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MASKS IN THE WORKS OF W.M. THACKERAY

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This paper is devoted to the phenomenon of mask in general and about masks in the works of a famous English writer of the Victorian age W.M. Thackeray in particular.

When we start thinking about a mask the first thing that comes to our mind is that it is an object used to cover a face in order to hide it or to protect it. If we continue thinking about a mask we'll remember about carnival masks, sport mask, medical masks, military masks, literature masks, etc.

Masks make up an inalienable part of a person's life, we see them and we wear them everywhere.

The key element of masking is simultaneous concealing and revealing of the content, by selecting aspects to be shown and those to be hidden, which enables manipulating the expressed message.

Today plenty of scientists of numerous scientific fields are interested in the phenomenon of mask. Mask is a focus point in the researches of historians, philosophers, psychologists, etc.

There are several approaches towards the analysis of this problem; I mean the problem of mask. They are the following: psychological approach, sociological approach, linguistic approach, literary approach, etc. These approaches focus on different aspects, but remain complementary.

According to sociological approach everyone, when in a social situation (in the company of others), behaves like an actor on stage. The mask is a synonym of role of which everyone has many types and constantly chooses the one most appropriate to the given situation, using various strategies of selection to make the best possible impression on observers in the interaction.

In psychology the mask is one's whole public personality, "the social self" which may be called an "interface", as it is a mediator between the human inner world and the external world.

The mask is expressed in roles and social customs, and it is an inevitable element of an individual's functioning in a society; the mask also possesses a function of protecting the most vulnerable

A mask in language may be seen as a type of a sign (such as a word or expression) where the signified is intentionally profiled depending on the perspective and will of the user. Certain aspects (elements) of meaning are concealed, while other ones are selected to be revealed or stressed.

Masking may employ various language tools. Common ones include: metaphor, metonymy, euphemism, passive and impersonal strategies, hyperbole, riddles (to be guessed from the context).

A separate broad category of masking language tools is humour, including irony.

Its most common masking function is entertaining and creating a sense of solidarity or common ground, and a distance to reality.

W.M. Thackeray is known for his humour, irony, skepticism, mockery and sarcasm and while getting acquainted with his works we meet masks, we figuratively speaking stub toe against them at every step.

If we take his fairy tales for example "The rose and the ring" we'll find there nice examples of masks: The rose and the ring here are masks which when worn make the princess Angelica and the prince Balbo the most beautiful and wisest in the world but without them they looked exceedingly plain and foolish, ridiculous and ugly.

During his career as a journalist Thackeray often used pseudonyms for example Yellowplush and Titmarsh. Use of these temporary personalities helped to shorten the distance between the reader and the writer, gave room for irony, mockery, satire and sarcasm and released from some responsibility.

And now let's pass to Thackeray's the most popular novel, novel that brought him fame and recognition, I mean "Vanity fair". This novel simply bursts with masks. We find here numerous examples of different kinds of masks. It seems that every personage in this novel wears a mask.

Let's take Rebecca Sharp.

She was a young girl, small and slight in person; pale, sandy haired, and with eyes habitually cast down, when they looked up they were very large, odd and attractive. Fluent in both French and English, Becky had a beautiful singing voice, played the piano, and showed great talent as an actress. But she was also completely amoral, manipulative and without conscience. She did not seem to have the ability to get attached to other people, and lied easily and intelligently to get her way. She desired social and financial security above all things.

In her letter to Amelia she wrote that she had passed the fatal night in which she had separated from Amelia in tears and sadness but in reality she concluded the operation of wiping her eyes with her handkerchief the very moment the carriage had turned the corner of the street, counted her guineas and began to depict in her mind what a baronet must be.

Sir Pitt Crawley, Baronet was an old, stumpy, short, vulgar and very dirty man in old clothes and shabby old gaiters who spoke with a country accent, smoked a horrid pipe and cooked his own horrid supper comprising triple, onion and beer in a saucepan and travelled in a coach.

But when in his mansion he wore a mask of respectability. He made his entrance to his park in state – a carriage and four splendid horses with armorial bearings awaited him within four miles from his mansion. He took his gaiters off and was in full dress. The sideboard was covered with glistening old plates and cups both gold and silver, everything on the table was in silver too, and two footmen stood on every side of the sideboard.

John, Mr Sedley's groom, behaved in a proper manner while Becky was in a Sedley's house but was no longer respectful to Miss Sharp and behaved rudely and insolently as her connexion with the family was broken off and as she had given nothing to the servants on coming away.

Joseph Sedley on his return from India plunged into delightful pleasures of a gay young bachelor in a town. He drove his horses in the Park, dined at the fashionable taverns, frequented the theatres, made his appearance at the Opera and on returning back to India he used to talk about that period of existence with great enthusiasm and gave you to understand that he was one of the leading bucks of the day. But that was only a mask because in reality he was in London as lonely as in his jungle, he scarcely knew a single soul in the town and were it not for his doctor and the society of his liver complaint he must have died of loneliness.

George Osborne was a son of a City man who was immensely rich. He wanted to be taken as a representative of a higher society and he said that his father was a gentleman because he had his own carriage and he'd go to the deuce to be seen with a lord. He paid their dinners and they invited the company and got what money they liked out of him.

Miss Pinkerton – the head of an academy for young ladies did not understand a word of French, she only directed those who did but she was too proud to confess it.

And even Amelia Sedley who was very charming, good-natured, kind and naïve can be accused of greed and duplicity. She insisted upon Rebecca accepting muslin dress but because it was too small for her and she wanted to present Rebecca white cashmere shawl but only because her brother had just brought her two from India.

Even the title of the novel is also a kind of a mask under which society with all its hypocrisy, opportunism, greed, idleness and snobbery is hidden.

Literary critics said that "Vanity fair" was a portrait of the English society of the 19 century but we can say that it's a true portrait of any society and at any time. In the 21 century we also meet people similar to those characters whose realistic and detailed portraits are masterfully drawn by the talented and pinpoint hand of the great artist W.M. Thackeray.

Well, the mask is an inevitable element of an individual's functioning in a society; it's like the skin on the body and our life is just a sequence of alternating masks. Mask may often mislead others about the wearer's personality and we often identify persons with their roles and take the mask for the actual person.

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