THE METAPHOR OF THE 'HOUSE AS TEXT' IN VICTORIAN NOVELS
METAFORA 'CASEI CA TEXT' IN ROMANE VICTORIENE

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Abstract: *After the poetic metaphor (of the Aristotelic and classical rhetoric schools), and the linguistic metaphor (belonging to the historical linguistics and the philosophy of language), the metaphor has turned into a central topos in epistemology (M. Black, 1962; P. Ricoeur, 1975; T. van Dijk, 1975; J. Molino, 1979a, 1979b; A. Ortony, 1979 apud Rovența-Frumușani, 2000); the metaphor has ceased, on the one hand, to be a poetic myth, becoming an explanatory principle in science (also in Johansen and Larsen, 2002) and, on the other hand, to restrict itself only to the lexical level, in order to enter the field of discourse theory (in argumentation through Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca's neo-rhetoric, in the speech acts theory with T. van Dijk, in implicit and indirect speech acts theory with J. Searle and Kerbrat-Orecchioni). Our intention is to shape the metaphorical references of such a statement as "the house is a text" and find out the effects that such an association of terms has when applied to 19th-century English novels and characters.*

Keywords: *metaphor, sign, text, structure, level.*

1. Introduction

According to Ch. S. Peirce [19, p. 287], metaphors are signs "which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing the parallelism in something else". D. Rovența-Frumușani [20, p. 95] uses Peirce's classification of signs to define the metaphor as an iconic legisign: a sign resembling the object by means of a conventionally established law. Therefore a metaphor, according to Peirce, is a relationship between two signs, in which the representative character of the first sign is expressed by the second sign.

The importance of metaphors is given by the fact that they offer flexibility in understanding all kinds of phenomena in spatial categories: "our ability to spatialize phenomena and relations – speech is structured from the egocentric 'I-here-now' point of view – enables us to strengthen the direct link between our 'I-here-now perspective and our body". For example, we experience that something is in front of us, behind us, above us, to our left or to our right: such a statement as 'Without knowing what hit him, he was struck from behind' is simply a statement with no metaphor in it; but the statement 'Her refusal hit him like a ton of bricks' is certainly metaphorical.

There are several statements which should be made about metaphors:
- they have a much greater sphere of influence that is generally assumed [*idem*, p. 42], [15, p. 5];

- the use of metaphors does not mean that the validity of the utterances in which they occur becomes impossible to determine;
- the use of metaphors is not only a matter of expression and emotion but can also "provide insight and be intellectually productive/creative as it often is in great poetry" [*ibidem*].

The metaphor distinguishes itself from the image and diagram (as iconic signs) by bringing together signs from two different areas; on the other hand, images and diagrams are often "near-indistinguishable" – most iconic signs that we refer to as images also contain diagrammatic properties, such as the representation of relationships and qualities. The conclusion is that "even simple images (in the common everyday sense) possess a high degree of freedom from the represented object, and that the method of representation is as dependent on conventions as it is on the object" [*idem*, p. 43].

2. "The House is a Text"

The analysis of the metaphor of the "house as text" will try to demonstrate the fact that the "house" can be regarded as discourse, as telling: the "house" becomes a "text" to be "read" and interpreted, so that the final result is knowledge. The current section of the paper will focus on defining the concept of "text" and identifying features of the "text" that may be applicable in the case of the "house as text" metaphor: in other words, we shall try to identify the characteristics of a "text" that may support the idea that a house can be metaphorically understood as discourse/telling.

The semiotic approach to the concept of structure no longer implies only the idea of a closed system of interrelated elements, the structural code being a perceptual framework composed of elements with a meaning-creating potential. Nevertheless, the closed structure has been approached in semiotics with linguistics as a model which emphasizes the architecturality of a text: natural language – a semiotic system which makes other semiotic systems possible – is taken as a model with two analytic steps:

- the phenomenon must be divided into an expression aspect and a content aspect; for example, a building is the expression – through the architectonic elements used in its construction – of a number of functions, while the content, or meaning of the building consists of its spatio-functional possibilities;

- subsequently, a classification must be made of elements on both sides, in such a way that they form opposite elementary structures; within architecture, the expression aspect is based on the relationship between openness and closedness, big opening and small opening, height and depth, light and darkness, and so on; and the content aspect is based upon the relationships inherent in certain functions (which may be symbolic, such as power; or social functions such as family life, or psychological functions such as intimacy) [14, p. 21-22].

The linguistic model of the text as a sign is not enough: the importance of the context is also important. J. D. Johansen and S. E. Larson have identified five different functions of texts:

- the text as contract and document: the texts of administration, the legislature and commerce, as handed down from the Middle Eastern writing cultures, with a tendency towards standardization (from this perspective, the "house" metaphorically acts as a "document" by means of which status is "established");

- the text as history and monument: this text encourages linguistic, visual, architectural and musical expression (the "house" encourages architectural, aesthetic expression);

- the text as manual: an attempt to preserve and pass on to another type of knowledge that is also considered important – theoretical and practical, the academic dissertation and the textbook being prototypes of this textual function (the "house" functions as a "manual" concerning various techniques of building, different architectural styles and tastes, etc.);

- the text as liturgy and mythical account in connection with a cult: a whole range of texts is linked to religious practices, manifesting one or more semiotics – the "cult site, the temple, the statue, song, dance, the hymn and the myth show that most human senses and their semiotics (add incense and the shared meal) are involved, so that the sacred place, the ritual and the myth make up some sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk* which claims to represent all aspects of human existence" [14, p. 147] (the "house" is a very complex sign that provides knowledge about the main aspects of human life);

- the token text which both imitates other texts and is self-reflexive, i.e. the artistic text: the artistic textual function can imitate the four others (for example cooking recipes in Tolstoy or courtroom dramas in Dostoevsky), but it is particularly linked to the religious and historical textual functions – the artistic textual function is linked to all the senses and their semiotics, and "the celebration and preservation of the memory of the exploit, ecstasy or epiphany would be central" [*ibidem*].

According to M. Danesi [6, p. 118-119], the semiotic definition of metaphors raises an interesting dilemma. We shall here use his model and apply it to what interests us most. For example, instead of analysing Danesi's example 'The professor is a snake', we shall analyse "The house is a text". This metaphor contains two referents, not one, which are related to each other:

- a primary referent, *house*, known as the topic or *tenor* of the metaphor;

- a secondary referent, *text*, known as the *vehicle* of the metaphor, which is chosen to say something about the topic;

- the linkage between the two creates a new meaning, called the ground, which is much more than the simple sum of the meanings of topic and vehicle.

Metaphors reveal a basic tendency of the human mind to think of certain referents in this way; the question which now arises is whether there is any psychological explanation for this. We consider that at least the five characteristics – functional focusing, visibility, demarcation, structuring and hierachization – which are useful for determining and analysing visible and lasting or repeatable texts may also be applied to houses: houses are *functionally focused* (they are constructed according to a certain functional purpose, for example houses for living in, or for working in); houses are *visible*, which means they can be identified as a complex sign materially manifested; just like texts, the demarcation of houses is twofold: a boundary is drawn between the elements belonging to the house and the elements belonging to other houses and, another demarcation line is drawn in relation to the non-demarcated, constantly expanding houses; the individual house can be perceived as an irreducible and minimal sign for a cultural function. This double demarcation together with the functional focusing turns it into a totality of meanings. Just like in the case of texts, houses are also internally crossed by boundaries, such as: the walls as divisions between different rooms or the different stories of the house, these inner demarcations leading to hierarchization, a characteristic which allows for visible houses to be analysed (just like visible texts) as a hierarchy.

M. Danesi [6, p. 119] mentions the *interconnectedness principle* as supported most strongly by the existence of metaphors. This principle reveals an ingenious device for seeking out and establishing similarities among things, interconnecting them semiotically. Danesi attributes the first mention of this principle to the Italian philosopher, rhetorician, historian and jurist Giambattista Vico (1668-1744): before him, metaphors were viewed as manifestations of analogy – an inductive form of reasoning whereby it is assumed that if two or more entities are similar in one or more respects, then a probability exists that they will be similar in other respects also; on the other hand, for Vico, metaphor was hardly a manifestation of analogical reasoning; it rather revealed how humans go about creating analogies; paradoxically, metaphors are so important to the way in which we form abstractions – such as analogies – that it is impossible to talk about without resorting to metaphor.

3. The Structure of Victorian Novels

Whatever the setting, Victorian novels represent a world in which social class seems interwoven with every facet of everyday life. According to M. Bakhtin's *Discourse in the Novel* [2, p. 116], the novel provides a locus for the social conflicts inherent in language: the diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and organize themselves within it into a

structured artistic system; the story the novel tells can never be one story – it can never be 'monologic' since the very staff of novelistic discourse consists of a welter of differing ideologies and points of view.

In Chapter *The Problem of Form*, Baktin [2, p. 93-109] argues that the artistic form (of the text) is the form of the content, fully realised through the material and merged with it. This is why Bakhtin suggests that the form should be understood and studied according to two directions:

- from within the aesthetic object, as an architectonic form, axiologically oriented towards and related to the content (a possible event);
- from within the compositional material of the work of art (that is, studying the technique of the form).

He further corrects the widely held idea (formalist and psychological approaches to art) that form is only "technique" by suggesting an aesthetic analysis of the form as *architectonic form*: the main question Bakhtin tries to answer is how can *form* (which is completely realized on the basis of the material) become *form of the content* and axiologically relate to it or, in other words, how can compositional form (the organization of the material) realize an architectonic form, that is, a unity and organization of cognitive and ethical values? [*idem*, p. 93]. Bakhtin understands *form* as the expression of an active attitude towards content: through form one can sing, tell stories, present things, show love, agreement, acceptance while content is something passive which needs form in order to be expressed [*idem*, p. 94].

Victorian novels suggest how powerfully social life is structured by the hierarchy of class, so much that Victorians could hardly make sense of the world without it [17, p. 48]: the language and experience of social class become insistent themes in the novel, together with new forms of social mobility, a mobility that generates certain crisis as it strains existing categories). The large structures of class provided a framework within which novelists tried to represent more complex and highly individuated forms of experience and identity: the novel seemed to be the perfectly suited discourse to shape the boundaries of social relationships and evoke a sharply particularized social psychology, with all the aspirations, conflicts and anxieties; it focused primarily on the private life:

> Victorian domesticity was proverbially a refuge from the rough and tumble of a newly volatile economy, but the ideal was itself a marker of material success – it required income sufficient to exempt a woman from paid labor – and at the same time could not seal off a host of social anxieties [*idem*, p. 52].

Domestic life was, indeed, the realm in which the most anxious of classes – the middle-class – made their most energetic claims to status (middle-class anxieties figure most prominently in Victorian novels). Although the novel stands as an extraordinarily rich guide to Victorian culture, it is,

nevertheless, by its preference for middle-class life and middle-class characters, rather biased.

The serial form of the novel still left is at the novelists' choice whether there were to be one or two narrators, for example. This process is similar to that of constructing a house: the architect may be required to build a house with four rooms, for example, but the way in which he posits and relates them to one another remains his own choice. Nevertheless, one cannot reduce the serial form of the novel to a commercial function: serialization was in fact an organization and creative principle for Dickens: the great innovator of serialization, he continued to experiment with the form, exploring new ideas about how best to write a narrative in parts intended to be read over an extended period of time; "the layered complexity of such serial works as *David Copperfield* (with its exploration of time, memory, and the self) or *Bleak House* (with its use of two narrative voices to tell the story) are linked to such exploration" [*idem*, p. 120].

Likening the structure of the Victorian novel to that of the Victorian house is based, first of all, on one common point: both the hierarchy of a house and the hierarchy of a text represented particularly the Victorian social hierarchy.

3.1. The "Threshold" of the Paratext

The *paratext*, as G. Genette explains [12, p. 1], is represented by the elements which "lie on the threshold of the text and which help direct and control the reception of a text by its readers. The paratext is the sum of:

- the *peritext*: titles, chapter titles, prefaces and notes, and

- the *epitext*: interviews, publicity announcements, critical reviews and addresses to critics, private letters and other authorial and editorial discussions 'outside' of the text in question.

The paratext does not simply mark but occupies the text's threshold – a space both inside and outside – it paradoxically frames and at the same time constitutes the text for its readers – a point stated by Derrida, before Genette. Genette, in turn, emphasizes the ambiguity of the paratext, owned to the ambiguous prefix: the paratext consists of "all those things which we are never certain belong to the text of a work but which contribute to present – or 'presentify' – the text by making it into a book. It does not only mark a zone of transition between text and non-text ('*hors-texte*'), but also a transaction" [12, p. 63]. Unlike Derrida or H. Miller, Genette is not interested in the philosophical problem regarding this aspect of textuality, but in the transactional nature of the paratext. We, too adopt Genette's interest in the transactional feature of the paratext as responsible for the inward and outward movements it implies and as a more productive approach to our current objects of study: the paratext in Victorian novels. For Genette, the

paratext fulfills certain functions which guide the text's readers and can be understood pragmatically in terms of simple questions regarding the manner of the text's existence: when was the text published? by whom/ for what purpose? Paratextual elements also help to establish the text's intentions: how it should be read and how it shouldn't be read. Genette also distinguishes between thematic titles (referring to the subject of the text) and rhematic titles (referring to the manner in which the text performs its intentions). Another major peritextual field – which may have major effects upon the interpretation of a text – contains dedications, inscriptions, epigraphs and prefaces; in a similar way, quotations used as inscriptions or as epigraphs may resonate significantly in a reader's mind. Another distinction that Genette operates is that between autographic paratexts (by the author) and allographic paratexts (by someone other than the author, such as the editor or publisher) (*apud* [1, p. 106]). Sometimes these may build ambiguity, another factor influencing the interpretation of a text; nevertheless, the functions of the autographic and allographic prefaces are those of encouraging the reader to read the text and of instructing how to read it properly. Modern editions of texts which are packed with peritextual elements (such as prefaces and notes) and those that had originally epitextual features (such as private letters, journal entries, original and later reviews) signify the text's status as part of a literary cannon and thus worthy of study. Contrary to the impression that paratextual elements undermine authorial intention, Genette actually asserts that the most important aspect of the paratext is "to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose" (*apud* [1, p. 107]).

M. A. Doody [10, p. 321] identifies the "Threshold Trope" – the most common manifestations of which is a description of a building, a wall, a door or a room – as a margin, a place where the characters are nameless, improperly identified or as acting outside their proper function and role: elements become confused, paradoxes interact – it is almost the same sense of ambiguity implied by Genette.

Let us take, for example, the case of illustrations in *David Copperfield*: to the modern reader, "the central paradox of the illustrated novel is the combination of a static picture with a dynamic narrative form" [16, p. 196]. The presence of illustrations supposes that the reader stops and performs another kind of reading in looking at an illustration. Henry James (*apud* [16, p. 196]) objected to illustrations in the Preface to *The Golden Bowl* arguing that they are a superfluous decoration to the text or they trespass the meaning which should be carried by the text. But A. J. Portas [*ibidem*] emphasizes the fact that the relationship between reading a novel and 'reading' its illustrations may be a complementary interaction, and the presence of these disparate forms is justified by their positive contribution.

The Victorian novel offered a common ground of manifestation for both writer and artist; the narrative tradition in 19th-century painting and engraving created a literary taste in art: "the artist became story-teller, novelist, as well as painter" [*idem*, p. 197]; in its most developed form, this aesthetic used the picture sequence to tell a story. Melodrama and painting were also related: melodrama used pictorial techniques derived even from contemporary paintings and engravings, reproducing them in tableau form on stage; similarly, melodrama was related to music and photography. Dickens's novels "can be seen at the centre of these related forms, not simply in having illustrations, but in the way the illustrations conspire with the text" [*ibidem*]. On the other hand, Dickens's novels, too, inspired popular songs and music, even political cartoons, and many melodramas based on his novels present re-creations of the illustrations on the stage. *David Copperfield* is important because the text and the illustrations suggest a relationship of collaboration and an unique effect of the partnership between Dickens and Browne: conditioned by a wider sensibility, Browne's decline as illustrator was caused by a new mode of illustration (starting with the year 1853) represented generally by Millais, and in Dickens's work by Marcus Stone, Luke Fildes and others. The new academic style concentrated on accurate drawing and left no place for subtleties of allegorical and allusive by-play characteristic of former illustrations; the illustration was separated from its popular aesthetic milieu and became "the grafted image" – in H. James' terms –, a change which was clearly related to the changes in painting or drama; similar changes made the modern novel not illustrated, and perhaps not illustrable [*idem*, p. 198].

Having been developed during the course of writing the novels, the illustrations in Dickens's work have an organic relationship to it; they are different from Browne's extra plates which he designed at a later stage, after the novels were completed and which add nothing at all to an understanding of the novel.

In *David Copperfield*, pictures are crucial to both detail and form: David, as a narrator and actor, pictures scenes from his life with his mind's eye; but these pictures or scenes may or may not give cues for illustrations; the main feature of illustrations in *David Copperfield* is the greatly extended use of the 'tableau': "in his novel, Dickens will momentarily arrest his characters in a significant grouping which he describes as a picture and which is evidently conceived with an illustration in mind" [*idem*, p. 199]. Dickens's use of pictorial effects in the text is not only meant to cue illustrations, it is a central aspect of his narrative method. The word 'picture' itself is used by Dickens in a complex way: it may refer to the graphic art, but it also refers to the "technical term in melodrama for a tableau or group pose which may act as a climax or re-statement of themes, during, or at the end of a scene" [*idem*, p. 200]. Dickens made both dramatic and pictorial sense out of such a scene.

For example, the illustration "We arrive unexpectedly at Mr Pegotty's fireside" is accompanied by a description of a 'tableau'. The 'tableau' created here shows David and Steerforth surprising the group in the house: the emotions of the characters in the "warm light room" are suggested in the word "fireside" from the title of the illustration; Mr Pegotty's face is "lighted up" and Little Emily is "blushing and shy", Ham is bashful and Mrs Gummidge excited; this contrasts the light inside the room to the night outside and to the action of Emily springing towards Peggotty. Dickens uses this tableau to anticipate the chilly consequences for the group of Steerforth's and David's arrival: David will later encounter and stop Pegotty wandering in the snow, and Steerforth will later stop Emily's relationship with Ham. Like in melodrama, Dickens's pictures in the text focus and present emotion by leaving a crucial moment without dialogue while pointing at the theme. There is also another function of illustrations in Dickens: the illustration presents David and Steerforth to our view, while the text gives a viewpoint from David. Besides, David's gesture is ambiguous: the gesture of his right hand, which is to keep Steerforth close for the surprise, combines with his left hand 'presenting' the scene; but David is also unconsciously 'pointing out' Steerforth with one hand, and indicating that he will come between Peggotty and Emily with the other. The 'picture' in the illustration combines that of the text with a view of David and Steerforth's place within it, so that the 'little picture' in the text and the illustration use complementary viewpoints [*idem*, p. 203].

Another function of illustrations in David Copperfield is that they present the reader with the only objective view of David, and of the other characters in the novel: as all the information is filtered through David's perceptions and narrated by him, the illustrations begin to take on an important role by giving the reader views of David and thus offering a different reading of the novel, quite different from the text.

3.2. Chapter Titles as "Doors"

According to J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant [5, p. 113-118] the "gate" or the "door" symbolizes the passage between two states, two worlds, the known and the unknown, darkness and light, richness and poverty. The gate/door opens towards some kind of mystery. But it also has a dynamic, psychological value and function: not only does it mark a limit, but it also invites the man to pass over or beyond it. Passing through a gate/door is most often a symbolic transition from the profane to the sacred – at least this is the signification of, for example, Hindu, Chinese, Japanese temples' gates/doors. The gate also recalls an idea of transcendence, accessible or forbidden according to its state of being open or closed, passed by or just looked at. Michel Cournot (*apud* [5, p. 117]), in his authentic commentary upon a film by Robert Bresson (in which the heroes spend most of their times opening, closing and passing through doors), distinguishes among the various significations of a door: a door is not a simple break in a wall, or a

piece of wood turning on a pair of hinges; depending on its being open, closed, locked with a key or swinging, the door signifies a presence or an absence, a calling or an impediment, a view or an illusory plan, innocence or sinfulness. For alchemists and philosophers the gate/door signifies the same things as the key: entrance or way of operating throughout some action or process, a revelation of the hidden tool, the secret means.

We shall try to provide a semiotic analysis to the chapter entitled "In which Mr Dombey, as a Man and a Father, is seen at the Head of the Home Department" from Dickens's novel Dombey and Son. The theoretical basis for this analysis is constituted by Cmeciu's course (2003) on the semiotics of titles, based on using the models of Benveniste (1974), Genette (1970), Derrida (1976), Raymond (1982/1978) and Rovenţa-Frumuşani (2000).

According to Cmeciu (2003), a title is a microtext ranging from a paradigm to a complex sentence whose major role is that of attracting the reader's attention to a semiotic system (such as a text, painting, exhibition etc); it has a surface structure (most often appearing as agrammatical) and a deep structure (grammatical), working for the text as an icon. As part of the paratext, titles foreground aspects such as the relationship between producer and receiver, the degree of authority, the force of the message, the quality of the contract established between artist and reader (Genette 1997: 55-103). Titles may be approached from the perspective of their type, structure, function, and history (diachronic and/or synchronic perspective). Applying Cmeciu's classification of titles to the chapter title we have chosen to illustrate our analysis with, we draw the following statements:

- the chapter title "In which Mr Dombey, as a Man and a Father, is seen at the Head of the Home Department" is – in the form that we, readers, now know it – a final title, the result of a certain process of creation;

- it is, according to the semantic area, a thematic title, referring to the main ideas of the chapter, leading "towards a specific interpretation, a set of connotations, pre-suppositions or clichés" and creating a paradigmatic relation with the text to follow: a first observation is that Mr Dombey is described both as "a Man" and a "Father", as if the word "father" does not entirely suit the purpose of the writer; therefore, he adds the word "Man" to signify two different roles fulfilled by Dombey (master and father);

- the title draws the reader's attention upon the character and the spatial frame: "the home Department";

- the title is a long one: this is probably justified by the serialized form in which the novel was first published; although Dickens published in serial form, he constructed his novels as a whole; thus, a long title would help readers remember the previously published episode, and on the other hand they would attract attention and arouse the reader's curiosity for the current chapter.

From the lexical point of view, this chapter seems to apply the German rule of spelling only nouns in capital letters – graphical markers – which makes it an explanatory title. The function of this chapter title is thematic. From a historical perspective, the form and length of this chapter tile places the text to which it belongs before the modern period: as we have already shown, long titles are characteristic of the serialized novel: "from the 17th to the 19th centuries titles changed from long histories to fairly short names, to reach 20th century titles such as *S/Z*, *If*, etc."; a title is a sign and "the act of entitling something is a cultural process which allows the users to go to texts and to give them a name/title/distinctive sign" and as a sign it signifies at the following levels of signification and interpretation:

- syntactic level: "In which Mr Dombey, as a Man and a Father, is seen at the Head of the Home Department" ;

- semantic level: mental representation of Man, Father, Head, Home, Department;

- referential level: a chapter in Dickens' novel Dombey and Son;

- pragmatic level: Mr Dombey runs the affairs of the home.

The semantic constituents of this chapter title are actantial elements (the main character: Mr Dombey) and spatial elements (the Home Department). From the pragmatic point of view, the title invites the reader to "sign a reading contract" containing 4 stages [*ibidem*]: before reading (attracting the reader's curiosity); during reading (offers "the reader a global perspective by digesting the structure of the text"); ending reading ("offers the reader an aesthetic satisfaction by tasting a figure of speech/poetic emotion); after reading ("makes the reader feel a dramatic tension" by the overall effect).

Finally, a title is a performative act: it promises to inform somebody of something; as a locutionary act it is affirmative; as an illocutionary act it is promissive and declarative; as a perlocutionary act it incites, invites to dialogue and sets the terms of a transaction: "by inviting towards an act of reading, the title anticipates, dramatizes, structures and gives a (literary) text a poetic dimension (a metaphoric synthesis of the text) or a ludic/parodic/ironic one (newspaper titles) [*ibidem*].

Our studied chapter title promises to inform us about the activities of Mr Dombey at home; it affirms that Mr Dombey is a father and owns a home department; it promises to describe Mr Dombey as the centre of attention; it incites by designating Mr Dombey using both "man" and "father" and it establishes the frame for all these other functions.

3.3. The "Corridors" and "Stairs" of Plot Levels

It is interesting to notice that the word corridor is etymologically derived from a Latin verb which means 'to run', therefore, we can draw out a first function of it: a passageway, an escape, a link between two or more spaces, for something or somebody to run, walk, move, etc. through. It is impossible

to discuss the significations of corridors without referring to the symbolism of the labyrinth – originally the palace of Minos, king of Crete, where the Minotaur dwelt and out of which Theseus could not have escaped but with the help of Ariadne's thread. Therefore, the corridor and the labyrinth stand for something complicated and difficult to travel through.

Stairs are the symbol of climbing and progress or of descent [11, p. 370]: they are a mythological image of the link between the sky and the earth, between the here and the underneath worlds; the stair, as a bridge between heaven and earth, appears in the critical moments of the world's evolution, when rituals are enacted to stop the degradation of the world into chaos; stairs are used by God and angels to climb down to us and up towards heaven; man also ascends to Heaven by climbing stairs; from a psychological, moral and religious point of view, stairs represent the way towards absolute reality which is concentrated in a sacred area at the centre and which may be represented by temple, cosmic mountain, or the tree of life; in psychoanalysis, dreams where one climbs up or down a set of stairs have an erotic symbolism, although Eliade (*Mythes*, 147 *apud* [11, p. 370] considers such an approach too simplistic or biased.

When discussing upon the structure of *Wuthering Heights*, Sanger (in [18, p. 55]) underlines one of the most important and obvious things about the structure: the way in which the story deals with three generations is done according to the symmetry of the pedigree: Mr and Mrs Earnshaw at Wuthering Heights and Mr and Mrs Linton at Thrushcross Grange each have one son and one daughter; Mr Linton's son marries Mr Earnshaw's daughter, and their only child, Catherine, marries successively her two cousins – Mr Linton's grandson and Mr Earnshaw's grandson. And Heathcliff is the intrusive element in both families. The absolute symmetry of this pedigree is so remarkable, particularly for such a tempestuous book. The method used to arouse the reader's curiosity and to give vividness and reality to the tale is that of two narrators – a male and a female narrator – each with their specific function. Lockwood introduces us to the house of Wuthering Heights – and I also refer to this in a metaphorical sense: through him, we are introduced to all the levels of the plot/the corridors of the house/text, but Nelly is the one to link all these levels into a unitary structure by means of her accounts which act as 'stairs' – she is the one to gather all the stories related to the above mentioned pedigree into one single symmetrical plot. It is Nelly's function to turn chaos into order by proving and setting the necessary links. In fact, even her role in the novel is ambiguous: she is a servant in the house, but her discourse is not that of the servant: she judges the relationships of her masters and mistresses, and she speaks her mind drawing attention to the truth.

Corresponding to the two narrators are two different timelines: a 'present narrative' acting as a narrative external frame, and a kind of 'present time' with Lockwood meeting Heathcliff – his landlord – and asking Nelly to tell

him the story of Heathcliff. Lockwood is also a narrative strategy: he is used to coax the reader into taking the position of an interpreting spectator by the presentation, in the novel, of so many models of his activity: Lockwood, the timid and civilized outsider, who 'shrinks icily into himself like a snail' (*WH*, p. 48) at the first sign of warm response demanding warmth from him, is the reader's delegate into the novel; "he is that familiar feature of realistic fiction, the naïve and unreliable narrator" and, like all readers (contemporary to the novel or modern), despite the help he gets from critics, Lockwood is faced with a mass of "fascinating but confusing data which he must try to piece together to make a coherent pattern" [*idem*, p. 363]. He first boasts of establishing the positions and nature of the persons he first meets at Wuthering, but then he confesses not to being able to understand things anymore: and this is the point when Nelly comes to the foreground. Hers is a kind of 'past narrative', acting as a narrative inner frame, because she relates events happened in the past, but nevertheless, the past and the present intermingle because the action extends to the present and the books open when they are about to finish.

The second chapter offers additional examples of Lockwood's lack of skill as a reader of signs or as a gatherer of details into a pattern: he mistakes a heap of dead rabbits for cats or things that Catherine Linton is Mrs Heathcliff: his errors are "a warning to the overconfident reader", he enters the gates and doors of Wuthering Heights – at whatever price, "I don't care – I will get in!" (*WH*, p. 51) – but he is incapable of explaining what really happens and happened there. On the other hand, Lockwood is not the only interpreter or reader in the novel: Catherine's diary is described by Lockwood as "a pen and ink commentary – at least the appearance of one – covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left" (*WH*, p. 62) in all the books of her "select" library (which included a Testament and a printed sermon of the Reverend Jabes Branderham, an interpretation of a text in the Testament and on whose margins Catherine's diary is written). In a similar way, Lockwood's commentaries are at the margin of the enigmatic events he tries to understand, and which are actually explained by Nelly. Lockwood's dream, too, is interpreted differently by himself and by Heathcliff: "these few pages present a sequence of interpretations and of interpretations within interpretations. This chain establishes, at the beginning, the situation of the reader as one of gradual penetration from text to text" – just as Lockwood moves from room to room of the house, each inside the other, until he reaches the paneled bed inside Catherine's old room; there he finds himself faced with "the Chinese boxes of texts within texts" we have just mentioned. The reader of the novel must find his or her way from one interpretive narrative to another – from Lockwood's narrative to Nelly's long retelling, to Isabella's letter, or to Catherine's dream of being thrown out of Heaven and to her interpretation of the famous "I am Heathcliff" (*WH*, p. 122).

Lockwood's own situation is rendered to the reader by the other characters reading or learning to read. The mystery that Lockwood tries to decipher corresponds to that facing the reader of the novel: How have things got the way they are at Wuthering Heights? What caused that sad disappearance of civility? Why does the novel resist in giving a satisfactory explanation?

At the moment of his "deepest penetration spatially into the house and temporally back near the 'beginning'", Lockwood encounters not an event or a presence to be grasped by his eyes, but another text to read: Catherine's diary. Catherine and Heathcliff, in their turn, are shown, in the diary, condemned to read two religious pamphlets on the awful Sunday when they escape to the moors under the dairy-woman's cloak; Linton reads in his study while Catherine longs for her death and he tries to keep her alive by tempting her with reading. Much later, the taming of Hareton is signified by his patiently learning to read under the second Catherine's guidance; reading seems to be opposed to the wind of the moors, to death, and to sexual experience: "yet, all the readers, in the novel and of the novel, can have as a means of access to this book, or to some other mediating emblem".

The text is thus 'opened' to us by Lockwood, but the task of 'climbing the stairs' of interpretation belongs to each of us, of course with the help of Nelly in the role of guide.

4. Luring the Reader into the Fictional Labyrinth, or Instead of Conclusions

The labyrinth is, first and foremost, a crossing of roads out of which some have a dead-end, while others lead to the centre of this 'spider web'. This complex network exists in some prehistoric caves that are crossed with access halls [5, p. 191]; the labyrinth must allow the access to the centre through a kind of initiation journey that is forbidden to the unfit. The labyrinth has also been used as protection at the gates of fortified cities and was painted on the models of ancient Greek houses. In both cases, the signification is that of protection of the city/house, regarded as being situated at the centre of the world, not only from human enemies, but also from evil forces. Symbol of a system of defense, the labyrinth, with its corridors as symbols of passage, transition and change, annunciates the presence of something sacred. The functions of the labyrinth may be [5, p. 192]: the military function for the protection of a territory, a village, a city, a tomb or treasure (access is granted only to the initiated ones); the religious function (to guard against the assaults of evil, the intruder intending to violate the mystery, the holy place, the privacy of the divine relations). Reaching the centre equals a victorious entering into a hardly accessible and well-guarded space that is a more or less transparent symbol of power, sacredness and immortality. The cabbalistic tradition, taken over by the alchemists, sees the labyrinth as fulfilling a magic function, being one of the

mysteries of Solomon; that is why the labyrinth of cathedrals, a series of concentric circles, broken at certain points, so that it forms a strange and inextricable trajectory, might have been known as Solomon's labyrinth. In the eyes of the alchemists, this would be an image of the complete work of Creation, comprising its major hardships: that of the road to be taken in order to reach the centre where the battle between the two natures takes place; that of the road that the artist must take in order to get out of it. This interpretation could also corroborate a certain ascetic-mystical doctrine: focusing on the self through the thousands of paths of sensations, emotions and ideas, and crossing out any obstacle that the intuition may face, turning to light without letting oneself intimidated by the roundabout ways. Entering in and coming out of the labyrinth would symbolize death and spiritual revival. The labyrinth also leads to the inner self, a kind of hidden, interior sanctuary housing what is most secret within the human being. The transformation of the self that occurs at the centre of the labyrinth and at the end of this passage from darkness to light will symbolize the victory of the spiritual over the material and, at the same time, of eternity over the ephemeral, of reason over instinct, of science over sheer violence.

M. A. Doody {10, p. 347] identifies the trope of the Labyrinth as appearing everywhere in novelistic fiction, "for it is deeply novelistic, though its particular applications may widely differ": it can reveal itself in two aspects: as an empty space, or as a space tormentingly crowded with objects. Hagan (in [3, p. 48]) emphasizes the "many different strata of society […] gotten into the comparatively small number of pages" that the story of *Great Expectations* takes up: in the first six chapters alone, we meet members of the criminal, the military, and the artisan classes, together with a parish clerk and two well-to-do entrepreneurs."

The Labyrinth has – or is – "a Via Negativa and/or Via Positive" [10, p. 351]: it stands for that where nothing is, where the self is constrained and pressed in gigantic emptiness; or it is the place where too much is, "a pressure of confusion of objects demanding the strained attention of the self"; the Labyrinth is associated with anxiety, puzzlement, restrained attention presenting one with an epistemological challenge, that of disentangling what is confused, locating meaning; the experience of the Labyrinth is not essentially – as with cave or tomb – enclosure, but wandering through an obscure suite of enclosures that are also openings, opportunities: "the mind must always be busy calculating these intricacies" and unlike the prisoner, the one who is lost in a labyrinth is a traveler and must keep on traveling in order to survive. No matter the type of the novel, each novel takes us into a labyrinth, and is a labyrinth: the functions of the labyrinth are therefore manifested on, at least three levels: the reader, the plot and the hero are all involved in some kind of labyrinth.

J. L. Borges (*apud* [10, p. 355]) explains the way in which a reader travels along the labyrinth of the novel: the *garden of paths that bifurcate* was the

chaotic novel; the phrase *various futures (not to all)* suggested to me the image of bifurcation in time, not in space […] in all fictions there occurs a time when a man is confronted within diverse alternatives, opts for one and eliminates the others.

And (in [3, p. 180]), Borges (and also Conan Doyle, Maurice Leblanc, Edgar Allan Poe), following Eco's ultimate belief in the power of interpreting signs through the labyrinthine aspects of the text, turns the novel into a treasure of intertextuality, and at the same time a challenging text for interpretation; furthermore, the "labyrinthine dimension of the text is visually doubled in the labyrinth of the aedificium. On the surface, the chaos of doors, corridors and mirrors that dominate the building have a deep, well-structured plan behind them". Eco posits the man-made labyrinth of language and referentiality at the heart of communication, the layering of meaning – like the layering of the aedificium, being a necessity – not only a challenge – to prove God's free will and omnipotence: "the freedom of God is our condemnation, or at least the condemnation of our pride" (*apud* [3, p. 180]).

In *Great Expectations*, we have wandered through the labyrinth during Pip's first visit to Miss Havisham's house: "we went into the house by a side door […] the passages were all dark […] we went through more passages and up a staircase, and still it was all dark" (*GE*, p. 86) – this is the (metaphorical) labyrinth of the aedificium; but in a later chapter, we find the older Pip giving a summary description of Miss Havisham's house as it looks when seeing it again, the word "labyrinth" being attributed to something else:

> I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course. But […] I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth (Ch. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, p. 253).

At this point in the novel, Satis House is closed off, and even if it is the place of "attractive mystery", the real mystery lies elsewhere: in Pip himself; his labyrinth is not that of Miss Havisham's, but it is the story he is telling, especially to himself, his "poor labyrinth" is his poor self – not his body – but his life. This phrase – "poor labyrinth" – is explained by Hagan as Pip becoming the focal point for Miss Havisham's and Magwitch's retaliation; he is a scapegoat, the one caught in the midst of the cross fire directed against society by two of the parties it injured, who, in turn, display in their desire for proprietorship some of the very tyranny and selfishness against

which they are rebelling. He is the one who must pay for original outrages against justice and the result is that he, too, takes on society's vices, its selfishness, ingratitude, extravagance and pride: he, too becomes something of an impostor, similar to Compeyson, following in the fatal footsteps of the man who is indirectly the cause of his future misery: "the worst qualities of society seem inevitably to propagate themselves in a kind of vicious circle". The case of Estella parallels that of Pip: as he is the creation of Magwitch, she is the creation of Miss Havisham:

> Her perversion has started earlier, as the novel opens, it is Pip's turn next. He is to be the latest heir of original injustice, the next to fall victim to the distortions that have already been forced upon Magwitch, Miss Havisham, and Estella. He is to be the latest product of Compeyson's evil as it continues to infect life (Hagan, p. 51).

But the labyrinthine pressure does not come only from Magwitch and Miss Havisham: injustice is also present under the roof of his own house, where we see Pip tyrannized by his sister and Mr Pumplechook or Wopsle whose constant goading make Pip susceptible to the lure of his "great expectations" – which promise escape and freedom. Pumplechook and Mrs Gargery are the first to put the wrong idea into Pip's head that Miss Havisham is his secret benefactor, and also that she will liberally reward him for his waiting upon her. They, too, like Magwitch and Miss Havisham, play a part in leading Pip on all those wrong ways. Of course, one cannot blame only these characters, but Pip's mind has been impressed with images of injustice and greed from a very early age, the images representing a small-scale version of the greedy and unjust world of "respectability" as a whole. The tyranny suffered by Pip from his sister, Pumplechook and the like reiterates the tyranny exercised by the conventionally "superior" elements of society over the suffering and dispossessed. They embody a miniature version of the society that tolerates the existence of "dunghills in which Magwitch and his kind are spawned, and then throw such men into chains when they violate the law" [*idem*, p. 51]. Pumplechook's boasting himself of being an instrument of Pip's wealth reveals another reality, never suspected and never cared for: the very subservient attitude towards money that he exemplifies is, indirectly, at the root of Pip's new fortune; the same attitude towards money led to Magwitch being debased bellow Compeyson, which resulted, in turn, in Magwitch's fatal determination to turn Pip into a "gentleman." Injustice is thus at the heart of the matter and once it has been committed, there is no telling of the way in which it will affect the lives of generations yet unborn or of people "far removed in the social scale from the victims of the original oppression". Within so few pages, Dickens has succeeded in drawing the labyrinthine intricacies of a larger social situation.

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