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■ A MODEL OF CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY IN DICKENSIAN NOVELS

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Tokom procesa prikupljanja i analize materijala o narativnim strukturama, autorka rada razvila je model narativnog identiteta koji se oblikuje kroz tri koordinate: konstrukcija identiteta narativnih učesnika, konstrukcija identiteta zapleta i konstrukcija tekstualnog identiteta (Morărașu 2007). Na osnovu Rikerovih teorijskih postavki, u radu se objašnjavaju obrasci imenovanja i važnost tog procesa kao najvažnijeg sredstva interpretacije, jer pruža neposredno i duboko razumevanje lika i zapleta.

Ključne reči: konstrukcija identiteta, narativni identitet, tekstualni identitet, ime, zaplet.

The first formulation of a theory that proposes a narrative projection of identity is due to Paul Ricœur in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990). Narrative identity is represented as “an interval, or rather a temporal mediation between character and truth towards others”, where character is the “set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same” (Ricœur 1992: 119). The basic principle is that the character’s identity is correlative to that of the plot/story.

From a narrative point of view, identity can be conventionally called identity of the character, built in close relation with the identity of the plot/story. The character is the one doing the action in the plot/story. His role derives from the same narrative intelligence as the plot/story itself. (Ricœur 1990: 141)

My theory of narrative identity shaped through the acts of naming (Morărașu 2007)² has as a general frame Avădanei’s presentation of “the concepts and methods

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2 This approach has started from revealing the omnipotence of the primordial Act of Naming and then broadened the research area to the acts of bestowing, bearing, revealing and earning a name, then to taking away, hiding or prohibiting and even slandering it.

of a theory of the narrative” (2002: 30). It basically draws on two narratological models – Ricœur’s model of narrative identity (1990) and Cohn’s model of the relationships among writing self, narrating self, experiencing self/performing self and reading self (1978), paralleled by Chatman’s communicational model of discursive levels (1978).

The model of narrative identity construction I have developed is based upon three coordinates: the identity of narrative participants, the identity of the plot and textual identity. This paper expands upon the first two coordinates of narrative identity (narrative participants’ identity and plot identity) and briefly introduces the acts of creating the text as a finished product in using the language of names.

Whitebrook (2001: 24-25) considers that “the process of construction of identity is foregrounded in a novel at two levels: the fictional process whereby the character or narrator puts together the story of his/one’s life, and the authorial process whereby the writer utilizes narrative structure, techniques and elements (such as voice and point of view) for fictional characterization of the process.”

The importance of the naming acts in defining the identity of authors, readers, narrators and characters is outlined in the following table. These acts are conceived as acts of identification (by pronominal reference, proper names and definite descriptions) and acts of categorization and differentiation (by social classifiers, within relations between participants or in relation to plot).

Author (experiencing vs. writing self)	Reader (reading self)	Narrator (narrating self)	Character (performing self)
- <i>Authors</i> identified by real full names vs. pseudonyms, pen names, anagrams, initials or no name; - <i>Implied authors</i> displaying different degrees of disclosure	- Named (identifiable by nominal or personal reference) or nameless <i>real readers</i> ; - <i>Implied readers</i> identified by pronominal reference (you) or by some appellative (reader, readers)	- Overt (defined by name, personal history and deictic identification – 1 st person or 3 rd person, rarely 2 nd person) vs. covert/anonymous (distinct vs. indistinct narrative voices)	- Named vs. nameless / anonymous <i>characters</i> ; - conventionally named vs. fictitiously named <i>characters</i> ; - Characters bearing motivated (descriptive names, charactonyms etc.) vs. unmotivated names; - Characters with transparent vs. opaque names

Table 1: Narrative Participants’ Identity Construction (Morărașu 2007: 149)

In shaping an author’s multiple identities, any reference to his real experiencing self should immediately relate to his/her biography, to written or oral evidence of his/her existence, exposing both his private and public life (personal vs. social self), with a view to understanding the cultural background of his literary career (writing self).

The most reliable projections of an author's self during his lifetime and beyond his/her limited physical existence are offered in writings, diaries, autobiographies and letters and by researchers in biographies, monographs, collections of the materials reflecting general reception of literary works, etc. – all these disclosing both personal and impersonal traits of the subject.

Contemporary critical reviews, their immediate public response, measured quantitatively by the number of copies being sold, do not always reflect a steady evolution in the process of reception. There are several factors that influence the survival of the writing self throughout the ages, as every exposure to the reader's/interpreter's attention leads to the reshaping of this kind of self. Thus, the closest similitude between the real self and the writing self resides in the relationship with the others; they both feed on the image projected in the public eye and any distortion of this image leads to serious loss of balance.

In Dickens's case, the intense awareness of his presence in the public eye, as transmitted by his writings and performances, was a defining influence. He seems to have depended heavily on his readers' response to his writings and struggled hard to maintain the middle course between self-acceptance and acceptance by the others.

Another important participant, whose role is that of speaker or *voice* in narrative discourse (Genette 1972: 86) is the narrator. "Voice" may also refer to the controlling presence or "authorial voice" behind the characters, narrators, and personae of literature. Even though we cannot actually see or hear the narrator, the text contains a number of elements that project the narrator's voice in terms of "overtness" and "covertness" (Chatman 1978). Most Victorian anonymous narrators are overt narrators, but some are more overt than others.

In addition to Genette's basic types of narratives, Stanzel (1984) presents three typical narrative situations: first-person (homodiegetic), authorial (heterodiegetic-overt) and figural (heterodiegetic-covert). All the novels written by Dickens fall into the first two traditional types, with slight variations as far as the narrative technique adopted is concerned.

In Genette's terms, *David Copperfield* is a homodiegetic narrative, due to the fact that the narrator exists in the same world as the other characters. In Stanzel's framework, Dickens's text is a typical first-person narrative, because the narrator tells an autobiographical story about a set of past experiences that evidently shaped and changed his life and made him into what he is today.

The problems caused by alternating narration between different grammatical persons impose a discussion of intertwining narrative types within the same novel. A problematic case of narrative situation is exposed at the beginning of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, as the narrator is, in fact, an I-as-observer or witness, whose main activities seem to be wandering about and watching people closely. Much to our amazement, the narrator who becomes more and more actively involved in the story of little Nell suddenly withdraws from the story and leaves the scene to the characters, turning into a heterodiegetic narrator.

As far as the characters' identity is concerned, writers conceive them either as constructs, structured upon different layers of traits (and names function as structural devices) or as "creatures", displaying human features (with the name as an important

identity marker). Dickens did not promote the idea that characters need to be constructed so as to correspond to the author’s design. His “relationship” with his characters was of a more intimate nature and he confirmed the idea of a cherished parentage.

In the construction of plot identity, I have accepted that the acts of naming entail naming practices (from simply giving a name or using a name for a unique individual), as well as re-naming (several names are taken by/given to a single person throughout his existence; this may lead to a chameleonic shifting of identity), mis-naming (altering the form of a name, tempering with its content) and un-naming acts (assuming anonymity as a mode of existence or deliberate refusal to identify or classify a person by means of a proper name).

Acts of naming or “naming plots” (Ragussis 1986)	Acts of re-naming	Acts of mis-naming	Acts of “un-naming” (Stump 1998)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inheriting vs. acquiring names; - Making or earning a name; - Losing vs. finding a name; - Preserving a ‘good name’ (reputation) vs. staining a name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bestowing vs. adopting multiple names; - Using substitute names such as nicknames and criminal aliases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intentional vs. accidental distortion of names; - Nominal truncations, misspellings, mispronunciation and onomastic deviations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effacement of the name; - Anonymity; - dehumanization and reification/ depersonalization

Table 2: Plotal identity construction (Morărașu 2007: 149)

Ragussis (1986) sees fiction as representing naming through a complicated series of “acts of naming” or “naming plots”. The most familiar ones are the plot of seduction and the plot of inheritance, followed by the plot of crime and punishment or the plot of earning one’s name. If the plots based on inheriting, finding, making/earning and preserving a “good name” are illustrative of Dickensian novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *Dombey and Son*, there are others (e.g. *Bleak House*) which venture to explore the acts of violation committed in using names – concealing, distorting, changing or erasing names, in other words, the acts of renaming, mis-naming and un-naming.

In the plot of “inheritance” from *Oliver Twist*, the most overt indication of the theme of naming occurs in the incipit, when the narrator makes a pact with us, in declaring: “I will assign no fictitious name.” The responsibility of inventing a name for the protagonist is passed to one of the characters (i.e. Bumble).

Classified as a nameless orphan, the boy (and his name) literally carries monetary value: he was “to let” and “five pounds would be paid to anybody who would take possession of him” – *Oliver Twist* (919). As the rightful inheritor of his father’s money, Oliver’s real value depends on his knowing his real name. There is a constant struggle between the evil Monks, assisted by Fagin, who wants to reveal that Oliver is the child

with a stain upon his name and Brownlow, assisted by the Mayles, who manages to reveal his proper/real name. In the end, Oliver Twist becomes the inheritor and the guardian of the family name.

The struggle to preserve a "good name", that is, a spotless reputation, was an essential theme in Victorianism. In order to illustrate it, I have focused my attention on Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, on account of the fact that the associations of names are sometimes so strong that they overwhelm their meaning. I chose to observe the naming patterns which announce the main stages in the progression of the plot.

In "Dombey and Son", there are two names of blood-related persons, in a combination of family name (including the functions/semantic features of man, father, proprietor, master), and of common name, which turns out to be as significant as the Son in the Holy Trinity, once it is elevated to the rank of proper name (Morărașu 2002: 73-74). These two names stand for the House (as Dombey is a snobbish merchant with royal pretensions) and for the firm which the family has owned for more than one generation. Dombey and his Son share more than the name and the ownership of the firm. The newly-born heir, little Paul, is expected to grow from "Son to Dombey", just as his father has risen in a tradition established by his own father. We witness Paul's indoctrination that he is to become an indispensable part of *Dombey and Son*, passing through the stages of "a talking, walking, wondering Dombey" (*Dombey and Son*, 87). In his turn, Mr. Dombey has waited for twenty years to ascend to the honorable position of Dombey, after having been the *Son* for too long. At the same time, the two names are so closely connected with the image of his father, that Little Paul identifies him with the company itself: "He's Dombey and Son" (*Dombey and Son*, 146).

At the end of the novel, we find the "almighty" Dombey deprived of all his social roles and functions (husband, father, Mr. Dombey, merchant, employer, owner of 'Dombey and Son'). Dombey's preservation of his basic human features (rendered by semantic features: +animate, +personal, +male), together with the indicators of age and social class, is emblematic for the incongruous triumph of his personal self over the overestimated social self. Though not acceptable as a semantic feature, his remaining a *gentleman* may be considered as the very essence of a Victorian man.

Various acts of naming do not only organize entire plots, but also show violations of social conventions. Thus, the title of *Our Mutual Friend* accounts for the concealment of real identity, first intended by the author, then adopted by one of the characters as a tactics of trial and testing of another character.

The complicated plot scheme delays the process of identification in which we pass through different stages of naming: "our mutual friend" (an indicator of the role this character will play in the plot of the novel) = John Harmon (real name, the inheritor of a large fortune made by "Dust", that is, dealing in refuse collection) = Julius Hanford (alias used by Harmon when going to see the body of the drowned man which was thought to be his) = John Rokesmith (the second name adopted when taking lodgings with the Wilfers and preserved until he risks being arrested under suspicion of murder). Throughout the whole novel, John Harmon has no stable name, but rather a succession of names, added to the ones already mentioned: "Jack a Manory" (Ch. 16), "the Fortune-Teller", "Blue Beard of the secret chamber" (Ch. 12) and "the Mendicant" (Ch. 5). Most of the time, he is not even the centre of his own narrative: at the Veneerings' dinners,

he is deprived of a name and accounted as “the Man from Somewhere” or the “Man from Nowhere”, while his surrogate name becomes distorted in: “his Secretary... whose name, I think, is Chokesmith – but it doesn’t in the least matter – say Artichoke” (*Our Mutual Friend*, 413).” If at first he adopts aliases as a means of escaping the web of relationships, in the end it is difficult for him to find any other name or identity.

All these examples indicate that the process of plot construction depends upon the assemblage of some naming patterns (events and actions told by author and/or narrator/reflector and performed by characters submitted to operations of identification and classification). The process of reconstruction of these plots by the reader involves remembrance of the specific type of identity markers of narrative participants, along with the fictional place and personal names that connect the events.

In applying different approaches to the language of names, one can also observe the way in which names contribute to the shaping of textual identity.

<p>Naming systems and practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Naming systems in literature (Toolan 1990); - Victorian name-giving practices: giving proper vs. “improper” names. 	<p>Signifying systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Titles as signifying systems; - “Sign-names” (Cmeciuc 2001) integrated in the complex system of “sign-characters” (Cmeciuc 2003). 	<p>Personal denominative devices</p> <p>(Poruciuc 2005):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Given/first names; - Family names; - Substitute names; - Culturally-charged names. 	<p>Cohesive devices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referring expressions (Brown and Yule 1995): - proper names; - definite descriptions; - indefinite descriptions; - pronominal referring expressions. 	<p>Stylistic devices and tropes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Metaphorical names (“metaphors for the self” – Melnyk 2002); - Allusive names; - Symbolic names; - Allegorical names; - Names based on antonomastic or metonymic substitution.
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Table 3: Construction of textual identity (adapted from Morărașu 2007: 150)

The major trends in the naming of participants can be perceived as “the manifestation of the narrator’s or character’s respect for the named individual” (Toolan 1990: 125-126). In the onomastic-etymological approach to denominative devices, we may concentrate upon the interplay of various types of personal naming devices, whereas the semiotic perspective aims at establishing the importance of onomastic signs in the semiotic system of characters.

A further step to be taken is submitting proper names to a close scrutiny of their stylistic features, trying to find enough evidence to support the idea of a deliberate intent in the selection of names that describe characters and of a vivid awareness of

the connotations attached to most of them. In a broader contextual analysis of literary onomastic devices, what is really intriguing is that such names may express attributes that are more meaningful and significant to one's identity than official conventional names.

Once we accept that the "enterprise of fiction grants and limits the power of naming" (Ragussis 1986: 229), the project of establishing the interdependence between narrative identity and the act of naming is successful. Thus, naming acts may define and qualify personal and social identity, as well as the identity of the plot and of the text itself.

The results obtained in applying this model to Dickensian novels entitle me to believe that the reshaping of the fictional enterprise in terms of interrelated identities, multilayered selves and naming acts may bring a contribution to the study of narratives belonging to any other period and writer.

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SUMMARY

A MODEL OF CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY IN DICKENSIAN NOVELS

As a result of a process of accumulation and sedimentation of reference materials on narrative structure, I have developed a model of narrative identity shaped through the acts of naming with three coordinates: construction of the identity of narrative participants, construction of plot identity and of textual identity (see Morărașu 2007). In discussing the problems of building the identity of narrative participants, I have first considered the multiple identities assumed by authors, the basic types of narrative situations, narratives and narrators; then, I have indicated the concrete techniques of constructing the identity of the characters. Considering that the process of “emplotment” (Ricoeur 1990) may be based upon the assemblage of some naming patterns, the name becomes the most powerful tool for interpretation, offering us an immediate and profound understanding of the character and of the plot.

KEYWORDS: identity construction, narrative identity, textual identity, acts of naming, name, narrative participants, plot.

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