

## The Victorian Family on Film and TV: Families, Lost and Found, OLLI, Fall, 2020

The family, that foundation stone of human society, was a favorite subject for the British writers of the Victorian period. The expectations of parents and children were quite different from those in today's world, but even in the rigid structure of the Victorian family, we can see a mirror of the perennial problems of our lives today.

This course will study, through adaptations into the format of the TV serial, how the basic issues of family life are expressed through some of the famous novels of that period. We will see a character who fakes his own death, and, through an assumed identity, must find a place in a new family (Charles Dickens, "Our Mutual Friend"). Thomas Hardy's novel, "Tess of the Durbervilles," shows how delusions of nobility play an important role in the developing tragedy. In Elizabeth Gaskell's novel "Wives and Daughters," the perennial clash between stepmother and stepdaughter is depicted, as well as the struggle of the same mother with her biologic daughter. William M. Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" is a mini-encyclopedia of the ways that greed, snobbery, and egotism help to destroy family cohesion.

### Schedule of Showings:

Sept. 4: "Wives and Daughters" (Elizabeth Gaskell) (1999)

Sept. 11: "Wives and Daughters," continued.

Sept. 18: "Our Mutual Friend" (Dickens) (1998)

Sept. 25: "Our Mutual Friend," continued.

Oct. 2: "Tess of the Durbervilles" (Hardy) (1979)

Oct. 9: "Vanity Fair" (Thackeray) (1987)

Oct. 16: "Vanity Fair" continued.

Oct. 26: To Be Announced

"Wives and Daughters" Script Written by Andrew Davies, Directed by Nicholas Renton

First Shown in the U.K. from Nov. 28 to Dec. 19, 1999

Time: 301 minutes

### The Cast:

Francesca Annis as Mrs. Hyacinth Gibson (formerly Fitzpatrick)

Justine Waddell as Molly

Bill Paterson as Mr. Gibson

Keeley Hawes as Cynthia (Fitzpatrick)

Deborah Findlay as Miss Phoebe

Barbara Flynn as Miss Browning

Emily McKenzie as Maria

Iain Glen as Mr. Preston

Tom Hollander as Osborne Hamley

Anthony Howell as Roger Hamley

Michael Gambon as Squire Hamley

Ian Carmichael as Lord Cumnor

Tonia Chuavet as Aimee

Elizabeth Sprills as Mrs. Goodenough  
Barbara Leigh-Hunt as Lady Cumnor  
Peter Copley as Robinson  
Rosamund Pike as Lady Harriet  
Shaughan Seymour as Lord Hollingford  
Fred Pearson as Sheepshanks  
Richard Coyle as Mr. Coxe  
Jemima Rooper as Lizzie Goodenough  
Georgie Glen as Miss Hornblower  
Jacqueline Pilton as Mrs. Dawes  
Tim Wallers as Mr. Henderson  
Roddy Maude-Roxby as St. Hilaire  
Dariel Pertwee as Lady Cuxhaven  
Ben Ellis as Mr. Wynne  
Gordon Gostelow as Williams  
Penelope Wilton as Mrs. Hamley

Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell (Stevenson) (1810-65) was the daughter of a Unitarian minister, and she was brought up by an aunt in Knutsford, Cheshire, the original of "Cranford," and of Hollingford in "Wives and Daughters." In 1832, she married William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister in Manchester. They had four daughters, and a son who died in infancy. After her son's death, as a distraction, she wrote her first novel, "Mary Barton," which is about a woman factory worker (1848). This novel attracted the attention of Charles Dickens, and much of her work was done for magazines edited by Dickens. "Cranford," (1853), about a small town run by women, was her best known work. "North and South" (1855) was about labor/management strife in the North of England. "Wives and Daughters" (1866) was unfinished at her sudden death in 1865. An editor wrote an Afterword in which he revealed what the author's intended finish would have been.

Gaskell was a beautiful woman, and among her many friends were Charlotte Brontë, John Ruskin, Thomas and Jane Carlyle, Charles Eliot Norton (her Platonic lover), and Florence Nightingale. With Dickens, the relationship was professional. They were not simpatico.

The message of her novels was the need for social reconciliation among various levels of society, and she was a keen observer of the manners, speech, and morals of the widest range of people.

She wrote the first biography of Charlotte Brontë, which contained passages which resulted in threatened lawsuits. This book was the foundation of the "Brontë Myth."

In her own time, Gaskell's novels were regarded on the same levels as the Brontës' and George Eliot. Then, they lost favor and were neglected for a century. In recent decades she has enjoyed a revival, in which TV has played an important part.

There is a 1971 BBC TV version, with very fine performances. Oddly enough, that version omits the episode of Molly's childhood, at the very beginning of the novel.