NAME CHOICE AND SYMBOLISM IN LITERATURE – AN OVERVIEW OF WILLIAM THACKERAY'S „THE BOOK OF SNOBS"

Lecturer and PhD student Manova-Georgieva Yana

Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad,
South-West University 'Neofit Rilski', Faculty of Philology

Abstract: The paper has the intention to unveil the hidden meaning of proper names in William Thackeray's „The Book of Snobs". The analysis involves characteristics related to proper names. Upon analyzing the meaning of proper names, a major ambition is to try to prove the importance of name giving and symbolism in literature. A summarized categorization of characters based on the meaning of anthroponyms is to be formed.

Keywords: proper nouns, anthroponyms, name symbolism, literature, meaning

Upon name giving, people strive for destiny giving and direction in a person's life. This phenomenon is present not only in everyday life, but is also seen in literature. Choosing a name for a character is a responsible task and equally important as building the actual character. There exist theories that are related to names and the meaning of names, but the most important issue when discussing antroponyms is their semantic value. That is why, this paper is an attempt to analyze the meaning and interpretation of proper names in English literature, and more specifically William Thackeray's „The Book of Snobs". For the purpose of the paper, 416 English proper names were excerpted and analyzed. A classification of the meaningful names is presented followed by the analysis of the basic groups of anthroponyms.

Characteristics of anthroponyms. Anthroponyms are related to linguistics in a way they have a meaning that is essential for the understanding of a language, a text or even a culture. Name bearers, especially in the English- speaking world, are flattered when asked about the meaning and origin of their name.

In the English naming tradition one can find different groups of names. The category of the wishing names is present, accompanied by the group of anthroponyms with non- transparent meaning as well as the group of the protective names. Names with non-transparent meaning are George (worker, one who cultivates land), Thomas (twin brother), Calvin (bald) etc.

The category of the wishing names carries the desire of the parents for their children to be beautiful, successful, good-natured, etc. The group of the protective names comprises mainly of saint names which names are believed to protect the individual and lead their faith into a positive direction. Such names are Mary, Joseph, etc.

Withycombe (1947:xix) suggests that names are given to the individual and usually consist of two parts. In the course of name choice there is the tendency to look for religious names, ones suggesting moral values or physical characteristics.

Naming traditions are an intriguing topic and it is always amazing to delve into the meaning and etymology of an anthroponym. Parents sincerely believe that giving a name to their child they predestine their future and success.

Names in English literature. Writers are in a way parents. They are creators, they give life, they predestine. They, like parents, spiritualize a character, attaching inner beauty as well as physical beauty, revealing positive features and sometimes even pointing at the negative ones, showing or hiding some characteristics of the literary image.
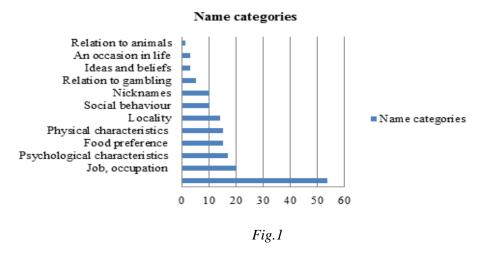
William Makepeace Thackeray is a master of name giving and symbolism. His characters are vivid, picturesque and colourful. For the purpose of the paper, 416 anthroponyms were excerpted. The book was translated into Bulgarian and published in 1986 by Mariya Rankova. With the translation, most of the names are explained in a footnote, showing their etymology and meaning. This is a great way to clearly show what is hidden behind each name.

As Vladimir Filipov clearly points out, Thackeray is not the first to deal with snobbishness. Jane Austen and Charles Dickens are also interested in revealing the snobbish nature of some of their characters. However, Thackeray is the first to investigate the matter that thoroughly, consistently and to such great detail. His novel "The Book of Snobs" shows the classes but not getting to the lowest possible ones. His simplest characters are the ones, belonging to the working class. (Filipov 1986: 12-14).

Upon analyzing the names, there appeared 167 meaningful names and 249 names with no semantic value. The novel includes also 82 names of real personalities.

Before going deeper in the categories of meaningful names, it is to be defined that the term "meaningful name" is used following Vlahov and Florin (1990) who use it for names which have "inner form, that is certain qualities of a common noun; allusiveness, i.e presented with the ability of the author to lead the reader towards a desired direction; and a phonetic form upon which a comical or satirical effect is to be created (1990:233). In other words, the analysis is mainly based on the belief that names do have meaning and therefore it is essential to decipher it in order to understand the message Thackeray, in particular, tries to render. The translator of "The Book of Snobs" has chosen to translate three names, which is unique for adult literature. Talking about the procedures related to names, there are several options for dealing with them. Transcription and transliteration are the usual procedure, but in the case of Thackeray's novel, the translator has decided to apply the procedure of explaining the meaning of symbolic names in a footnote.

In the course of the analysis, eleven categories of meaningful names were formed as well as a group of nicknames was identified.

Fig.1

As it is obvious, the largest number of meaningful names occupies the category of typical behaviour and attitude, where one finds fifty- four instances of proper names. What is interesting about this category is that the names show a specific characteristic of the recipient, as for example Count de Diddloff, which in a footnote in the Bulgarian translation is explained to be "cheat; waste time"(1986: 29). Other examples in this category include: The Princess Pimini ("pimini" – someone who is pretentious and snobbish); Lady Leach("leech" – a person who gives attention to someone over a long period in order to get their money or support); lady Clapperclaw (a chatterbox); lord Mumble (to groan about something), etc. Basically, the names in this category have negative connotation.

The second category is the one of occupations. Here fall twenty examples, and the meaning and hint of profession can be found usually in the surname of the character. Thackeray even uses a collective proper noun for a whole class – the Jeams (a footman) as well as the Johns, used with the same meaning. Other examples from this category are Knopf (button) and Stecknadel – pin), etc.

The third category comprises the psychological characteristics, with an estimated number of seventeen. The root word in this category lies actually in the idea of the novel. The names used here are related mainly to snobbishness and selfishness. This category includes Blanche Stiffneck, colonel Snobley, Fanny Highflyer, Lord Snobbington, Miss Snobky, etc.

A large number of the names fall into the category of food preferences – 15. Examples of such names are the Countess Dei Spinachi, Lord Claude Lollipop, Jack Puddington, etc. The meanings behind the names are obvious and easily deciphered.

The same number of examples falls in the category of physical characteristics. One can find here the Marrybones, Bob Scarecrow, Whiskerando Sombrero, Lady Longears, etc. In two excerpts from this group we find a clear reference in the text itself.

Fourteen names form the category of locality, where the birthplace or the place of living is shown in the names of the characters. Such names are The Earl of Aldborough , the Earl of Muffborough , Captain Border , etc.

There is a distinct category which associates the names with the referents' social behaviour. This behaviour is mainly related to money and attitude in society. Names from this category are Young Croesus, Tom Sniffle, Silenus, etc.

A category comprising of ten excerpts is the category of nicknames. They are not a usual phenomenon in the English literature, although they are the ones to be translated in a text and therefore easily interpreted by the reader of the target text. Nicknames reflect the inner nature of their bearer (Orlando Furioso; Peter the Cruel; Hocus, the leg; Libertas), some of them reveal the profession of the bearer (Higgs, the traveler; Biggs, the novelist; Fitzstultz, our Colonel) or physical characteristics (Frederick Barbarossa).

Five names form the category of gambling relation. Here the characters reveal meaning closely related to card games (Jack Deuceace (deuce ace); Bob Greengoose (naïve person);Trumper (a card that belongs to the group of cards that has been chosen to have the highest value in a particular game), etc.

In the next categories, the names are related to occasions in life (3) and ideas and beliefs (2). The group of the occasions in life includes Polly Rabbits (who has thirteen children); Mr. Hemp (the figurative meaning suggests hanging) and old Ladies Fitzague (a fever in which your body shakes, especially one caused by malaria). The category of ideas and beliefs comprises of Silk Buckingham (silk – material; Buckingham is related to the palace in England), who is supporter of palace etiquette, as well as The Galeongee, who is the supporter of Turkish beliefs and policy.

The last category with only one member is the one related to animals where one finds Mrs. Fox, which is a clear translatable name with reference to the wild animal.

Conclusion. Taking everything into consideration, English literature, and more precisely Thackeray's "The Book of Snobs" abounds in name symbolism. Although the names of characters are not literally translated, most of them are explained in a footnote and the ones that are not, carry the meaning hidden in its semantics. Upon relating to the immediate context, one notices the semantic value of each name and thus can go closer to the target text and the target culture. And this is the idea of translating and understanding written texts – to unveil the meaning of an item, to get closer to a different culture, to get to know it better.

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