primarily because they want to be part of her will – but she despises them all and is vain, snooty and fierce.

Synopsis

Episode one



In a world where everyone is striving for what is not worth having, no-one is more determined to climb to the heights of English Society than Becky Sharp (Olivia Cooke).

The lowly teaching assistant issues her headmistress, Miss Pinkerton (Suranne Jones), with an ultimatum – pay her properly to teach at the Academy for Young Ladies, or find her a situation elsewhere. But Miss Pinkerton calls Becky's bluff, deciding to send her off into exile as a country governess. Kindly stockbroker's daughter Amelia Sedley (Claudia Jessie) takes pity on the poor homeless orphan and offers to take her home.

Amelia's dreams are like any other girl's – she wants to be married and happy. But Becky wants to make sure tomorrow is better than today, and she seizes this opportunity to better herself.

Becky quickly makes herself at home at the Sedley house, where she targets Amelia's wealthy but oafish brother, Jos (David Fynn). With Amelia's enthusiastic help, Becky makes it her mission to charm Jos into proposing marriage before the week is out.

Synopsis

Episode one continued:

Amelia persuades her snobbish fiancé, Lieutenant George Osborne (Charlie Rowe), to take the whole party out for a romantic night at the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens - the perfect chance for Becky to secure Jos's affections. George brings along his best friend Captain William Dobbin (Johnny Flynn), who is secretly in love with Amelia.

At Vauxhall, Becky hangs on Jos's every word, willing him to propose to her. But Jos is much more interested in drinking rack punch and ends up making a drunken fool of himself. When George ridicules his choice of a lower class bride and scares Jos off, Becky knows exactly who to blame for scuppering her plans.

Becky must now leave the Sedley house and journey to darkest Hampshire, to take up her position as governess at a rundown old mansion. Alone in the world again, Becky cheers up at the sight of Rawdon Crawley (Tom Bateman), her new master's dashing youngest son...

Cast and Production Credits

Key Cast Credits | Episode One

Becky Sharp.....	OLIVIA COOKE
Amelia Sedley.....	CLAUDIA JESSIE
Rawdon Crawley.....	TOM BATEMAN
William Dobbin.....	JOHNNY FLYNN
George Osborne.....	CHARLIE ROWE
Mr. John Osborne.....	ROBERT PUGH
Mr. John Sedley.....	SIMON RUSSELL BEALE
Mrs. Louisa Sedley.....	CLAIRE SKINNER
Jos Sedley.....	DAVID FYNN
Sir Pitt Crawley.....	MARTIN CLUNES
William Makepeace Thackeray.....	MICHAEL PALIN
Miss Pinkerton.....	SURANNE JONES
Jemima Pinkerton.....	KERRY GILBERT
Sam.....	RICHEL CAMPBELL
Rhoda Swartz.....	SIENA KELLY

Cast and Production Credits

Production Credits

Executive Producer and Writer.....	GWYNETH HUGHES
Executive Producer and Director	JAMES STRONG
Executive Producers.....	DAMIEN TIMMER
.....	TOM MULLENS
Producer.....	JULIA STANNARD
Director episode 6.....	JONATHAN ENTWHISTLE
Line Producer.....	PAULA MCBREEN
Director of Photography.....	ED RUTHERFORD
Casting Director.....	THEO PARK
Costume Designers.....	SUZIE HARMAN
.....	LUCINDA WRIGHT
Make Up Designer.....	VICKIE LANG
Production Designer.....	ANNA PRITCHARD
Art Director.....	HENRY JAWORSKI
Sound Recordist.....	DYLAN VOIGT
Script Supervisor.....	SARAH HAYWARD
Editor.....	STEVE WORSLEY
First Assistant Director.....	LIAM LOCK
Location Manager.....	BEN MANGHAM
Military Advisor.....	PAUL BIDDISS
Historical Advisors.....	AMBROGIO CAIANI
.....	OSKAR COX JENSEN
Production Co-ordinator.....	PHILIP KING

