

“Vanity Fair” by William Makepeace Thackeray [B2]

Il romanzo racconta la storia di Becky Sharp, ambiziosa e astuta, e di Amelia Sedley, innocente e leale. La trama esplora le dinamiche dell’ambizione e della lotta sociale nell’Inghilterra del XIX secolo.

William Makepeace Thackeray wove many of his own experiences into his greatest work, *Vanity Fair*. A satirical story of English society set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic War, it was published in monthly instalments during 1847-48. The novel intertwines the fortunes of two women and describes the social manoeuvring, morality, gender roles, and class barriers of the Regency period.

HER OWN WAY

In Rebecca ‘Becky’ Sharp, Thackeray created one of literature’s most memorable characters. Independent, strong-willed, amoral and manipulative, she refuses to follow the roles and rules of early 19th-century Britain. Becky Sharp does things her own way. In contrast, her friend Amelia Sedley is everything a young woman should be: polite, sentimental and devoted. When Amelia’s brother, Jos, leaves a note rejecting Becky as a possible wife, Amelia is truly upset for her friend. “It was the death-warrant. All was over. Amelia did not dare to look at Rebecca’s pale face and burning eyes, but she dropt the letter into her friend’s lap; and got up, and went upstairs to her room, and cried her little heart out.” “Era una condanna a morte: tutto era finito. Amelia non osò fissare la faccia pallida e gli occhi scintillanti di Rebecca, ma gettò il biglietto in grembo all’amica e corse in camera a sfogare il suo dolore.”

RULING CLASSES

Becky takes a position as governess at Queen’s Crawley, which is owned by the crude, lecherous Sir Pitt Crawley. Before long, she marries his youngest

son, Rawdon Crawley. They live an extravagant lifestyle in Paris and London, despite having no **income**. "How to live well on Nothing a Year [...] Some three or four years after his stay in Paris, when Rawdon Crawley and his wife were established in a very small comfortable house in Curzon Street, Mayfair, there was scarcely one of the numerous friends who they entertained at dinner that did not ask the above question regarding them." "Come viver bene senza avere un soldo [...] Quando, tre o quattro anni dopo il loro soggiorno a Parigi, Rawdon e la moglie si stabilirono in un piccolo e comodo appartamento in Curzon Street, a Mayfair, non ve n'era uno, fra i numerosi amici invitati a cena da loro, che non si ponesse la domanda cui abbiamo accennato sopra."

REUNITED

When Amelia's husband dies in battle, she is left with a young son and memories of her marriage. Becky, too, loses her husband — but for different reasons. A **chance meeting** reunites Becky with Amelia and her brother Jos, who remains **gullible**. Becky has plans for them all, but can she be trusted? Major William Dobbin, loyal family friend, makes his views clear: "That little devil brings mischief wherever she goes," the Major said disrespectfully. 'Who knows what sort of a life she has been leading? And what business she has here abroad and alone? Don't tell me about persecutors and enemies; an honest woman always has friends and is never separated from her family.' "— Quel piccolo demonio porta la disgrazia con sé, dovunque vada, — disse poco ceremoniosamente Dobbin. — Chi sa che vita ha fatto finora; e perché si trova qui, sola, all'estero? Non mi parlare di nemici e di gente che la perseguita; una donna onesta ha sempre chi la protegge e non si separa mai dalla famiglia."

A TRUE GENTLEMAN

Standing quietly in the background **throughout**, Dobbin remains the one true gentleman in the novel. **Awkward**, modest, Dobbin has courage, emotional intelligence and a strong **sense of duty**. He loves Amelia, but believes her to be **weak**. After many years of devotion, he finally speaks his

mind. "No, you are not worthy of the love which I have devoted to you' [...] Amelia stood scared and silent as William thus suddenly broke the chain by which she held him and declared his independence and superiority. He had placed himself at her feet so long that the poor little woman had been accustomed to trample upon him. She didn't wish to marry him, but she wished to keep him. She wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all. It is a bargain not unfrequently levied in love." "—No, non siete degna dell'amore che vi ho consacrato." [...] Amelia, silenziosa e sgomenta, ascoltava William che, così, d'un tratto, rompeva le catene con cui lo teneva avvinto e affermava la sua indipendenza, la sua superiorità. Era stato per tanto tempo ai suoi piedi che s'era abituata a calpestarlo: non voleva sposarlo, ma lo voleva tener legato a sé; non voleva dargli nulla, ma voleva ricevere tutto da lui... Patti di questo genere non sono rari in amore."

MORAL MAZE

Vanity Fair was the first work published by Thackeray under his own name. He used a sub-title too: A Novel without a Hero. In the moral maze of his masterpiece, none of the characters are without flaws. The critics loved it. Even the upper class, who Thackeray satirised in Vanity Fair, hailed his novel as a work of genius, and it brought him celebrity and prosperity.

Glossary

- **intertwines** = intrecciare
- **throughout** = durante tutto il tempo
- **maze** = labirinto
- **chance meeting** = incontro casuale
- **gullible** = credulone, ingenuo
- **weak** = debole
- **against the backdrop** = con il telone di fondo
- **lecherous** = lascivo
- **Before long** = poco dopo
- **Awkward** = goffo
- **sense of duty** = senso del dovere
- **flaws** = difetti
- **hailed** = acclamare
- **instalments** = fascicoli
- **strong-willed** = tenace
- **upset** = turbata
- **governess** = istitutrice
- **income** = reddito