

The Metaphor of the Body as a House in 19th Century English Novels

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Abstract: The paper aims at identifying the way in which the human body functions as a metaphor for the concept of the house. The metaphorical process will be approached from a semiopoetic perspective, while the textual support will be provided by such novels as: *Great Expectations*, *Dombey and Son*, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, by Charles Dickens, *The Return of the Native*, by Thomas Hardy, *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë. Clothes will be approached as extensions, boundaries and modifiers of the human body and of the way in which human bodies are perceived.

Keywords: metaphor, identity, house, body, mind, clothes

1. Introduction

From the poetic metaphor (of the Aristotelic and classical rhetoric schools), and the linguistic metaphor (belonging to 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 1979 a and b; A. Ortony, 1979 *apud* Roventă-Frumușani 2000: 118); 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: 42), 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 Searle (1969) and Austin (1962)).

According to Peirce ([1903] 1990: 287, 2.277), metaphors are signs “which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing the parallelism in something else” and is considered 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 example offered by Johansen and Larsen (2002) is that of the mercury column which is a metaphor for the intensity of fever: we use the new, visual sign because heat, after all, can be felt but not seen, while the mercury column can be seen but not felt. Poetic metaphors behave in the same fashion, although the transformation of a parallelism into something else takes place as a process of transition from one semantic area to another (Greek *metaphora*: transition, exchange). Reading a thermometer and using a driving metaphor (e.g. ‘living in the fast lane’) to describe an energetic, frantic and ambitious person are two completely different things.

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’” (Johansen and Larsen 2002: 41). 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 than is generally assumed (Johansen, Larsen 2002: 42; Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 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 [can also] be intellectually productive/creative as it often is in great poetry” (Johansen, Larsen 2002: 43).

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” (Johansen and Larsen 2002: 43).

Our intention in this paper, is to shape the metaphorical references of such a statement as “the human body is a house” and find out the effects that such an association of terms has when applied to 19th century English novels and characters.

2. The metaphor of the body as a house

2.1. A semiopoetic approach to the concept of the body as metaphor

According to Danesi (2004: 118-119), the semiotic definition of metaphors raises an interesting dilemma. We shall use his model and apply it to what interests us most: the metaphor “The body is a house.” There are two referents, which are related to each other:

- the primary referent, *body*, which is the topic, or *tenor*, of the metaphor;
- the second referent, *house*, the *vehicle* of the metaphor which is chosen to say something about the topic;
- the linkage between these two creates a new meaning, the *ground*, which is much more than the simple sum of the meanings of topic and vehicle.

When discussing about the principles governing the organization and construction of space, C. H. Flynn (1990: 15) mentions the body as ideally disclosing “harmonious, divine proportion, matter made in God’s image.”

The metaphor of the human body as a house has been dealt with by Bachelard ([1958] 1969) and retaken by Madanipour (2003) through a social, cultural and psychological approach. Taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul through a phenomenological approach, Bachelard ([1958] 1969: 6) mentions that it is important to go beyond the mere description of houses and analysis of comfortable and/or uncomfortable elements: the space of the house shelters daydreaming, protects the dreamer and allows one to dream; moreover, Bachelard ([1958] 1969: 14-15) claims that the “house we were born in is physically inscribed in us” as a group of organic habits “we are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme”. In psychoanalysis, the exterior of the house represents the masque/the exterior/the appearance, the roof is a man’s head and spirit, the lower floors stand for the subconscious and the instincts while the kitchen would symbolize psychic changes or inner progress.

2.2. The “house” of the mind

For Madanipour (2003: 6), the personal space of the body represents a socio-psychological, invisible and yet physical space around each individual, which others may not enter without consent; the innermost part of a conscious human being is the mind, which is the house of thoughts, feelings and desires, and it may play the role of a refuge from the outside world or that of a trap. The mind is dependent on the body to grasp the meanings of the outside world and, together with the body, forms the boundary between the inner and the outer space. It seems that the mind is the most suited “space” of the human body to be described in metaphorical terms related to the house, or to certain rooms of the house. We shall use Holmes’ theory of the finite mental space – from A. C. Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) – to show the way in which the Victorians perceived the space of the mind and how they interpreted the workings of the human mind:

“You see,” he explained, “I consider that a man’s brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things, so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before.” (Ch. 2 *apud* Brantlinger and Thesing 1988: 67).

It is this particular image of furnishing the mind with thoughts that is suggested with Florence in *Dombey and Son*: *“It was a soothing consolation to Florence to give shelter to these thoughts, until one day [...] the fancy came upon her that, in weeping for his alienated heart, she might stir the spirits of the dead against him”* (DS, p. 299), together with the idea of the power of the mind as a tool to be used cautiously. One most important point that the fragment from Doyle shows is that the Victorians placed much emphasis on the material basis of the mind and also on the relationship between the mind and the body. Another point suggested here is the assumption that the individual has the capacity to control his or her mental composition, and its recommendation of the careful management of mental resources: this, in turn, illustrated the philosophy of the Victorian self-help movement which “advocated the individual’s power to gain control over emotions, ideas and behaviour, and to foster mental development” (Brantlinger, Thesing 1988: 68). Let us now take a look at the way in which Rochester describes Jane’s forehead as suggestive of the contents of the mind behind it:

The forehead declares, *“Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things: but judgment shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision. Strong wind, earthquake shock, and fire may pass by: but I shall follow the guiding of that still small voice which interprets the dictates of conscience”* (JE, p. 176).

According to this fragment, which follows the Victorian belief that an individual can control his/her mental composition, it seems rather too easy for Jane to “govern herself”, and therefore, where does the problem lie? The treacherous quality of the human mind – ready to give in to temptation – is in fact suggested by the beautiful imagery which signifies the tempestuous forces and purely instinctual impulses trying the human mind: passions rage furiously like heathens; the metaphorical use of the elements – strong winds, earthquakes and fires – are also imagined as vainly trying to populate Jane’s mind. This same mind inhabited by Reason, the supreme guardian against unhealthy and dangerous thoughts, is the one which revolts against the Reeds in Chapter 2, and the impression is, in both of these fragments, that the mind has a life of its own – located somewhere within the body, by means of which it has access to the exterior world – and its main purpose being that of judging as objectively as possible what happens outside – experiences – but also what happens inside – thoughts and memories:

“Unjust! – unjust!” said my reason, forced by the agonizing stimulus into precocious though transitory power: and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression – as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (JE, p. 10).

It is as if saying: “my mind has decided that I should not eat till I starve to death”; but Jane’s subsequent inner discourse emphasizes the power of the disciplined individual to intervene in the processes of the mind through the organization of knowledge.

In Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, it is the effect of a conversation that Eustacia overhears which allows for the invasion of her mind with new visions; one’s need to ‘furnish’ one’s inner world with food for hopes and dreams is also emphasized here:

That five minutes of overhearing furnished Eustacia with visions enough to fill the whole blank afternoon. Such sudden alternations from mental vacuity do sometimes occur thus quietly. She could never have believed in the morning that her colourless inner world would before night become as animated as water under a microscope, and that without the arrival of a single visitor. The words of Sam and Humphrey on the harmony between the unknown and herself had on her mind the effect of the invading Bard’s prelude in the ‘Castle of Indolence’, at which myriads of imprisoned shapes arose where had previously appeared the stillness of a void (TRN, p. 127).

This fragment emphasizes that necessary link between the mind and the body – the body as the means by which the mind obtains its material, and also the mind as empty container waiting to be filled – “furnished” – with “animated” thoughts: the microscopic animated water inhabiting her mind is the small-scale representation of the world outside which she so frequently tries to grasp by means of the telescope. The mind is also an empty ‘castle’ of laziness – also suggesting Eustacia’s indifference towards books and reading, her getting up late while Clym toils from dusk till dawn – which can be stirred only by certain outside stimuli: the fact that Clym may be the one to offer her what she most ardently desires – living in the city as a lady – bring to life the “myriads of imprisoned shapes” (the hopes she had always nurtured and for which she had finally found a means of fulfillment). The word “shapes” suggests the fact that the mind is impressed by words, but is still in need for an image from the eyes on which to work upon – a need which translates itself in Eustacia’s immediate decision to go and see Clym’s house.

3. The architectural production of bodies

Before proceeding to discussing the point of our interest in the current section of the paper, we should, first of all, mention what this point exactly is, since the phrase “architectural production of bodies” may be regarded as ambiguous: our interest lies in the 19th century writers’ preference to describe their characters by using the architectural discourse; we consider that such a discussion serves, as well as adds to the overall purpose of our paper: that of establishing the relationship between Victorian men and houses as signs of identity for Victorian men (and implicitly society). Therefore, we shall analyze the way in which 19th century writers constructed characters as if these had been designed according to some architectural plan.

The first thing that we would like to mention is Lefebvre’s ([1974] 1984: 170) theory on the relationship between body and space. Starting from the question of whether a body, with its capacity for action, can produce space, Lefebvre argues that there is an immediate relationship between the body’s deployment in space and the occupation of space – but not in the sense that occupation might be said to manufacture spatiality. The reasoning used by Lefebvre is that

(...) before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.

Starting from this fragment, we shall continue with mentioning the fact that a commonly held idea during the 18th century (also continuing to exist during the 19th century) was that buildings represent human temperament – an idea originating in the traditional derivation of architectural proportions from those of the human body:

(...) the modernized version of Vitruvian decorum extends the analogy to a point where a house represents the wealth, class and occupation of its owner. So what a monument does for the state, a domestic building does for the individual (Varey 1990: 19).

By combining these two quotations – the first one based on the idea that a body produces space as it produces itself, the second one stating that houses resemble their owners – and by applying a reversed argument of the house as a sign of cultural, social and personal identity – we reach the following hypothesis: 19th century writers described their characters ‘architecturally’, i.e. produced architectural bodies – particularly using words similar to those used in describing their houses – in order to emphasize this doubly-directed process of inhabiting on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to ironically reflect the extent to which Victorians ‘paid their respect’ to appearances; another reason may be the fact that the rendering of a character’s physiognomy by means of clearly distinguishable geometrical lines and/or curves may have the effect of a more ‘visible’ result concerning the character’s personality (also in the tradition of phrenology and physiognomy, two theories maintaining that the shapes on a man’s face and of his head bones could tell his/her character).

One of the novels in which characters are constructed by means of the architectural discourse is Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, where most of those owning houses are described as if they were some kind of an additional outbuilding to the house – we should mention the fact that our interest here is not in the immediate changing effects that a new owner may have upon his/her new house, but on characters/owners who are depicted as having been in possession of their house from the very beginning. A first example is that of Doctor Strong:

Doctor Strong looked almost as rusty, to my thinking, as the tall iron rails and gates outside the house; and almost as stiff and heavy as the great stone urns that flanked them, and were set up, on the top of the red-brick wall, at regular distances, all round the court (...) and his shoes yawning like two caverns on the hearth-rug. (DC, p. 235)

In fact, here similarity is drawn between Dr Strong and the building of the school: obviously, Dr Strong does not pay too much attention to the Victorian code of clothes (which we shall later discuss) and would rather be himself than try to seem somebody else; his “rusty” and “stiff”, “heavy” look may be misleading: indicating antiquity (and, again, lack of interest for worldly overdue attention paid to looks), it is nevertheless a look combined with the strength and durability of stones (also found in his name) anticipating a faithful and selfless inner nature, a man devoted to his wife and a friend for David, also devoid of any form of snobbism (which usually manifested itself by means of clothes and a severe sorting out of acquaintances).

We shall further direct our attention towards Miss Dartle, whom the narrator describes as follows:

I concluded in my own mind that she was about thirty years of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little dilapidated – like a house – with having been so long to let; yet had, as I have said, an appearance of good looks. Her thinness seemed to be the effect of some wasting fire within her, which found a vent in her gaunt eyes. (DC, p. 301)

Her similarity with the image of a dilapidated house, *having been too long to let*, and then her appearance of good looks clearly associate her with the idea of woman on the marriage market: on the one hand she had been too long in search of a husband and although in possession of good looks, her ‘dilapidated’ character made her clearly not designed as a ‘haven of refuge’ (Sanders 2003: 75) for any man at all. What should have been the windows of her soul, her eyes are nothing but some hollow outlets for her inner consumption: the wasting fire reminds us of Miss Havisham’s life of a suttee.

Miss Murdstone is described in terms of a jail:

(...) then, just touching the back of my hand with the tips of her cold, stiff fingers, she walked away, arranging the little fetters on her wrists and round her neck [...] these reminded me, in reference to Miss Murdstone’s nature, of the fetters over a jail-door; suggesting on the outside, to all beholders, what was to be expected within. (DC, p. 401)

Miss Murdstone is actually the embodiment of both the prisoner and the jailor: the fetters are significantly placed on her wrists and neck – like the cuffs of a criminal – but the allusion is made to the fetters of a jail-door suggesting what was to be found within: she is a prisoner, and a jailor to herself, but she acts as a jailor to others, such as David, for example. In Chapter IV David sees her numerous “little steel fetters and rivets” arranged upon the looking-glass in “formidable array” (p. 59) – just like a jailor’s keys – and it is Miss Murdstone who brings food to David while he is locked in his room, and her behaviour is very much like that of a jailor, in fact, the feeling is that there may never have been a fiercer jailor than Miss Murdstone: “when the key was turned, and Miss Murdstone came in with some bread and meat, and milk. These she

put down upon the table without a word, glaring at me the while with exemplary firmness, and then retired, locking the door after her” (p. 69).

Another meaning is rendered by Hardy’s description of Eustacia¹:

When her hair was brushed, she would instantly sink into stillness and look like the Sphinx (...) Viewed sideways, the closing-lone of her lips formed, with almost geometric precision, the curve so well known in the arts of design as the cimarecta, or ogee (...) One had fancied that such lip-curves were mostly lurking underground in the South as fragments of forgotten marbles (...) each corner of her mouth was as clearly cut as the point of a spear. (TRN, p. 76)

This description sets Eustacia as an outsider: her physiognomy – unusual for Egdon Heath – reflects her nature as a foreigner to the heath; the Sphinx-like image attributes her to far-off exotic places, and the “forgotten marble” together with the shapes of the points of a spear add a mixture of ideas from both old and new times (a native of fashionable Budmouth she had been forced to move to Egdon Heath), as if she belonged to some fairy-tale, or – as is suggested in the novel – to the realm of the ancient gods. The cyma recta – or the Doric cyma – is an architectural term referring to a “molding of double curvature which is concave at the outer edge and convex at the inner edge”² and the ogee is a “double curve, formed by the union of a convex and concave line, resembling an S-shape”.³ These geometrical shapes embody the idea of perfection and exotic antiquity: the earliest literary mention of the Dorians is in the *Odyssey* where they are described as inhabiting the island of Crete. But perfection with Eustacia also implies pride and the corners cut as the points of a spear, indicate her vengeful nature.

4. Clothes as extensions and/or boundaries of the human body

4.1. A semiotic approach to clothes

Clothes (either as boundaries or as extensions of the human body) have the power to transform the shape of the body according to the author’s intention. The examples that we shall use will demonstrate that the changing of clothes modify the shape of the human body and thus they modify the entire signification of the metaphor “the body as a house”: once the clothes change, the mind that the body “houses” changes, or is perceived as changed accordingly. Clothes may be thus metaphorically regarded in terms of “façades”/extensions or “fences”/boundaries of the body/ “house”.

Madanipour (2003: 11, 21-23) describes the body as a boundary between two realms – the private and the public one – and, consequently, as belonging to both the private and the public sphere; the personal space around the body is an invisible and mobile space that lies between the interior space of the body and the space that finds architectural and geographical expression outside. This space around the body is further defined as a socio-psychological space, “a small but invisible protective sphere or bubble that individuals maintain around them” (Madanipour 2003: 21); while the realm of the mind is considered the innermost private realm, and the (space of the) body as the extension of this subjective realm, as potentially accessible and as making up the realm of behaviour and social interaction, there is another boundary, that of the personal space:

a physical boundary between the self and the other is articulated, where a fundamental ingredient of the public-private relationship develops. Personal space is the space that a person and the others observe around his/her body, as the extension of the body. It is a space emotionally charged and helps regulate the spacing of individuals. (Madanipour 2003: 22)

It is this intermediary space (both public and private) that clothes belong to; by means of clothes, another boundary, of a visual nature particularly, is placed between the body itself and the outside world; clothes are an extension in themselves

¹ Hardy had been an architect himself; according to Turner (2001: 5), “building was in Hardy’s blood” and although he later abandoned architecture for writing, he “went on to apply his structural instincts to verse-forms, fictional plots and a massive historical drama”.

² Harris, M., Cyril (2006) *Dictionary of Architecture and Construction*. London: McGraw-Hill, p. 293.

³ *Idem*, p. 674.

because they, too, occupy a certain space around the body and confer upon the body different shapes and dimensions. Victorian novels portray both men and women as paying almost equal attention and importance to the clothes they wear.

In *Messages, Signs and Meanings*, Danesi (2004: 177) provides a semiotic approach to clothes which, seen as signs, stand for personality, social status, and overall character of the wearer. The semiotic questions of *how*, *what* and *why* (Cmeciu 2009: 280-281) something means what it means, are also applied here. A first characteristic of the dress code emphasized by Danesi is the fact that it is gendered: clothes are first and foremost used according to the gender of the person, and they are firstly interpreted by this criterion. The following criterion to be taken into consideration is a social requirement: that of dressing for the occasion, as a primary means of presenting persona (although they may or may not help one to achieve one's intended goal). For example, the elements and options for clothing signifiers which may constitute the male dress code for an interview appointment may include:

- *shirt* (white or some other conservative colour, long sleeves, no design, preferably buttoned at the collar);
- *tie* (conservative colour that should match the suit, tied neatly around the neck with a standard knot);
- *jacket* (gray or blue or some other colour that does not stand out); pants (matching colour);
- *shoes* (black, preferably with shoelaces).

A similar choice of clothes applies to women bank employees, for example: the “unisexual” type of dressing originated in the 1960s and was meant to symbolize equality between men and women in the job market, in the family and in society generally. But it was also meant to suggest the fact that clothes make the man: clothing means more than covering the body for protection: “It is a sign system that is interconnected with the other sign systems of society through which we can send out messages – about our attitudes, our social status, our political belief” (Danesi 2004: 178). What others call artifactual semiotics – the study of the meaning of material objects and artifacts, Danesi simply calls clothing semiotics.

Clothes extend the basic meaning of bodies – as signs of selfhood – in a cultural context; together with “the bodies they [clothes] enfold are imbued with moral, social and aesthetic significance” (Danesi 2004: 179): the Christian Church, for example, has always played on the duality of the body as a temple and as an enemy of the spirit. Generally, the morally significant body should be covered in clothes.

The biological function of clothes is a very important one, too: “they enhance our survivability” (*idem*): from this point of view, clothes are “human-made extensions of the body's protective resources”, additions to our protective bodily hair and skin thickness, therefore, clothing styles vary across geographical areas. Dress codes, which inform people how to clothe themselves in social situations, vary across cultures: for example, to an outsider, the Russian *kilbak* appears to be a brimless red hat, but to a rural Russian it means that the wearer is a doctor.

Another function of clothing is that of a tool by means of which one lies about himself/herself (Danesi 2004: 180), of a façade: to discourage people from deceiving other through clothing, some societies have even enacted prohibiting laws that state who can dress in certain ways (for example, in many religiously oriented cultures, differentiated dress codes for males and females are still regularly enforced).

Regarding the history of clothing, we shall only mention here what is relevant to our study, namely, the fact that while up until the nineteenth century fashion was the privilege of the aristocracy, with the Industrial Revolution fashion was turned into economic possibility for the masses, too, and since then fashion has become an intrinsic feature of modern living, and the 1950s – with the new paradigm of dress codes, the clothes worn particularly by rock'n roll musicians, which mirrored the power of youth culture – are known as the starting point when aristocrats ceased to dictate the ways of fashion (the punk movement, for example, started as a political statement from working-class youth in England, although its dress code later turned into all things to all classes). Dress codes are interconnected with social trends, social roles, and even political movements: dressing for social reasons is a universal feature of human cultures, and sometimes people prefer decorating their bodies (rather than literally dressing them) despite the lack of protection that they thus expose themselves to (Danesi 2004: 182).

Besides protection, clothes fulfill such functions as expressing one's identity, but also identifying oneself (distinguishing oneself as belonging to a certain group, or profession); dress also reveals people's beliefs, feelings and general approach to life. Headgear has also been worn across centuries to indicate social status.

4.2. Clothes – an expression of Victorian values

The Victorian dress code exhibited not only the gendered characteristic, but also the one implied by social class. Both men and women revolted, at the end of the 18th century, against the artificiality of the mannered clothing associated with the royal court. Men pleaded for a more natural style, unartificial which was actually modelled after the riding costume and which included: a linen shirt, a stiff neckband or a cravat, tight pants and tall boots worn over them, a vest (waistcoat) and a 'dress' riding coat cut high up and double-breasted with high lapels in the front over the waist and long-tailed in the back. Gradually, the lapelled coat was relegated to the evening, becoming the standard "white tie and tails" that is still formally worn today. The colours also grew darker, black becoming the standard colour for men; by mid-century men in society wore gloves (preferably coloured and not worsted) in the street, and white gloves for dinner parties; except for buckskins, all outer garments were made of wool, which means that they wrinkled terribly and needed a lot of special care; shirts had snob appeal "because it dirtied so quickly that if you could wear clean linen all the time you obviously had enough money to be a gentleman" (Pool 1993: 217). Materials were also worn according to social class: thin linen like lawn or muslin was worn by the upper classes, while the poorer classes were various thicker materials; boots were frequent due to the conditions of roads and streets and also the need to ride horseback; men were clean-shaven until the 1850s but after the soldiers came home bearded from the Crimean War, every respectable man had to grow one; and the indispensable element of a gentleman's attire was the cane, or its doppelganger, the tightly furled umbrella (the descendants of the sword which any 18th-century gentleman carried about him as a sign of noble birth).

In Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Pip must, first of all, transform his "common" appearance by putting on an entire array of clothes, so that his allegedly unattractive, ordinary body may turn into the body of a gentleman. Therefore, Pip receives a first allowance for his program to become a gentleman in the sum of 20 guineas to buy clothes: we have, therefore, an idea of what clothes meant to a gentleman and how expensive they were, a guinea being worth a pound and a little more, which would be the equivalent of today's \$ 4,000. It was also the equivalent of half of Joe's yearly blacksmith's wages. In contrast to the cost of fine clothing, the wages of servants seem small: "The labour of a man was cheaper than that of a horse" (Brown 1985: 11). It is in contrast to Miss Havisham's house that Pip compares his own common boots.

In *David Copperfield*, the interest towards nice clothes and boots – that corresponds to an interest in changing the shape of his body – is associated with David's falling in love, as if clothes were truly a sign of worthiness; the discourse shows a funny and ridiculous way of thinking, ironically depicted:

My passion takes away my appetite, and makes me wear my newest silk neck-kerchief continually. I have no relief but in putting on my best clothes, and having my boots cleaned over and over again. I seem, then, worthier of the eldest Miss Larkins (DC, p. 279).

Of course, the other accessories so determining for a gentleman do not escape David's *toilette*: "a gold watch and chain, a ring upon my little finger, and a long-tailed coat; and I use a great deal of bear's grease – which, taken in conjunction with the ring, looks bad. Am I in love again? I am. I worship the eldest Miss Larkins (*idem*). On a subsequent occasion, David offers us the 'joy' of letting us know about his two-hour ritual of dressing for a ball where he expects to encounter Miss Larkins. The same ridiculously careful attitude towards clothes and outward appearance is exhibited "in the way of preparation for [the] blessed event" of seeing Dora: "I turn hot when I remember the cravat I bought. My boots might be placed in any collection of instruments of torture" (DC, p. 487).

In *Oliver Twist*, the snobbish, self-concerned Bumble is depicted as unexpectedly 'modified' after his convenient marriage to Mrs Corney by means of the dress code, too; his (particularly mental) incapacities are mocked at by a description of the clothes he wears after marrying Mrs Corney:

The laced coat, and the cocked hat, where were they? He still wore knee-breeches, and dark cotton stockings on his nether limbs; but they were not the breeches. The coat was wide-skirted, and in that respect like the coat; but, oh, how different! The mighty cocked-hat was replaced by a modest round one. Mr Bumble was no longer a beadle. (OT, p. 233)

The widespread idea that clothes make the man is ironically depicted further, where clothes are seen as signs indicating one's profession:

A field-marshal has his uniform, a bishop his silk apron, a councillor his silk gown, a beadle his cocked-hat. Strip the bishop of his apron, and the beadle of his hat and lace; what are they? Men. Mere men. Dignity, and even holiness, too, sometimes, are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine. (OT, p. 233)

The value and worth connected with clothes is very clearly stated here; but the lack of substance underneath the empty clothes is even more trenchantly – with a kind of bitter smile attitude – emphasized.

Concerning women's clothes, there was a gradual shift from frocks (dresses that buttoned down the back) and stays at the beginning of the century towards more bell-shaped figures with the line of the waist much closer to the natural one and with the fuller dresses made to look so by the petticoats added underneath. Just like with men, materials were worn according to social class: the upper classes wore rich and heavy materials such as velvet and silk. Clothes were an important element for a decent, well-mannered lady: in the morning, the etiquette required a loose dressing gown and a bonnet to hide the paper hair curlers; once breakfast was over, the dress had to be chosen according to the occasion: the morning dress had to be loose, with a high collar, the sleeves tight at the wrists and a girdle; the skirt for walks was supposed to barely touch the ground; receptions and visits implied a dully coloured dress made out of silk or of any other high-quality cloth according to season and status, completed by lace collar and cuffs, and a certain amount of jewellery; the cloth for a walk in town was not supposed to be too rich: silks, velvet, lace, a lot of jewellery and expensive furs for the cold weather; the dress for an evening in the company of guests had to shine: any type of expensive cloth, according to the season, for a dress which should have touched the ground; the fan had to be perfect and the gloves impeccable; the jewels consisted in diamond brooches, pendants, necklaces, earrings and bracelets; the proper dinner colours were all the tones of black, navy blue, purple, dark green, brown, dark red; expensive furs and cashmere, diamonds and other expensive accessories were forbidden to a young single lady. "The 1850s and 1860s saw the rise of one of the great gifts to the century's cartoonists – the crinoline – as women abandoned the five or six layers of petticoats" (Pool 1993: 215); but the crinoline posed such problems as: difficulty to fit through doors and to sit down, embarrassment on windy days, the ease with which one could fall down the stairs; and when maids insisted on wearing it themselves, instead of dusting tea-tables, they risked sweeping all the bric-a-brac off them. However, dresses diversified according to purpose, so that by the 1870s the tea gown was introduced and the "*Habits of Good Society* noted that its female readers would need at least a walking dress, a country dress, a carriage or visiting dress, an ordinary evening dress, a dinner dress and a ball dress" (idem.). Colours were favoured sometimes, and a twenty-three-year-old wore grey silk in 1871 because she was 'too old to wear white'.

In *Wuthering Heights*, clothes are a compulsory element to the position of a lady; the contrast here is between the idea that clothes make the man/lady and the idea that lack of ornament and lack of paying attention to one's looks equalled savagery and primitivism: while recovering from her injury to her ankle at Thrushcross Grange, Catherine is visited by her mother who, finding a suitable occasion for 'reforming' her, tries to

(...) raise her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery, which she took readily: so that, instead of a wild hatless little savage (...) there lighted from a handsome black pony a dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver (...) I removed the habit, and there shone forth, beneath a grand plaid silk frock, white trousers, and burnished shoes; and while her eyes sparkled joyfully when the dogs came bounding up to welcome her, she dare hardly touch them lest they should fawn upon her splendid garments. (WH, p. 93)

Actually, clothes will never succeed in changing Catherine's true nature, which is also revealed by her hypocritically polite attitude towards the Lintons, described as "ingenious cordiality" sprung from her newly formed "double character" (p. 107). Catherine stands as a proof that clothes alone can, in no way, alter somebody's status: they may provide a mask,

or a deceiving tool, or a means of being accepted into a certain social group, but their influence alone is powerless upon the person's character unless it is supported by other things such as proper education, self-awareness.

Clothes have a magnifying effect in *Jane Eyre*; they stand as symbols of power and social status, and also as deceiving tools, empty ornaments nourishing the Victorians' snobbism and taste for hollow appearances; the following fragment describes the ladies invited at Thornfield on the occasion of a party also attended by Blanche Ingram: "There were but eight [ladies] (...) many were dressed in white; and all had a sweeping amplitude of array that seemed to magnify their persons as a mist magnifies the moon" (*JE*, p. 149).

Prior to this party, Adèle's complicated ritual of dressing for the event – helped by Sophie, the servant – has a significantly calming effect upon the girl: she, too, is part of a society which treasures clothes as signs of supreme, absolute Value (moral, social and economic), and she, too, as a product of that society, will behave accordingly: "by the time she had her curls arranged in well-smoothed, drooping clusters, her pink satin frock put on, her long sash tied, and her lace mittens adjusted, she looked as grave as any judge" (p. 148). On the other hand, Jane's simple stile of dress has no other immediate effect upon her – besides that of being able to dress quickly and unattended – than that of contributing to her already unnoticeable position at the party: "my best dress (the silver-grey one, purchased for Miss Temple's wedding, and never worn since) was soon put on; my hair was soon smoothed; my sole ornament, the pearl brooch, soon assumed" (*JE*, p. 148).

The possession and exhibition of clothes and furniture reflects social class and financial power, but also snobbism and shallow human natures. The absence of nice clothes is felt as an incarcerating force. In *Great Expectations*, it is through the absence of fine clothing that Pip realizes that he is "common"; boots, a compulsorily required accessory for a gentleman, are depicted as "common", "vulgar appendages" (*GE*, pp. 91-92). With Miss Havisham the metaphor of the clothes is also used to convey entrapment: the materials are rich satins, lace and silks, indicating her status as belonging to the wealthy, the higher classes; but the dress is so old, and more significantly, a bride's dress, that it makes Miss Havisham look like a decayed, withered woman. It is the attire not of a Victorian respectable lady, but it is that of a mad woman. On the other hand, clothes act as boundaries since, whatever kind of soul she may have inside, she does not let herself be judged but through the mirror of this white-yellow carnivalesque dress. Her act of wearing the old, ragged bridal dress signifies her mockery at the allegedly prevailing Victorian values of respectability, domesticity and stability; in her, one can identify the type of the hysterical spinster, also embodied by Rosa Dartle in *David Copperfield*.

In *David Copperfield*, Little Emily is aware of the class distinctions that clothes offer; she is, in fact, also aware of the link between clothes-profession and social status; when asked by David whether her uncle, Mr Pegotty, is a good man, she answers by mentioning the benefits that she would incur upon him if she would ever become a lady:

"Good?" said Emily. "If I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money." (*DC*, p. 47)

As far as professions are concerned, what seems to be childish discourse with her in considering the gentleman and the lady to be occupations belonging to the middle-class, while being a fisherman was an occupation belonging to the lower classes, was in fact a reality documented by reports: discussing upon the acquaintances of the Brontë family, Barker (2002: 19)⁴ quotes William White's 1837 *History, Gazeteer and Directory of the West Riding of Yorkshire* as listing twenty-nine people who might be placed in the category of the middle-class, namely: mill-owners, clergymen, heads of schools, quarry owners, merchants and five men whose occupation was given as "gentleman".

In Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, clothes are used not only to signify profession and occupation, but also to illustrate another commonly held belief: that according to which sons should follow in the occupation of their fathers. The book opens with the captain's walking along the road, in "glazed hat, an ancient boat-cloak, and shoes; his brass buttons bearing an anchor upon their face" (*TRN*, p. 8). Such ideas as that maintaining clothes to be powerful indicators of one's

⁴ Barker, Julien (2002) "The Haworth Context." [In:] Glen, Heather (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontë*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 13-33.

true nature and that maintaining that sons should continue in the occupation of their father are immediately “demolished” by the metaphor of the clothes itself: the captain’s ancient clothes make him look decayed. The discourse of clothes is used in the same direction with Venn, the reddleman: although his red clothes indicate his occupation, the red dye metaphorically covering him entirely from head to foot (on which grounds he is judged by the others), he will gradually turn out to be a smart, kind-hearted and well-meaning young man, worthy of Thomasin. Venn stands as a proof that clothes are only a mask and appearances should not guide anybody in judging one’s inner nature. His outward appearance may seem even devilish at times, but this is only meant to increase the clash between the appearances that the others see in his clothes, and what he truly is. Of, course, Venn will finally lay off the red clothes and the red dye, together with his occupation of reddleman, but readers have guessed his nature from the very beginning. Clothes have the same disguising function with Clym: as a furze-cutter, he is described by Eustacia as “disguised by his leather accoutrements, and by the goggles he was obliged to wear over his eyes, that his closest friend might have passed by without recognizing him” (p. 295). In fact, Eustacia is the one who refuses to recognize the good qualities that made her fall in love with him (besides the hope that he would get her out of Egdon Heath). When Wildeve, now in possession of a good fortune, comes elegantly dressed, Eustacia has another chance to compare the “surfaces” – because that is all she is capable of seeing – of both Wildeve and Clym: “on the hearthrug lay Clym asleep. Beside him were the leggings, thick boots, leather gloves, and sleeve-waistcoat in which he worked” (p. 331). What is more unfair from Eustacia’s part, is the fact that she speaks of his alleged failure in matters of the world to Wildeve himself:

Wildeve being elegantly dressed in a new summer suit and light hat; and she continued: “Ah! You don’t know how differently he appeared when I first met him, though it is such a little while ago. His hands were as white and soft as mine; and look at them now, how rough and brown they are! His complexion is by nature fair, and that rusty look he has now, all of a colour with his leather clothes, is caused by the burning of the sun.” (p. 332)

She despises in Clym what his working clothes represent to her; “his complexion is by nature fair” unconsciously and ironically tells the truth by itself: Clym is, indeed, of a fair nature. On the other hand, Eustacia’s scrupulous care of dressing resembles that of Blanche Ingram in *Jane Eyre*:

(...) there was material enough in the picture for twenty new conquests. The rebellious sadness that was rather too apparent when she sat indoors without a bonnet was cloaked and softened by her outdoor attire, which always had a sort of nebulousness about it, devoid of harsh edges anywhere; so that her face looked from its environment as from a cloud, with no noticeable lines of demarcation between flesh and clothes. (TRN, p. 303)

The lack of harshness in her clothes – present in Clym’s clothes – is still indicative of her harsh pride so easily tempted into judging everybody around on all the wrong grounds. It is that same harsh unflinching pride which will make her design her runaway plan and which will lead her to tragedy.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the metaphor of the body as a house, together with the discourse of the clothes reveals the mind as a room ‘furnished’ and populated with thoughts and visions. Most of the times, the construction of bodies by means of the architectural discourse explains the metaphor of the body as a house in which the mind dwells, and also what the identity of this mind is. Just as fences are extensions and boundaries of the house, sparkling but shallow façades, clothes are extensions of the human body, used for different purposes: besides the fundamental role of covering and protecting the body, the Victorians liked the idea of exhibiting wealth by means of the code of clothes – which thus function as masks – and, most often, the intended effect was reached (clothes ‘magnified’ bodies) but only on a superficial level, since clothes never managed to ‘magnify’ or to improve one’s true self.

6. References

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Abbreviations

- Brontë, Anne ([1848] 2008) *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Introduction and Notes by J. McDonagh. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, abbreviated in the quotations as *TWH*.
- Brontë, Charlotte ([1847] 1992) *Jane Eyre*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, abbreviated in the quotations as *JE*.
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