A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO THE ACT OF NAMING HOUSES IN VICTORIAN NOVELS

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Abstract

The semiotic approach to the act of naming houses found in 19th-century English novels is meant to reveal the significations of a common cultural practice of the time, particularly belonging to middle-class and wealthy families owning a house/manor/hall: that of attributing names to houses.

Rezumat

Abordarea semiotică a nominalizării locuințelor în romanele din sec. al XIX-lea are drept scop dezvăluirea semnificațiilor unei practici culturale comune a timpului dat, și anume cea de a atribui nume caselor, conacelor, sălilor etc., adică locuințelor care aparțineau famiilor de mijloc și celor bogate ale societății.

I. An author is almost always purposive in using allusive and symbolic names, although he may not be aware of the entire range of significations that a name may contain.

Names act as descriptors and individualizers, but also as social classifiers[1]: we noticed the fact that, in 19th-century English novels, there are names attributed to large houses, halls and manor houses belonging to the wealthy, while the poor or the lower classes usually live in dwellings referred to only by common nouns such as cottage or small house. Examples of house names in 19th-century English novels include: Satis House in Ch. Dickens' *Great Expectations*; The House of Dombey and Son and the "Castle" in Dickens' *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation*; The Rookery, Salem House – the school, Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse in Dickens' *David Copperfield*; Gateshead Hall, Thornfield Hall, Lowood School, Vale Hall, Moor House, Ferndean Manor-House in Ch. Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange in E. Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Wildfell Hall, Grassdale Manor and Lindenhope in A. Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Blooms-End, Mistover Knap, the Inn of "The Quiet Woman" and the house at Alderworth situated in a place called Devils Bellows in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*.

From the examples above, we may draw certain conclusions which may help us establish a taxonomy of toponymic structures based on the way in which place names are created:

- personal names, which may also include historical names or names of saints ("Dombey and Son");

- descriptive names which, according to Baker and Carmony[2], may refer to some "identifiable characteristic of an area (distinctive local wildlife, a particular hue of the area, or noteworthy botanical specimens)" ("Thornfield Hall", "Grassdale Manor", "Vale Hall", "Ferndean Manor"), or may be "inspired by some peculiarity of the locale not linked to a tangible characteristic" ("Wuthering Heights", "Wildfell Hall");

- "inspirational names may refer to some characteristic of the inhabitants" ("Satis House"), to the "putative pleasant climate of the places ("Lindenhope") and humorous names are given with an explicit amusing intention" (the "Castle").

There is sometimes some kind of explanation of the origins of the names of houses based on some local legend or some anecdote, but most of the times historical truth and evidence is not quite a part to be taken into consideration: this process of explaining the name of a house adds mystery to the place, and feeds the readers' taste for fairy-tale like settings, be they welcoming ones or not; on the other hand, most of the times, the name of the house is placed as a label upon a certain location and is left to signify by itself. Another important aspect with the act of naming houses as presented in 19th-century English novels is the fact that although the houses in question belong to the wealthy, it is still the common people who attribute a legend or an explanation to the origin of the house's name. This may be regarded as one of the writers' 'subtle' stratagem which is part of the entire process of revealing the Victorian true spirit hiding

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[1] Anderson, 2007, p. 100-101.

[2] *apud* Morărașu, 2007, p. 91.

behind the polished facades of their houses: thus, on the one hand, the writer exculpates himself/herself by saying something like "it is said/it is believed by most people in the region of X that …" and, on the other hand, the truth is told and illustrated. For example, the responsibility for the word "wuthering" is attributed to the provincials – "'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective" (*WH*, p. 46), the word "significant" being quite full of meanings: an adjective which is important for the provincials, or an adjective which is important through what it signifies in relation to the house itself – or Satis House – "which is Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew … for enough" and meaning that "whoever had this house could want nothing else" (*GE*, p. 86), subtly reminding us of the Victorians' most precious embodiment of their values and needs: the house. Sometimes, even a mere ironical touch tells us more than a hundred extra words would have said: for example, Dickens' novel *Dombey and Son* where, although the firm is called "Dombey and Son", the house in which Dombey lives with his family is actually transformed into a firm, and all the household behaves accordingly: " 'The House will once again, Mrs Dombey', said Mr Dombey, 'be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son'" (*DS*, p. 5), irony immediately comes to set the truth to its rightful place in the minds of the readers: "Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole references to them: AD had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei – and Son" (*DS*, p. 6).

While opinions diverge upon whether personal proper names carry any signification, besides the simple function of designator (J. S. Mill considers that proper nouns are only denotative, while Russell disagrees with him saying that as soon as a thing is named, it acquires as part of the meaning of its name some of the properties of its bearer[3]), with names of houses we may argue that they clearly signify something, be it on the lexical, semantic or syntactic and pragmatic level, or/and on all of these levels combined. We may look at house names as 'titles' of the respective houses (houses as texts to be read and deciphered) – in fact, some titles of novels contain names of houses: E. Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, A. Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* – which can be considered from a semiotic point of view. The title[4] – the name - is thus a microtext which defines, evokes and makes something valuable. At the same time, according to the focalization of the reader's interest, such a title as "Wuthering Heights" draws attention to the spatial frame.

We shall here try to apply Peirce's triadic model of the sign[5] to names of houses in order to understand the relationships that are established between the name of a house and its inhabitants, and how these connections are established. We also base our analysis on the relation inhabitant – inhabited place which is not a univocal process of determination. The process of inhabiting as the human activity would degrade itself without a subjective fingerprint, without a relationship establishing itself between the human subject and the surrounding environment; the act of inhabiting, although apparently involving a static principle, implies these types of actions: active reception, permanent intentionality and conscious transformation; the living situation involves an interaction of the cause-effect type in which the effect reshapes

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[3]*apud* Morărașu, 2007, p. 34-35.

[4]According to Cmeciu's course (Cmeciu, 2003) on the semiotics of titles, who uses the models of Benveniste (1974), Genette (1970), Derrida (1976), Raymond (1982/1978), Rovența Frumușani (2000).

[5]Charles Sanders Peirce (Peirce, 1990, p. 278-275, 2.230, 2.231, 1.313, 2.303) formulated a triadic model of the sign consisting of: the *representamen*: the form which the sign takes (not necessarily material though usually interpreted as such) – called by some theorists the 'sign vehicle'; an *interpretant*: not an interpreter, but rather the sense made of the sign; an *object*: something beyond the sign to which it refers (*a referent*). According to Peirce's own words: "A sign … [in the form of a *representamen*] is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen" (idem, p. 269, 2.228). The sign cannot exist without all these three elements, being a unity of what is represented (the object), how it is represented (the representamen) and how it is interpreted (the interpretant).

its cause: the arranged space/the house influences the act of inhabiting by the way in which the inhabitant/the individual/the community responds to it objectively or subjectively. The signification of a house's name will borrow and lend at the same time meanings from and to the owner(s)/inhabitant(s).

By applying Peirce's triadic model of the sign to names of houses, we reach the following statements:

- the *representamen*, the form which the sign takes, is usually represented by one or two words: Satis House, Thornfield Manor, Rookery, Wuthering Heights.

- the *interpretant*, not necessarily an interpreter, but rather the sense made of the sign: the signification that the name of the house unfolds, together with all the meanings that such a name may allude to, or that may result from the process of semiosis – the interaction between the representamen, the interpretant and the object.

- the *object*, something beyond the sign to which it refers, a referent, the house viewed from the perspective of the name's signification. We may thus draw the conclusion that it is impossible for the representamen and the interpretant not to influence one's perception of the respective object/house.

The analysis of the process of semiosis will allow us to reveal the way in which signification is produced, on the one hand, by these interactions and relationships established between the representamen, the object and the interpretant as constituents of the concept of name as a sign, and on the other hand, by the relationships established between the name as a sign and the context of its use.

II. Besides the identificatory and classificatory function of names, Anderson[6] also mentions the names' capacity of differentiation. The Victorians' preference for the act of naming their houses can be thus translated into their desire to identify, classify and differentiate themselves; thus, the act of naming houses is used:

- to *identify* who the owners and their families are, the house being usually inherited from parents and grandparents, the (name of the) house being associated with the (name of the) family, the older the family's name the better; also, to identify oneself as the new owner of a house, or as the builder of the house, implying the fact that as long as one affords to own/built such a house, one has enough money and power as to belong to the higher classes; this does not mean that the house necessarily takes the name of the family, but it may have a name of its own and be inhabited by several generations/families with different family names;

- to *classify* themselves as belonging to the upper-classes since they live in such a stately manor house, as implicitly embodying and behaving according to the principles of respectability, domesticity and stability;

- to *differentiate* themselves from the lower-classes, from immorality (Victorians often considered the poor to be immoral just because they were poor).

When referring to the properties of the "ideal proper name", Duke[7] mentions the following: "precise identification", "brevity", "ease of memorization", and "formal marking of onomastic status." The act of naming houses as presented in 19th-century English novels is also part of the writer's narrative technique, meant to ironically show what the inhabitants of the respective house are described as wanting to hide, or to directly signify what is later reinforced by the descriptions of the inhabitants and their 'inhabiting rituals'.

The production of signification with the act of naming houses works on three levels: lexical, semantic and syntactic.

On the lexico-semantic level, the act of naming translates itself as the act of applying a word or a group of words to a thing/being with a view to distinctly designate it and to distinguish it from other things/beings of the same class. The lexical level represents a first clue for the analysis of the signification produced by names of houses in 19th-century English novels since the choice of words is not arbitrary but carefully selected. For example, the metaphorically-

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[6]Anderson, 2007, p. 101.
[7]Duke, 2005, §§3.2.2.1, 3.4, *apud* Anderson, 2007, p. 105.

constructed names of Th. Hardy's *The Return of the Native*: Blooms-End and Mistover Knap: "end" meaning, among other things, 'the ultimate state', the whole name may imply the fact that ultimately, the respective house allows for a blooming of the soul; on the other hand, Mistover Knap – 'mist over hill' – already implies confusion, misunderstandings, a failure to see clearly, a paradoxical juxtaposition of terms since the 'hill' signifies a vantage point, but the mist is there to blur and distort the view – it is no wonder then that Eustacia's principles, desires and thoughts are 'distorted'.

The names of the houses will reveal their full significations only when put into the intricate design of the novel's plot and in relationship to the characters and their names. The representamen and the interpretant influence and condition each other in the semiotic process, so that the object beyond them becomes a kind of common denominator: the signification of the name is gradually and eventually supported by the signification of the house.

On the semantic level[8], a certain name singles out a certain entity, and by choosing a name for a house, writers "single out" that certain house by using, usually, one or two words, words which add their metaphorical or symbolical content to the signification of the name. The name thus 'saves' the writer's and the reader's time, but also condenses the richness of significations into those one or two words; on the other hand, several descriptions of the same house happen to occur throughout a novel, so that the signification of the name is reminded and strengthened over and over again.

For example, in Ch. Dickens' *Great Expectation*, the house's name, i.e. Satis House, is explained in Chapter 8, followed immediately by a description of the house: "some of the windows had been walled up […] the great front entrance had two chains across it outside […] and still it was all dark, and only the candle lighted us" (*GE*, p. 84-86); another description occurs in Chapter 11: "there was a clock in the outer wall of this house. […] it had stopped at twenty minutes to nine." (p. 108); then again in Chapter 17 – "so unchanging was the dull, old house, the yellow light in the darkened room" (p. 152) –; Chapter 29 – "its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms" (p. 253) –; Chapter 38 – "it is needless to add that there was no change in Satis House" (p. 320) –; Chapter 49 – "the lighted candle stood in the dark passage within, as of old" (p. 407) –; and Chapter 59 – "there was no house now […] I saw that some of he old ivy had struck root anew, and was growing green on low quiet mounds of ruin" (p. 491). Each time a description of the house is made, the same pervading elements of the house seem to be the iron bars of the gate, the darkness of the corridors, the rooms lit by candles, the stopping of time, and the yellowish colour associated with Miss Havisham and her clothes. The narrative flows 'in loops', in a continuous movement of leaving and coming at Satis House, supporting the statement that Satis House stands at the centre of the novel; the act of Pip walking Miss Havisham around the room stands as a synecdoche for the entire plot: it seems that on the tunes of the song of "Old Clem", Pip not only walks Miss Havisham around

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[8]Anderson (2007, p. 164) quotes several name theorists – among whom Sørensen (1963), Seppänen (1974), Lyons (1977), Conrad (1985), Pulgram (1954), Nuessel (1992) – particularly concerned with the semantic properties of names and their origins, some of these discussions being based on etymology and the onomastic tradition; others, such as Thrane (1980), exclude sense from names, while some linguistic scholars and philosophers – Kleiber (1981), Lass (1973) – consider names as marginal even to the semantic structures of languages. However, these considerations refer particularly to proper names of persons, therefore we shall use Gardiner's (1954, p. 42, *apud* Anderson, 2007, p. 164) definition of a proper name as "a word referring to a single individual" that we consider as best applying to our current study: names of houses in 19th-century English novels may be defined, first and foremost, as words or groups of words referring to a single house, a first characteristic of the object signified by the name being that of singularity. Sørensen (1963, *apud* Anderson, 2007, p. 165) reduces the names' descriptive qualities to the advantage of quickening and shortening the otherwise tiresome act of denomination, which would sound like "the person who is …" in the absence of proper names, admitting however the fact that it is important for names to refer to only one thing/being, a name with more than one bearer having, implicitly, more than one meaning.

the room, but leaves and returns to Satis House in an almost ritualistic manner: the occurrences of the descriptions of Satis House happen approximately once every ten chapters.

The name of a house is usually a noun phrase, constituted of a head noun (usually one of the words 'house' or 'hall') and a modifier which is usually a noun or an adjective. In their turn, certain modifiers are the result of composition, one of the oldest ways of word-building in English[9]: "a process of coining new words by combining grammatically and semantically two or more than two stems or roots." Moreover, using composition as a process for constructing names of houses and of places seems to provide writers with a richness of possibilities in associating different meanings within the same word, so that the result is a far more metaphorical, poetic and symbolic expression than would have been otherwise. The names of houses in Victorian novels are thus constructed, from the very beginning, to fit the authorial intention concerning not only the respective house as a spatial frame, but also the relationship of the house with its inhabitants – the novel's characters. This is why the house as a semiotic object starts to signify as soon as its name is mentioned.

Let us take, for example, the names of Grassdale Manor, Lindenhope and Wildfell Hall in A. Brontë's novel "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall", pretend that we have not read the novel, all that we know being these two names of houses, and see their impact upon the reader's expectations.

The word "Grassdale" is made up of the words:

- "grass": herbage suitable or used for grazing animals; land (as a lawn or a turf racetrack) covered with growing grass; a state or place of retirement (e.g. 'put out to *grass*') (*SOEDHP*, p. 823).

- "dale": an elongate depression of the earth's surface usually between ranges of hills or mountains; an area drained by a river and its tributaries; a low point or condition (*SOEDHP*, p. 450).

The reading of the name of "Grassdale Manor" already echoes with certain implied significations: seclusion and isolation are meanings contained in both words "grass" and "dale"; however, fertility and life is suggested again by both words: the green grass as a symbol of the power of regeneration, and water as the symbol of life. Therefore, can we expect the inhabitant of such a manor to be (feeling) somewhat isolated, lonely, but at the same time to be young, full of hopes and of potential to recreate one's life? If we read the novel, our expectations are confirmed and strengthened: once married to Arthur, Helen is "settled down as Mrs Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor"; after the honeymoon speedy trip to France and Italy, she is 'deposited' again at Grassdale, "safely installed … just as single-minded, as naïve and piquante as [she] was" (*TWH*, p. 158-159) by her husband who is willing to keep her away from society so as not to spoil her; in fact, he keeps her there, almost all alone, except for the servant, while he makes several longer or shorter stays in London, entertaining himself with the high society there; her position is inferior, as the discourse of the master shows it: " 'You may go,' said he, 'if you've done. I don't want you.' I rose and withdrew to the next room." (p. 167); marriage also means loneliness, isolation and lack of affection: "two persons living together, as master and mistress of the house, and father and mother of a winsome, merry little child, with the mutual understanding that there is no love, friendship or sympathy between them" (p. 252). The positions and the roles at Grassdale are clearly established. But the green colour of change and hope flashes upon Helen's secret departure from Grassdale – together with her little son Arthur, and her servant, Rachel. The sense of freedom is suggested by the "draught of that cool, bracing air" inhaled by Helen once she is out the gates of the house, with "no shadow of remorse" (p. 304).

Applying a similar analysis to the name of "Lindenhope", we may see that it stands alone as a composed noun, being followed neither by "hall" nor by "house", therefore suggesting a fairy-tale realm, with no boundaries involved. In fact, it is described, by Gilbert, as a place of bliss, warmth and comfort: "the gleam of a bright red fire through the parlour window" immediately cheers him up as he approaches the house "one cold, damp, cloudy evening, towards October" (p. 9), and once inside the house, he is welcomed by the kindness of his mother, sister and brother; he is treated as a master, as he is invited to have the privileged seat

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[9]Hulban, 2001, p. 77.

near the fire, after which they all talk over a nice cup of tea. Later on, Gilbert describes it as "my home where all comparatively was light, and life, and cheerfulness" (p. 83).

The name of *Wildfell Hall* stands for an improper place for dwelling, strengthened both by the public opinion of the local society who wonder at who might have come and inhabit such a desolate house, and by the legends and stories inspired by that place: "they presented all of them a goblinish appearance, that harmonized well with the ghostly legends and dark traditions our old nurse had told us respecting the haunted hall and its departed occupants" (p. 18). However, while the atmosphere of Grassdale sickened (p. 239) and stiffened Helen (p. 300), she looked eagerly for her escape to Wildfell Hall where a "tolerably snug little apartment" (p. 305) is more than enough for her tranquility. Wildfell Hall will signify her failure in the attempt to make her husband a better man, in attaining conjugal happiness by his side, her dropping into a lower social position (from a mistress and wife to a self-assumed role of widow); she will commit the immoral act – according to Victorian conventions – of leaving her husband and hiding her true identity. On the other hand, it is at Wildfell that she manages to support herself as an artisan, and to be "comfortably settled in [her] new home" (p. 306); she "fells" the wilderness around her by airing the house, lighting a cheerful fire, by transforming one of the parlours into her studio, and arranging some flower beds in the garden. However grim and desolate as it may seem from the outside, and from the inside, it is nevertheless the best asylum ever: "I was glad to ascend the stern-looking staircase, and lie down in the gloomy old-fashioned bed, beside my little Arthur […] but sleep was sweet and refreshing when it came, and the waking was delightful beyond expression" (p. 306).

We will focus upon the pragmatic level of semiosis with Victorian house names as signs when dealing with the semiotic relationships within the act of naming Victorian houses (section IV).

In conclusion to this section of the paper, names of houses are signifying units which can be separated from the context of the novel and still produce meaning.

III. In this section of the paper, we shall focus upon the act of naming Victorian houses and that of numbering modern houses.

According to Rybczynski[10], a medieval house, like church bells, swords and cannons, "was given a name and thus was personified, a practice which has continued till now but has now largely been overtaken by numbers, which offer anonymity and represent economic rather than emotional value." As we have already seen from the examples above, Victorians named their houses particularly to identify, differentiate and classify themselves on the scale of the social hierarchy. We make use of Rybczynski's statement as a starting point for our analysis in the current section, not necessarily disagreeing, but rather completing the assertion with several personal observations so that it may suit our purpose. Starting from Shakespeare's lines "What's in a name? That which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet"[11], we shall attempt to analyze the act of naming houses vs. the act of numbering houses so that we may reach some conclusion concerning the signification of these two acts. Another aspect supporting the idea that the act of naming houses with the Victorians does not exclude an economic value is given by the writers' choice to inspire their descriptions of fictional houses from real-life Victorian houses. According to Sanders[12], the small suburban house in Bayham Street, Camden town where Dickens' family moved in 1822 represents the model for Traddles' home described in Chapter 27 of *David Copperfield*; in Chapter 2, 'Mrs. Micawber's Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies' is described as resembling the private school for girls which Dickens' mother attempted to set up in Gower Street North, in 1823, both of the establishments, the fictional and the real one, bringing no results. The shoeblacking factory – Warren's of 30 Hungerford Stairs, between the Strand and the River Thames – where Charles worked when he was 12, and which Dickens himself described in his unfinished autobiography clearly resembles

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[10]Rybczynski, 1986, p. 25-35, *apud* Madanipour, 2003, p. 78.

[11]Shakespeare, W. *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 1 //"The Complete Works of William Shakespeare", Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1999, p. 257.

[12]Sanders, 2003, p. 2-21.

Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse (*DC*, p. 165). Besides the closely resembling descriptions of the warehouse in the novel and the real shoeblacking factory, there is the structure of the name itself suggesting the same sense of reality: both of the names contain the owner's name prefixed to the building by way of the genitive; the owner is thus confirmed as the master of the establishment – and implicitly of all those working within – but also as the possessor of the implied economical and financial assets.

Dismissing Mrs. Gaskells' *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* – the first two chapters of which being dedicated not to Charlotte, nor even to her ancestry, but to the place where she grew up and spent most of her adult life – as misleading and at least a hundred years out of date – Julien Barker comes with proofs documented by contemporary newspapers and reports and provides us with a clear description of the Haworth parsonage – the model for Wuthering Heights and other houses in the Brontë sisters' novels – but also with several examples of house names inhabited by families which came into contact with the Brontës: "the Taylors of Stanbury and the Heatons of Ponden Hall", "the Greenwoods of Bridge House" – the only family identified by Mrs Gaskell –, "Theodore Dury of Keighley and Thomas Crowther of Crag Vale", "John Fennel of Cross Stone."[13] The description of the Haworth parsonage justifies Emily's giving in to her interpretive imagination and calling it "Wuthering Heights" to suit her fictional purposes.[14]

It is a real fact that in Victorian times addresses comprised just an individual's name, the terrace (a group of row houses) in which the house was situated, or the house name itself and the town: for example, Jane Eyre advertises for governess mentioning the fact that the answers "must be addressed to J. E., at the post-office there" (*JE*, p. 74) (i.e. at Lowton); this signifies the fact that she had no house of her own, therefore no house name to mention in the advertisement, and implicitly a clue to her financial situation: if one owned a house, it meant that one's financial situation allowed for it, therefore, no house name, no economic value attached to the houseless. Another example is the address that Mr. Jaggers sends Pip on arriving to London: "Little Britain, just out of Smithfiled, and close by the coach-office", and after being "packed up' in the coach, Pip is taken to 'a gloomy street, at certain offices with an open door, whereon was painted Mr. Jaggers." (*GE*, p. 187). According to the explanatory note (p. 504), Little Britain is a street which still exists near St. Paul's and the Old Bailey, running between Aldersgate Street and Smithfield Market; it gets its curious name from the fact that it runs through the site of the ancient town mansion of the Dukes of Briton (Brittany). But what seems thoroughly unknown to Pip, is easily and rapidly identified by the coachman: an act which denotes Jaggers' fame owed to his occupation, and implicitly his financial situation.

On the other hand, industrialization changed the face of the city: urban agglomerations determined the construction of more and more terraced-houses, basement rooms, the proliferation of buildings to the detriment of gardens and green spaces, this leading in its turn to the need of identifying each of these dwellings through a more simple process and more easily recognizable sign than the name: the number. For example, in Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the narrator sentimentally makes Mr. Micawber give his address to Pip – who will actually be a lodger there – only by mentioning the street and the name of the row of terraced-houses, swiftly trying to pull a lighter air and a softening effect upon the reality: Mr. Micawber was, in fact, one of those trying to make an existence and keep out of the debtor's prison – which he fails after all –, moving from house to house in the attempt to keep up with the speed of change and progress, being thus depersonalized: "'My address,' said Mr Micawber, 'is Windsor Terrace, City Road. I – in short', said Mr Micawber, with the same genteel air, and in another burst of confidence – 'I live there'" (*DC*, p. 167). Micawber is obviously embarrassed at having to reside in such a "shabby" (p. 167) house and offers to come and lead Pip to the house

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[13]Barker, Julien, "The Haworth Context" //Glen, Heather (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. P. 13-33.

[14]"The house itself was solid and uncompromising, the only concession to ornament being a pilastered and pedimented central doorway. Like all the houses in Haworth, it was built of local stone, hewn out of the quarries on the hillside behind, and roofed with stone flags to withstand exposure to the winds" (Barker, *apud* Glen, 2002, p. 27-28).

himself, for fear he might "lose" himself (p. 166), but the writer avoids to 'force' his character into confessing 'the number' of his dwelling, as that would mean spoiling his identity which is already starting to be contoured as that of an honest man who finally emigrates to Australia and becomes a magistrate and a manager of the Port Middlebay Bank. Nevertheless, the 'untold' number is already there, since a row of terraced-houses implied the need to identify each one of them separately.

IV. So far, our analysis has focused upon house names as descriptors, identifiers, classifiers, briefly, signs which signify something unique. We shall further analyse the semiotic relationships within the act of naming, and to defining the identity of a house name according to the role it plays. The roles we have chosen to discuss upon are those of object – how people use house names and to what purpose –, and that of agent – the way in which a house name 'uses' its inhabitants or how it influences people. Analysing the roles of object and agent that house names may fulfill implies approaching the names of houses from a pragmatic perspective, which means focusing upon the relationships between signs (house names) and their users or interpreters (human beings). The questions[15] we are trying to answer in the current section of the paper are, for example: 'Satis House at what date and time of the day?' or 'Satis House as a familiar environment or as a hostile one?', or 'Whose Satis House: Miss Havisham's, Estella's or Pip's?', in which the name of 'Satis House' can well be replaced by, for example: 'Wuthering Heights', 'Blooms-End', 'Thornfield Hall', 'The Rookery', etc. It is the kind of thing that the name of a house represents at different times and for different people that we are interested in contouring.

Defining house names as objects will allow us to construct a finer picture of the way in which 'the talk of the town' used house names to pervert, distort, tinge somebody's reputation, or to snobbishly praise a human being's worth in financial terms. House names functioning as objects[16] would thus fulfill the role of the 'sought-for-label' – since in this case, house names act as labels for the houses to which they are attached. Moreover, certain house names are characterized by a double role, acting both as passive object and active agent, depending on the way in which they are used in different parts of the novel and by different characters.

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[15]Our analysis starts from certain theoretical considerations (Chandler, 2007, p. 60-61), according to which the lexicon of a language is made up mostly of 'lexical words' (or nouns) which refer to 'things', but most of these things are abstract concepts rather than physical objects in the world. Proper nouns: these have specific referents in the everyday world, only some of these referring to a unique entity (the example offered by Chandler is the very long, unique and distinctive name of a Welsh village: Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch; he further states that even proper names are not that specific as they are supposed to be: e.g., "a reference to 'Charles Sanders Peirce' begs questions such as 'Peirce at what date?', 'Peirce as a philosopher or in some other role?', or even 'whose Peirce?' (e.g. 'Jakobson's Peirce?')" (Chandler, 2007, p. 60). Chandler further uses Peirce's own observation that "a symbol … cannot indicate any particular thing; it denotes a kind of thing" (Peirce 1990, p. 277-278); furthermore, words do not necessarily name only physical things existing in an objective material world but may also label imaginary things and concepts.

[16]The structuralist semiotician and literary theorist A. J. Greimas (Greimas, 1966; Greimas, 1987) 'semiotically reduced' Propp's seven narrative roles (the hero, the villain, the donor, the helper, the sought-for-person and her father, the false hero and the dispatcher, based on the characters' different functions in relation to the action or plot of the story) to three types of narrative syntagms as part of a grammar of narrative which, according to him, could generate any known narrative structure: *syntagms performanciels* – tasks and struggles; *syntagms contractuels* – the establishment or breaking of contracts; *syntagms disjonctionnels* – departures and arrivals. According to Greimas, there are three binary oppositions which underlie all narrative themes, actions and character types – called 'actants', simply defined as names of roles, and these are: *subject – object* (Propp's *hero* and *sought-for-person*); *sender – receiver* (Propp's *dispatcher* and *hero* – again); *helper – opponent* (conflations of Propp's *helper* and *donor*, plus the *villain* and the *false hero*). The *subject* is the one who seeks the *object* – that which is sought; the *sender* sends the object and the *receiver* (also identified by Greimas as the *hero*) is its destination; the *helper* assists the action and the *opponent* blocks it.

Therefore, it will be no surprise if the mere shift in perspective upon the name of the house completely changes its role.

One example of a house name acting as an object is that of Thornfield Hall in Ch. Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, which is also associated with the idea of independence. The first time that Jane comes into contact with the name of Thornfield is through the answer that she receives from Mrs. Fairfax to her advertising as a governess: "J. E. is requested to send references, name, address, and all particulars to the direction: - 'Mrs Fairfax, Thornfield, near Milcote, –shire.'" (*JE*, p. 76). The name of Thornfield immediately becomes the label of what she had so ardently been hoping for, a place where she could escape from Lowood school. On receiving the answer, Jane peruses the brief letter with such carefulness that the way in which she interprets the name of Thornfield is expressed on the length of more than half a page, the discourse being a signifying container of her most ardent wishes; her imagination makes out of the name of Thornfield what she herself would have liked the place to be: "Thornfield! That, doubtless was the name of her house: a neat orderly spot, I was sure; though I failed in my efforts to conceive a correct plan of the premises" (p. 76). She mistakes Mrs Fairfax as the respectable owner of the house, and her alleged impossibility of conceiving the correct plan of the premises supports the idea that Jane did not look forward to getting at Thornfield in search of a tangible, stately, luxurious house, but in search of her dreams and wishes, unfulfilled at the time.

Claude Brémond (1981) defines his narrative roles (agent, patient, beneficiary, victim, adjuvant, opponent) as the conjunction between the fundamental roles of the narrative deep structure of actant – general categories of behaviour or doing underlying all narratives (and not only narratives) – and actor – which are invested with specific qualities in different narratives[17]. Bremond offers a detailed classification of the narrative roles identified by him, but we shall here restrict ourselves to the functioning of house names as agents. In the broadest sense, an agent is "an NP that plays a necessary role in the semantic concretization of a narrative structure"[18]. We have applied the cardinal agential functions (function understood as a way in which agents fulfill their roles as bearers of narrative communication) identified by Coste[19] to names of houses and we have reached such conclusions as:

1. House names as agents in their dynamic function transform situations or offer the possibility to transform situations: for example, associating a (Victorian) woman's name with the name of a poor dwelling or, on the contrary, with the name of a stately mansion will immediately transform the way in which she is regarded by the others. An example for house names as agents in their dynamic function can be found in Hardy's *The Return of the Native* where Mrs Yeobright introduces herself to Venn as " 'I am Mrs Yeobright of Blooms-End' " (*TRN*, p. 40). The relationship here may be regarded as paradoxical, or double-sided: while the name of Blooms-End is used by Mrs. Yeobright as an object to identify herself as the mistress of that house, the name of the house acts as an agent – here, in a positive way – by associating her with all the things implied by such a great house, therefore, situating her on a social and financial position higher than the average of the place. Another example of – in this case more clearly and less ambiguously defined – a house name acting as agent is Grassdale Manor in Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: after marrying Arthur Huntingdon, Helen ponders upon the way in which the name of the house she now inhabits and is mistress of acts upon the way in

[17]Rimmon-Kennan, 1983, p. 14.

[18]Coste, 1989, p. 140.

[19]The three cardinal agential functions identified by Coste are: the dynamic function: in its dynamic function, the agent is the subject or object of verbs of "doing"; "it transforms situations or offers opportunities for situations to be transformed"; the panoramic function: this function consists in "offering things to see or, more generally, to know, as they are, or might, or should be"; the agent in this function is a bearer of descriptions, judgements, interpretations and other units of non-narrative discourses; the focal function: agents are seen, observed, described by others; questions are asked about them, and answers are given, with two observations: 1. when agents display their focal function by becoming an object of attention, one or more other agents necessarily exert their panoramic function as a counterpart, and 2. the "focal function may have, separately or jointly, two different, opposite and complementary aspects: inquisitive and assertive" (Coste, 1989, p. 141-144).

which she is regarded in society: "I am married now, and settled down as Mrs Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor" (*TWH*, p. 159). She is aware that this is the name by which she will be known, recognized and identified, and according to which she must behave: the name of the house that she inhabits will identify and classify her, and also distinguish her as belonging to a certain social class. The particle "of", used here as a function word to indicate belonging or a possessive relationship, is suggestive in both examples – Mrs Yeobright of Blooms-End and Mrs Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor – by signifying the fact that the role of mistress of a large, stately manor house implied a paradoxical state of affairs: on the one hand, this role implied that the respective woman occupied a privileged place in society but, on the other hand, she belonged to the respective house and had to act accordingly, particularly by fulfilling certain social and domestic tasks and responsibilities.

2. House names as agents in their panoramic function offer the possibility of seeing, knowing 'their house' – because, in the case of the name's functioning as an agent, it is the house which belongs to the name and not vice-versa – as it is, might or should be; for example, once a name is 'applied' to a house – it does not matter by whom at this point in our analysis –, it must 'suffer' to be described, judged, interpreted by and within that name. An example for house names as agents in their panoramic function is the inscription of Lowood school in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The school at Lowood bears, on a "stone tablet over the door", the inscription: " 'Lowood Institution'. – This portion was rebuilt A.D. –, by Naomi Brocklehurst, of Brocklehurst Hall, in this county" (*JE*, p. 76). For the moment, we shall analyse this name as agent in its panoramic function, but on the next page of the novel, it will be observed in its focal function, which we shall discuss in the following section. The panoramic function of "Lowood Institution" allows the name to describe the respective place as it *is*, *might* or *should be*: that is, an institution *is* an established organization with a public character and with certain rules; an institution *might* also *be* an economical, political or educational tool meant to serve certain purposes; an institution *should be* the place where everybody should obey the rules by which it is governed and behave accordingly. All of these meanings go hand in hand with the Victorians' 'passion' for conventions and rules. Once there, Jane is supposed to act and speak according to the internal rules.

3. House names as agents in their focal function are the house names seen, observed, described by the others; for example, house names become objects of attention in their focal function when some character asks such questions as: 'What does it stand for?', or ''What is the origin of it?' In this case, the panoramic function of the other necessary agents will be fulfilled by, for example, either the owner of the house, or the inhabitant(s), or somebody from the outside.

The signification implied by the focal function of the name of "Lowood Institution" as agent is offered with the help of Helen Burns immediately after Jane first sees the inscription and thinks about what it may mean: " '… What is Lowood Institution?' 'This house where you are come to live.' 'And why do they call it institution? Is it in any way different from other schools?' 'It is partly a charity-school: you and I, and all the rest of us, are charity children. I suppose you are an orphan: is not either your father or your mother dead?' 'Both died before I can remember.' 'Well, all the girls here have lost either one or both parents, and this is called an institution for educating orphans.' "(*JE*, p. 77)

The conversation continues and Jane finds out that although the friends or relatives of the orphans, or even themselves pay fifteen pounds a year, they are still called "charity-children" because fifteen pounds a year is not enough for "board and teaching", the deficient being supplied by subscription from benevolent-ladies and gentlemen in the neighbourhood; and that Naomi Brocklehurst built the new part of the house and her son directs everything there. Gradually, we learn the 'rules' of this institution: once one lives at Lowood, it means that he/she is called an orphan; once one is an orphan, this means not enough money for board and teaching, therefore, one is called a charity-child; once one is a charity-child, it means that he/she is left to live at the mercy of not necessarily the benevolent ladies and gentlemen, but of Mr. Brocklehurst who buys their food and clothes.

V. In conclusion, names of houses, as represented in Victorian novels, acted as 'labels' not only in relation to the houses they were attached to, but also in relation to the inhabitants of those houses: names were either used – as objects – to identify and classify somebody's social position and financial status, or they were agents themselves, 'climbing' in the mind of some character or another and monopolizing their imagination, wishes and dreams.

List of abbreviations

Brontë, Anne, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2001, abbreviated as *TWH*.

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, Hertfordshire, 1992, abbreviated as *JE*.

Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, London: Penguin Books, 1985, abbreviated as *WH*.

Dickens, Charles, *David Copperfield*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., London, 2004, abbreviated as *DC*.

Dickens, Charles, *Dombey and Son*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2002, abbreviated as *DS*.

Dickens, Charles, *Great Expectations*, London: Penguin Books, London, 1983, abbreviated as *GE*.

Dickens, Charles, *Oliver Twist*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000, abbreviated as *OT*.

Hardy, Thomas, *The Return of the Native*, London: Penguin Books, London, 1994, abbreviated as *TRN*.

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