

The Functions Of "Letter" As an Element of The Narrative Structure of W. Thackeray's Novel "Vanity Fair"

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Abstract: The article examines the functions of "writing" as a way of contrasting the characters in W. Thackeray's novel "Vanity Fair". It is noted that the "letters" in the novel play an important role on a compositional and motivational level. Special attention is paid to the representation of the concept of "wealth" in the "letters" given in the novel. This analysis is informed by the current trends and approaches in reading narratives from the Victorian era, with a focus on the relations between Thackeray's letters and imperialism, emotional distance, and performativity.

Keywords: Writing, situation, context, reaction, artistic concept, motive, narrative structure.

Introduction: Narrative Form and Social Critique

W. Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* is a large-volume work in which the author reveals the vices of Victorian society. It was published in 1853. Continuing the existing national tradition of describing life in England, following Fielding, W. Thackeray ridicules the immoral model of life in English society in his novel. It should be noted that the author chooses a peculiar form of narrative in which he expresses his thoughts implicitly [5,240], thereby showing his individual, creative manner against the background of a traditional English novel of the 19th century. The author personifies his image in the novel as a Puppeteer who acts as an observer of everything that happens, thereby giving a subjective description of events. The Puppeteer's comments emphasise the main idea of the novel, laid down by the author, that the world is fair where everything has material value, and wealth occupies a higher position than moral qualities. Thanks to the comments of the Puppeteer, the novel becomes extremely logically structured. Thus, Nakao (2024)

suggested that this type of narrator, often known as the "Thackeray-type narrator", functions on the basis of performance where he mimes character psychology and frequently intermixes free indirect discourse with authorial judgment to evoke rampant uncertainty. [8, 22]

Research

Along with the Puppeteer's comments, W. Thackeray uses "letters" as a special component of the narrative structure. Following the literary tradition of the classic English novel of the 19th century, in which "letters" are considered a constructive element of a work of art, W. Thackeray, in the novel "Vanity Fair", in several cases, refers to "letters" using their expressive possibilities. In this article, we will consider the versatility of letters by making a specific thematic classification. It seems that the parts of the novel in which the author uses "letters" as an element of narration provide an opportunity to consider "character subtexts" in their pure form [2,17], determine the spatial and temporal separation of events, perform a communicative and pragmatic

function, and are also significant at the compositional level since they are included in the general context of the novel. Letters are a necessary element of the composition of a textual whole. As Glovinsky (2020, 96) pointed out, the application of the epistolary form by Thackeray is purposeful since the novel in letters was gradually evolving into realism by the third-person omniscient narrator at the time of the writing. Therefore, the letters in *Vanity Fair* may be seen as belonging to the bygone form of the novel but also as a means of distancing the reader on the part of the author.

DISCUSSION

Firstly, it is crucial to point out that the letters mentioned in the novel are used as a tool for the formation of characters. In this regard, it is necessary to agree with the ideas of O. V. Protopopova, based on which the first person can be viewed as the epistolary form of psychological convincing, the actualisation of the inner spiritual state of characters, the creation of intimacy in the narratives, and the ability to reveal the character's personality more or less. [4,634] Considering the personal nature of the letters, we believe that in the text of the novel, "letters" act as a manifestation of character subtexts through which the concepts of "poverty-wealth" are actualised. According to A.A. Boronin: "One of the stages of an adequate interpretation of character subtexts is the allocation of special semantic units in their structure—concepts" [2,17]. The scientist notes that the study of concepts makes it possible to describe the personal characteristics of a fictitious subject more thoroughly.

Therefore, considering the letter written by Rebecca Sharp to Emilia, it can be determined that when narrating the events that took place, she highlights material wealth: "one of them has the bed in which Queen Elizabeth slept;... old cup, both gold and silver..." [7,49] N.S. Bolotnova focuses on "the associative layer that, in the process of the reader's cognitive activity, forms ideas about different aspects of the artistic concept reflected in the text" [1,75]. The textual associative field of the concept of "wealth" is numerous (carriage, coat of arms, huge house), which stands out especially in Becky Sharp's letters. Through letters, the author shows her the value of material wealth, thereby modelling her psychology. "Letters", in this case, act as a means of self-presentation of the heroine. Note that at the end of this letter, the Puppeteer's comments are given, which highlight the "keywords" of Rebecca's letter – "lady weeping for the loss of her beauty", "with hay-coloured whiskers and straw-coloured hair" [7,52], he ironically defines the main everyday problem – the capture of the groom. This interaction of the letter and the narratorial

response thus vindicates Harden's (1967) assertion that Thackeray achieves a formal unity as he relates the characters' inner transformations and motifs in the use of both the embedded and authorial narrator.

Secondly, letters in the novel are an essential structural component that determines the chronology of the novel's actions and serves as a means of defining space-time relationships in the work. The novel "*Vanity Fair*" was written by W. Thackeray chronologically, taking into account the historical time of the action and the narrative of the hero's life. Chronological storytelling is a logical way to create a social ladder along which Rebecca ascends and establishes herself in a secular society in a short time. Therefore, U. Thackeray needs events related to the storyline of Becky Sharp's rise up the social ladder. Note that the author points to the transformation of events through the dynamics of space, which is significant in the work. Note that the author indirectly indicates the time and place of the events through the dates on the letters. Thus, the temporal-spatial aspect of the "letters" is significant in the novel. This use of letters to construct a narrative in *Nicholas Nickleby* also provides cohesion to the episodic plot of the novel, as also pointed out by Harden's (1967) formalist reading of the internal structure of the novel.

Thirdly, we emphasise that for W. Thackeray, "writing" is a way of subjectively characterising the heroines. Since the novel has the subtitle "A novel without a hero", the author does not divide the characters of the story into positive and negative characters. However, we believe that the "letter" given at the beginning of the novel, written by Miss Pinkerton, is a way to get acquainted with the characters who will become the driving centre of events. At the same time, we note that the text of the letter carries a hidden meaning, reflecting a positive modality towards Emilia: "... Miss Sedley ... whose delightful sweetness of temper has charmed ... the affectionate regards of her mistress"; and a negative one towards Rebecca: "Miss Sharp's stay in Russell Square may not exceed ten days". [7,6]

Thus, the "letter" is communicative, and it aims to identify the positive and negative subjective-evaluative characteristics of the characters in the novel. The important technique of "repeating" Pinkerton's negative opinion further allows Thackeray, emotionally but in a different context, to reinforce Rebecca Sharp's social inequality in Crowley's camp: "I have nothing to say in her displeasure... I am sure nothing will occur to injure them in the elegant and refined circle of the eminent Sir Pitt Crawley» [7,64]. It is important for Miss Pinkerton that Rebecca's position has changed; where she is now in a wealthy society. A change in the social status of a character is the reason for contrasting

characteristics about her. In addition, since Rebecca is from a noble family and is a pupil of Miss Pinkerton's school, saying bad things about her can affect her reputation. This underlines the accursed share's distinct epistolary characteristics, as Nakao (2024) calls it, 'narratorial performance,' which unearths further inner evaluations masked by politeness.

Fourthly, the ontological nature of the letters lies in the fact that they are a component of W. Thackeray's narrative strategy. Note that the author cites an entire chapter, framed as a letter, in which Rebecca tells her friend about the events of her life. This method of narrative allows us to describe different events within the framework of a single letter. Glovinsky (2020) stated that these longer letters are both textual "containment" and "sentimentality, thus making it possible for Thackeray to pillory and deploy the epistolary structure at the same time.

Fifth, in the modern scientific paradigm, there is the concept of an epistolary linguistic personality, which is understood as the author (addressee) of the content of epistolary texts. In this regard, A.V. Kuryanovich makes a classification of categorical parameters of an epistolary linguistic personality, among which the researcher identifies the level of "rhetorical skill necessary to achieve communicative tasks and expressed in the justified and effective use of stylistic resources of language" [3, 259]. In creating the "letters" of the novel, the author also strictly follows the main idea of the novel, pointing to the rhetorical skill of Becky Sharp. Note that in the part "Before the curtain", the Puppeteer characterises Rebecca as: "... flexible at joints" [7,3].

This definition of the author finds its proof throughout the novel, as the author shows her skill in cunning not only in life situations but also acts as a brilliant adventurer who can. It is "correct" to express your thoughts by choosing the right words. Dictating the text of the letter to her husband, Rawdon Crowley, Rebecca chooses words that could soften Lady Crowley's relationship with her nephew: "... which very possibly may be fatal ... say goodbye to my dearest and earliest friend" [7,165]. This tactical use of rhetoric underscores the notion of Rebecca as a constructed 'epistolary personality,' as she moulds herself and her letters into a work of art, reflecting 'sentimental distance' as understood by Glovinsky (2020) in relationship to Thackeray's narrator.

Sixth, by analysing the "letters" in the novel "Vanity Fair", it becomes evident that the "letters" given in the novel provoke events or motivate them. It should be noted that the proposed opinion of I.V. Silantyev, who highlights: "... the characteristic way of naming a motif

through a keyword" [6,84], is very relevant to our study. So, in Rawdon's "letter" to his aunt Lady Crawley, which Rebecca dictates, it is possible to clearly identify the keywords that the author uses as a definition of the character's motif repertoire. Note that the author cites several similar situations in which writing serves as an actualizer of the characters' motives. We find interesting two mirror situations in which Rebecca Sharp dictates to her husband, Rodon, the text of letters that he sends to his rich aunt. "My dear Aunt,"... [7,159]. In this case, the "letter" acts as an actualised of the intentions of the characters – that is, it is not written to ask for forgiveness sincerely but for the benefit of Rebecca Sharp and her husband Rodon want to receive.

The "letter" is also significant for the development of the plot, as old Miss Crawley realises that Rawdon did not write this letter himself, and thus her hatred for Rebecca increases. As already noted, this situation repeats itself after the Battle of Waterloo, when Rebecca also dictates to her husband what he needs to write in a letter to his aunt. The author repeats a similar situation in which the intention of the letter is to reveal the character of the characters. The significance of these events lies in the definition of Rebecca Sharp as a cunning adventurer who controls her husband. In their family, she plays the leading role and manipulates her husband. It is also important to note that for all her cunning, the author points to her intellectual abilities when she corrects her husband's mistakes: "You old booby," Rebecca said, pinching his ear and looking over to see that he made no mistakes in spelling—"beseech is not spelt with an a, and the earliest is. "So, he altered these words, bowing to the superior knowledge of his little Missis" [7,159].

The recurring motif of letter-dictation shows the formally conditioned mechanism of the imagery that accentuates Rebecca's domination in domestic and rhetorical spaces. According to Silantyev (2004, 103), this indicates the "keyworded" nature of motivational topics in characters' actions.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the analysis of the "letters" in W. Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* shows that they are multifunctional. The main function of "writing" is modelling characters' images. Similarly, "letters" determine the chronology of the development of actions and are a special component of the author's narrative strategy. The significance of "letters" is also in the motivational repertoire, as they provoke events.

In addition to their structural role, letters in *Vanity Fair* are also narrative and ideological means that merge sentimental tradition and satire. The narrator's

distancing from the letter toward imperialism and formalism creates a tension that is not easy to decipher. Thus, the epistolary methodology is not by any means limited to the sphere of characters' communication; it also manifests itself in the planes of the cultural performance of feelings and the establishment of the narrator's position.

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