

# "The main female characters in the novel "Vanity Fair» by William Thackeray

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**Annotation:** The article presents the life of two women: Emily Sedley, as well as her friend and at the same time rival – Rebecca sharp.

Describing the life path of each of the girls, Thackeray shows in his work, and in life as well, how cruel the confrontation of good and evil is. He recognizes not only good-nature, meekness, and love for one's close person, but also hypocrisy, self-interest, vanity, and selfishness, since they are inseparable from human life.

In the novel "vanity Fair", good and evil are in a state of balance, neither force wins. Thus Thackeray makes the reader understand the following: as long as good and evil are engaged in a fierce struggle, life on earth continues.

**Key words:** Vanity fair, Emilia Sedley, Rebecca sharp, Thackeray, selfish, attitude to women in society, mad love, jealousy, heroine, happy marriage, George Osborne, Dobbin.

Speaking about the foreign classical literature of the XIX century, it is hardly possible to ignore such a significant figure as William Makepeace Thackeray and, undoubtedly, one of his most famous novels, "vanity Fair" (1847 - 1848).

The pages of "vanity Fair" unfold a wide panorama of life in England in the first half of the XIX century. The novel presents people from different social circles, but the author makes the plot center of the book one of the eternal themes of world literature – the story of two women. Thus, the composition of the novel consists of two storylines: the life of Emily Sedley, as well as her friend and at the same time rival – Rebecca sharp.

Emilia is the daughter of a successful merchant, has an even and gentle disposition, and is universally adored. Becky is an orphan, the daughter of a drunken artist and a French dancer who left their daughter only a bright appearance, artistry, intelligence and a brilliant knowledge of the French language. She lives with miss Pinkerton as a French teacher for the younger pupils.

Emilia Sedley is the only person Becky treats with almost genuine kindness. "Almost" - because the friendship is poisoned by both Becky's awareness of the inequality of their situation, and the fact that Emilia, who did not know the need, can not understand Becky's problems and help her friend.

The girls leave the boarding house together. Emilia – in order to settle with her parents and soon marry the son of a wealthy businessman, officer George Osborne, whom she adores. Becky has a job as a governess in an impoverished aristocratic family, but before she starts working, she is invited by a friend to stay with her for a while.

The moment Rebecca sharp leaves boarding school is the beginning of her difficult struggle for her place in life. She does not stop at intrigues or careless actions, just to achieve her goal: to be rich, to shine in society, to live in pleasure. Rebecca is selfish and cruel, heartless and vain. Thackeray is merciless in portraying this clever adventurer, but at the same time, with all the logic of his work, he convincingly proves that the people around her are no better. Unlike many others, Becky is devoid of hypocrisy. This consists in the fact that, soberly reasoning about the people around her, she does not close her eyes to her own actions. Rebecca is well aware that only money will help her to take the desired place in society, and for them she is ready to do anything.

The complete opposite of Rebecca sharp, Amelia Sedley is a virtuous and respectable creature. Emilia is a gentle, sweet, trusting girl who is impossible not to love. "All the virtues of a noble English lady, and all the perfections of her birth and station, belong to dear miss Sedley," wrote

miss Pinkerton in her message to Emily's parents. However, the descriptions of the angelic girl sound undisguised irony. Emilia is limited and insignificant, and she is no less selfish than any of the participants in the show at the fair. This is the social type whose behavior is due to constant dependence on the father, husband, son, even girlfriend. Emilia idealizes the image of the deceased spouse, so she does not notice what is happening around her: she does not see the love of William Dobbin, the suffering of her parents. However, after the death of her mother, the girl completely devoted herself to the unfortunate father. Thackeray combined advantages and disadvantages in this image, emphasizing that they have such common origins as the system of education, the attitude to women in society.

Throughout the novel, the author continuously compares Emilia Sedley and Rebecca sharp, describing them in the same positions, but with different outcomes.

Both girls married at the same time. Unlike Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, Mrs. George Osborne loved, but was not loved. After a certain time, Emilia and Rebecca became mothers: Mrs. Sedley lived as one child, wrapped the helpless creature in love and adoration. For Rebecca, her own son was a burden, a nuisance. She didn't love him.

Miss sharp had done almost one decent thing in her life. She helped destroy the mad love that Emilia had been a victim of for a long time. Of course, Rebecca had an interest in her friend's second marriage, because she wanted her brother, Joseph Sedley. Nevertheless, Becky helped Emilia.

Emilia, by nature a gentle and peaceful being, considers Becky at the beginning of the novel as her friend and, moreover, even her sister. When, after leaving miss Pinkerton's boarding-house, Becky goes to stay with Emily, and, having met Emmie's brother, Joz, decides that she must marry him, Emmie rejoices at the prospect of being related to her friend, perhaps even more sincerely than Rebecca herself. After Becky's engagement to Joz fails and Becky goes to live with baronet Pitt Crawley as a governess, Emilia sees her friend off in a very touching way, gifts her extravagantly with her ribbons and dresses, and weeps heartily as she watches the carriage take Becky away. While Becky wipes her eyes with a handkerchief just before the carriage pulls out of the Sedley gate. The writer goes on to describe the lives of Emily and Becky separately, and the development of their relationship is delayed until Emily visits Becky at the Crawley estate. By this time, Becky is secretly engaged to Rawdon Crawley, and although she does not openly tell Emilia about it, the latter's sensitive female heart knows all about it. When they are alone in Becky's room, Emilia says admiringly that she understands everything. Emmys admire Rebecca's resourcefulness and ingenuity, because she herself would never have dared to do anything like this. But in the future, the paths of the heroines diverge and the friendship seems to end. Emilia marries her adored George Osborne, Becky runs away with Rawdon and begins her ascent in the world. This is not mentioned in the novel, but I think that, despite the fact that the communication of friends is interrupted, the meek and good-natured Emmy still loves Rebecca, considers her a close, loyal, good person, does not believe all the gossip about Becky, which is full of light. Emilia believes in Becky's integrity to the last. The last is the episode when the Osbourne` meet the Rawdons in military Brussels. George Osborne admires Becky and pays her every attention. Poor Emilia sees all this, but doesn't want to notice it. She knows that she can't compete with Rebecca's intelligence, beauty, position, and wit. And Emilia begins to be terribly jealous of her husband's friend, although she tries to hide her jealousy in every possible way. She can't stand it at the ball when her husband leaves her alone, and when he sees Rebecca enter, he rushes to her. As Emmy would later learn, George wanted to run off with Becky that night: he left her a note in a bouquet with a confession and a request to run away with him. That night, poor Emmy's heart is filled with jealousy and resentment. She remembers all the conversations about Becky and the coldness of her friend's treatment to her. Emilia decides never to help Becky in anything again, she feels that her friendship has been violated and insulted. Then George is killed in the war. Here, Emily is completely inconsolable, because she understands that the last night of her life, her adored husband spent not with her, but with Becky. And when Rebecca comes to visit a widowed friend, Emily attacks her with reproaches and insults. Which, of course, Rebecca is not going to tolerate.

Becky's attitude toward Emilia is motivated by Rebecca's nature: she uses people for personal purposes and is a good judge of people. She sees Emmy's unassuming mind, her excessive meekness, modesty, and kindness. I seriously doubt that Becky is capable of a real, genuine friendship at all. She can't even be truly grateful. But she knows very well how to play this feeling, as well as many others. She is kind and attentive to Emmy when she sees a direct benefit in this attitude. For example, at the beginning of the novel, when they graduate from boarding school, or when Becky goes to visit Emily. She is well aware of her power over this gentle heart and uses it. Throughout the novel, Becky thinks Emilia is stupid, naive, too kind, too shy. And Becky hides and shows these feelings as she needs something from Emily or not. It is also important to say that from the very beginning, Rebecca is jealous of Emilia. After all, Emmy has a rich, loving family, a mother and father who are engaged in her marriage and the arrangement of her life, there is money and a name. And Becky has nothing but her mind, dexterity, and resourcefulness. And so, at the very beginning of the novel, Rebecca sets herself a goal: to become better than Emilia. Higher. Successfully. And Rebecca takes pride in the sense of her triumph when she meets Emilia's carriage while she is riding alongside one of the wealthiest and most famous generals in the English army. Becky is always happy to be lenient with Emilia when she has reason to be, but she also doesn't shy away from complaining, pretending to repent, and begging for help if Emmy can help her in any way. So, going from one extreme to the other, and the relationship between Becky and Emily is built on the first side. Between triumphs and defeats, the entire novel passes, and only at the end does Thackeray decide to give his heroine a chance to "improve" in the eyes of the reader. Many years later, a disgraced, lost Rebecca meets Joseph Sedley, Emilia's brother, at a card club. Rebecca is wearing a mask, but Jose knows her voice. Becky tells him all the failures of her life and begs him to come to her hotel for a meeting. Joseph visits Becky and her story makes such an impression on Joseph that when he comes home, he tells everything to his sister, which throws the gentle Emily into shock and fright. Emilia comes to Rebecca, is convinced of what kind of life has come to her old friend, and pity overwhelms poor naive Emily. She moves Becky to her house with a determination that is completely uncharacteristic of her. She does not listen to Dobbin's arguments, who sees the essence of Becky and warns Emily against her. But Emily is adamant. Due to Becky starting to live in Emilia's house, the latter has a quarrel with Dobbin and he leaves. Here, Rebecca can't stand Emily's stupidity (Becky sees what Emmy stubbornly refuses to notice: only Dobbin has loved Emily all his life, and she has rejected him). So Becky feels guilty about the quarrel and Dobbin's departure. In short, she decides to set the stupid Emmy on the right path and shows her the very note that George Osborne put in the bouquet many years ago. Rebecca sees how Emily is blinded by love for George, sees that it is the shame of her infidelity to this "Holy" man that keeps Emily from relaxing and living happily with Dobbin. So she shows her the note. Emily's reaction was exactly what Becky had expected. Emilia goes to the Wharf to meet the steamer on which she feels Dobbin is coming. Dobbin arrives, there is a wonderful reunion of lovers, everyone is happy that Dobbin is back. Becky sees his attitude towards her and understands that she has nothing more to do here and nothing to wait for. By doing so with a note from George, Becky is doing good for the first time in her life without counting on her own profit from it. On the part of Rebecca, this episode may indicate that she is not such an anti-heroine: callous, cold, calculating. Perhaps she was grateful to Emilia after all. Perhaps Becky is even a little sentimental, which is not typical of her nature, because she has always kept a box that was given to her by Emilia. However, in this box, Becky hid from her husband the jewelry given by rich men and a stash of money. Of course, she had caused Emily a lot of grief and disappointment, and after helping to reunite her friend with Dobbin, she continued to ruin Emily's brother Joaz, but it was Becky that Emily owed her life's happiness. Thus, we can not say that the attitude of Rebecca to Emily is only consumer and ungrateful. It is multi-faceted and contradictory, like Becky herself, like life itself.

As we can see, the images of the central characters are contrasting, as are their fates: Emilia's monotonous existence is contrasted with the turbulent life of her school friend; Becky experiences ups and downs. Sometimes she acts as a director, whereas Emmy is always dependent on the people around her. Thackeray contrasts the static nature of Emilia with the dynamic nature of Becky. You can see that even the parts of the novel that tell about these girls are different: Emilia's

movements in space are insignificant, always determined by someone's will, while Becky's movements depend on her vanity.

The differences between Emilia and Rebecca are constantly emphasized by Thackeray throughout the story, but he does not make either of them the heroine of his novel. From all the above, we can conclude that Rebecca is a "bad, evil woman", and Emilia is a real heroine. But this conclusion will be a mistake, because Thackeray did not give his work another name for nothing - "a novel without a hero". Perhaps the heroine might have been Emilia Sedley, who was so much loved at the boarding school, but not Mrs. George Osborne, who almost ruined her own life, because of her selfish love, almost deprived her son of the opportunity to find a grandfather and aunt, get a decent education, and many other benefits. Nevertheless, for all her virtues, love, and fidelity, Emilia was rewarded with a happy marriage with a loved, loving, and devoted man. Rewarded, but not honored, as the heroine of a novel. Someone will say that this is correct, because Emmy is a weak and characterless creature, and someone will condemn the author and will prove that there is no one better, kinder and more beautiful than Emilia in this novel.

What about Rebecca? "Her story has remained a mystery," although we can safely say that the most spectacular figure at this vanity fair was Becky. It is represented as a "mask", or rather, a "set of masks" ("snake", "Fox", "siren",). Once, when the Crawley`s were still moving in high society, Rebecca confessed to her husband that she wanted to stand on stilts and dance so that "all these snobs" would be amazed. The life of Mrs. Rawdon Crawley may be called a drama. This is the drama of a talented person who destroys his talent for the sake of vain goals. Becky rose from the lowest circles, achieved a position in the highest, but then fell lower than before her marriage: her reputation was "killed", the young woman began to drink and play, and once luxurious dresses turned into " a dress not the first freshness with torn lace." But the author does not punish Rebecca for all the evil that "everywhere this woman carried", because she is not different from all the inhabitants of the fair, so why should she be punished?

The two-dimensional composition of the work-the line of Emilia Sedley, who belongs to bourgeois circles, and the line of Rebecca sharp, who aspires to join the aristocratic spheres - opened the opportunity for Thackeray to create a wide panorama of English life in 1815 – 1830-ies. But still, the main feature of the novel's composition is its philosophical embodiment. Describing the life path of each of the girls, Thackeray thereby shows in his work, and in general in life, how cruel the confrontation of good and evil is. He recognizes not only good-nature, meekness, and love for one's neighbor, but also hypocrisy, self-interest, vanity, and selfishness, since they are inseparable from human life. In the novel "vanity Fair", good and evil are in a state of balance, neither force wins. Thus Thackeray makes the reader understand the following: as long as good and evil are engaged in a fierce, sometimes merciless struggle, life on earth continues.

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