

Managing Money and Language as Interrelated Sign Systems

Nadia-Nicoleta MORĂRAȘU
University of Bacau, ROMANIA

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Abstract: In proposing an interpretation of money and language as overlapping sign systems, we have in view the metaphorical language of finance/commerce that permeates Dickens's novels. The two novels that we consider as representative for the way in which metaphors from the financial system slip into other systems are *Our Mutual Friend* and *Dombey and Son*.

The method that we use consists of approaching the two novels from the perspectives of semiotics and stylistics, with particular reference to the economic isotopies represented in the semiotic square and the economic/financial metaphors in different types of discourses.

Introduction

We start our research from the hypothesis that money represents for Charles Dickens the main system that establishes the relationship between the individual and the society, whereas language itself is another important system that "becomes a commodity, a medium of exchange or an item of currency" (Connor, 1985:150).

In the interpretation of the complex structure of economic relations in *Dombey and Son*, we shall use an adapted model of Greimas's semiotic square proposed by Connor (1985). This model of structural relationships brings to our attention the opposition of openness and closure. According to the positions on which the main characters may be placed in the square, the structure of family relationships corresponds to the four-term economic relations established among them. Thus, Connor's model proves that "giving, exchange, investment and purchase come to provide a metaphorical language for the relationships of characters, and the giving, hoarding, purchase, dispossession and bankrupting of self." (Connor, 1985:42).

One of the most interesting aspects of the metaphorical language of commerce and finance in *Our Mutual Friend* is the way in which human materiality (the material refuse of human lives under the form of dust, garbage, slime and excrement is continually being put back into productive circulation. The book satirizes the unfailing corruptive power of wealth, symbolized by the inheritance of these mysterious garbage heaps, called dust mounds (that were the source of the fortune made by John Harmon's father) and by the changing fortunes of Boffin, the Golden Dustman. As the problem of inheriting these mounds is a major plot concern, we find a close association between money and language in the will

which represents a text in two systems (the linguistic and the financial) and carries out a transaction: the transfer of money from the deceased to its rightful recipient.

The outcome of our research project is the validation of idea that Charles Dickens shows keen awareness of the complicated and unstable systems of signification which determine the individuals in the Victorian age, leading to the destruction of the family lives of both rich and poor by an industrialized, materialistic society.

1. Economic relations in *Dombey and Son*

1.1. Models of structural relationships

Greimas argues in *Sémantique structurale* (1966) and *Du sens* (1970) that signs tend to gather in clusters rather than in rigid oppositions. The most common of these clusters is the four-term relationship represented in the semiotic square.

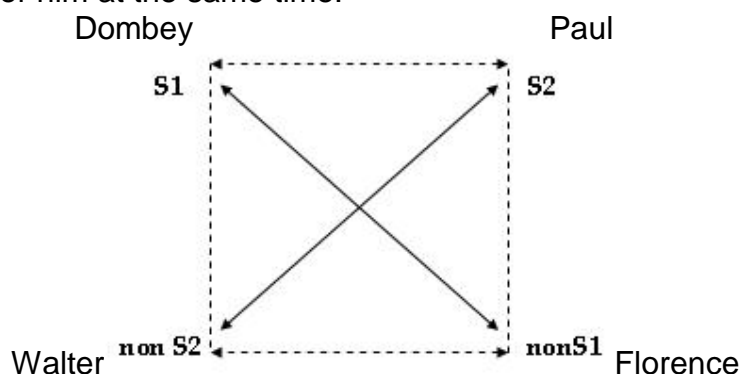
This narrative semiotic model is based on binary oppositions, more precisely, on privative oppositions (absence or presence of a feature) and qualitative oppositions (e.g. masculine vs. feminine). Thus, we shall consider the following types of relations set between the four positions: S1, S2, Non-S1, and Non-S2:

- Relations of contrariety (partial exclusion) – between S1 and S2 between Non-S1 and Non-S2;
- Relations of contradiction (total exclusion) between S1 and Non-S1; between S2 and Non-S2.
- Relations of implication (inclusion) set on the vertical axis between S1 and Non-S2 together with S2 and Non-S1.

Close attention to the language of *Dombey and Son* indicates that there are several oppositions established between the characters taken as terms of the semiotic square. Among the usable models of structural relationships, we can mention selfhood and otherness, paralleled by interiority and exteriority.

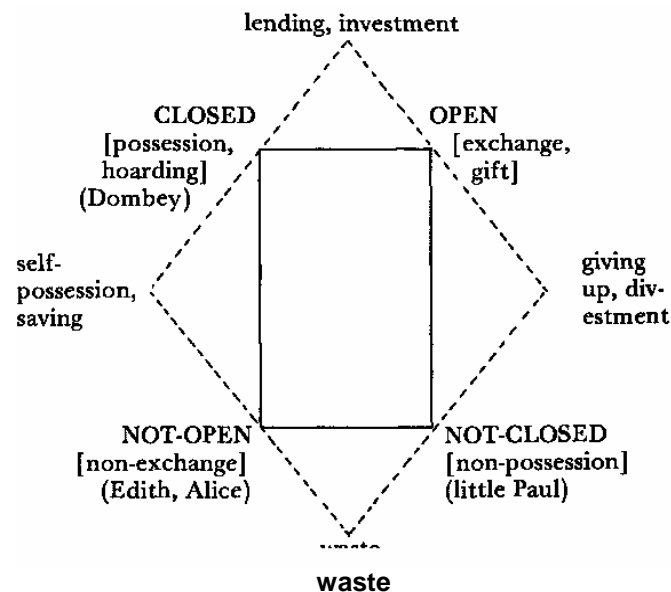
In analyzing the isotopy of family relationships, it becomes obvious that the most important relationship is that of father and son. Fatherhood is repeatedly formulated in terms of possession and interiority. Dombey has himself been a son and has been absorbed by the structure of family relationships just like Paul. This is why, although, in the isotopy of personal identity, Paul is the negation of Dombey, in this familial isotopy he is Dombey's contrary.

The text also produces a signifier which stands outside the sphere of the father and of the family: Florence is the negation of Dombey's interiority rather than its contrary. Florence therefore occupies the position of 'non-closure' in the square. We might expect this to be balanced eventually by a 'non-openness', the negation of little Paul, to balance Florence's negation of Dombey. It is tempting to consider Walter in this role. He is not a son, after all, but a nephew (of Sol Gills) and thus stands in a curiously unfixed family relationship. In the end he becomes another son to Dombey, of course, but one who enjoys a fuller, more permanent selfhood. In other words, he represents a negation of Paul and compensation for him at the same time.



1.2. The isotopy of economy

Another highly visible isotopy which corresponds in some respects with the structure of familial relationships is that of economy. The complexity of the economic isotopy, together with the way in which the openness/closure opposition is transposed into different signifiers can be observed in the following representation (Connor, 1985: 43).



This diagram represents the main points of contrariety, negation and mediation in the economic isotopy. In its interpretation, Dombey represents the starting-point. As he is a financier, some of the imagery of hoarding attaches to him. There is a close relationship between this and his pride and emotional frigidity (even after his transformation, when speaking of Florence's daughter, Dickens tells us that Dombey 'hoards her in his heart').

The closure of economic possession is differentially related to a number of other signs. It is related by contrariety to the openness of spending or the circulation and exchange of money. If the contrary of possession or hoarding is to be found in exchange, then we can see the text generating examples of its negation in the non-possession or indeed dispossession of Paul and Florence. The relationship between contrariety and negation is pointed up in the passage describing Walter's application to Dombey for a loan. When Paul tells his father that if he had a lot of money he would 'give it' to Walter's old uncle, Dombey willfully mishears him: *'Lend it to his old uncle, eh?'* retorted Mr. Dombey. *'Well! When you are old enough, you know, you will share my money, and we shall use it together.'* (Ch.10, p. 134)

Paul has no money of his own, and his dispossession is the negation of Dombey's possession. A gift of money is merely the contrary of possession, for giving depends on the fact you have something to give. Lending is actually even closer to possession than giving, since it involves the reversion of the gift to the giver. Dombey is using the act of exchange to increase possession, since he will now possess not only the money but the person to whom the money is lent. Lending is therefore a form of exchange which annuls itself.

Florence, excluded from her father's economic interest, is even more decisively dispossessed. As 'base coin' she is no good for investment purposes, though she does suffer divestment, when she gets lost in London and has her clothes stolen by Mrs. Brown. This episode involves an exchange, in that Florence's clothes are exchanged for the beggar's rags, but she is really the object of the exchange rather than a participant in it.

We have yet to identify in the text the last term of the semiotic square formed by the economic isotopy — the negation of exchange. The character who represents this final term is again surely Edith Dombey. Like Paul or Florence she is the object of a transaction,

but, unlike them, she is able to resist the act of exchange. Nevertheless, like Paul or Florence, she is also a non-possessor, for she asserts the importance of things which cannot be bought or exchanged, indeed, things that lie altogether outside the economic system:

'There is no wealth,' she went on, 'that could buy these words of me, and the meaning that belongs to them. Once cast away as idle breath, no wealth or power can bring them back. I mean them; I have weighed them; and I will be true to what I undertake.' (Ch.40, p. 545)

As proven in this section of our paper, the system of capital investment and return is one of the dominant ones in most Dickensian novels. Further on, we shall bring further evidence to support the idea that the language of finance and commerce invades and transforms more customary discourses: psychological, moralistic and comic.

2. The language of finance and commerce in *Our Mutual Friend*

2.1. The powers of money

The shiftings and overlappings of systems of signification in *Our Mutual Friend* act against the formation or maintenance of a stable sense of self. This is a novel in which the only way for consciousness or identity to survive is to attempt a withdrawal from systematic exchange.

The luring power of money, with its beneficent or destructive effects becomes a central theme of the novel. Gaffer Hexam starts by establishing its lack of importance to the world of the dead in order to justify his making a living in scavenging corpses:

'Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? 'Tother world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. But it's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man.' (Book 1, Ch.1, p.47)

Bella Wilfer seems to impersonate the most hungry-for-money character who emphatically declares: "... I love money, and want money – want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor." (Book 1, Ch.4, p.81).

Her discourse is characterized by foregrounding devices, intensifiers and a variety of means of expressing modality that underline her resolution to "have money".

'I have made up my mind that I must have money, Pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it.' (...)'Have resolved, I say, Pa, that to get money I must marry money. In consequence of which, I am always looking out for money to captivate.' (Book 2, Ch.8, p.375)

Her ambition is nourished and encouraged by the Golden Dustman, who enhances the idea that he owns the means to make her rich as much as she does herself:

'You are right. Go in for money, my love. Money's the article. You'll make money of your good looks, and of the money Mrs. Boffin and me will have the pleasure of settling upon you, and you'll live and die rich. That's the state to live and die in!' said Mr Boffin, in an unctuous manner. R-r-rich!' (...)'These good looks of yours are worth money, and you shall make money of 'em. The money you will have, will be worth money, and you shall make money of that too. There's a golden ball at your feet.' (Book 3, Ch.5, p.526)

Bella's concern with what Boffin appears to have become under the influence of money is firstly shared with her father while she is still under the spell of the corruptive power of money. It is exactly the idea of the degrading power of money that is enhanced in the Marxist ideology:

Money, then, appears as this *distorting* power both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., which claim to be *entities* in themselves. It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice

into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence, and intelligence into idiocy. (*The Power of Money*, Marx, 1844)

The strong-willed money-lover and “mercenary plotter” ends up melodramatically pleading in favour of a reversal of her condition to the initial state of poverty and a return to the ever-lasting family values:

“O Mr. Rokesmith, before you go, if you could but make me poor again! O! Make me poor again, Somebody, I beg and pray, or my heart will break if this goes on! Pa, dear, make me poor again and take me home! I was bad enough there, but I have been so much worse here. Don't give me money, Mr. Boffin, I won't have money. Keep it away from me, and only let me speak to good little Pa, and lay my head upon his shoulder, and tell him all my griefs.” (Book 3, Ch.15, p. 661)

The pervasive idea is that the omnipresent force of capitalism ruins and scatters human nature. Even the possession of shares is no guarantee of intrinsic being, for they give only a substitute or shadow identity to those with no identity in themselves (Connor, 1985:147):

Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares! To set those blaring images so high, and to cause us smaller vermin, as under the influence of henbane or opium, to cry out, night and day, 'Relieve us of our money, scatter it for us, buy us and sell us, ruin us, only we beseech ye take rank among the powers of the earth, and fatten on us'! (Book 1, Ch.10, pp.159-160)

The domination of human relationships by financial ones is to be found everywhere in *Our Mutual Friend*. The Lammlers substitute a financial arrangement for their marriage and thereafter their relationship is one of commercial indirectness. At one point, this is dramatized by a metaphor: the exchange of looks, which has the indirectness of a financial transaction:

There was a mirror on the wall before them, and her eyes just caught him smirking in it. She gave the reflected image a look of the deepest disdain, and the image received it in the glass. Next moment they quietly eyed each other, as if they, the principals, had had no part in that expressive transaction. (Book 2, Ch. 4, P.312)

2.2. Economic metaphors

“The metaphor is probably the most fertile power possessed by man.” (Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*, 1948)

Metaphors drawn from the language of commerce and capital invade the text. We can see it in the description of Sloppy's dress (“*A considerable capital of knee and elbow and wrist and ankle had Sloppy, and he didn't know how to dispose of it to the best advantage, but was always investing it in wrong securities, and so getting himself into embarrassed circumstances*” – Book 1, Ch. 16, 249) or the description of the exchange of diseases at Charlie Hexam's school: “*the whole hot-bed of flushed and exhausted infants exchanging measles, rashes, whooping-cough, fever, and stomach-disorders, as if they were assembled in High Market for the purpose*” (Book 2, Ch.1, p.265).

The most frequently employed economic metaphors are market, investment, and capital accumulation. However, the most important metaphor of the novel is that of the dust Mounds correlated with money and the symbol of the river (the transfer of meaning being achieved through one common element: mud).

Surveying the economic literature on the nature and functions of money, we come across the best known denotative definitions:

- Money is a resource (finance).
- Money is "an accounting device" (economic models: Ingham, 1996).
- Money is a "measure of value (or unit of account); a medium of exchange; a standard of deferred payment; and a store of value". (Ingham, 1996)

In literary texts, there are also money-related motifs and figures (gifts, treasures, the miser, the gambler etc.):

Your money has changed you to marble. You are a hard-hearted Miser. You are worse than Dancer, worse than Hopkins, worse than Blackberry Jones, worse than any of the wretches. And more!' proceeded Bella, breaking into tears again, 'you were wholly undeserving of the Gentleman you have lost.' (Book 3, Ch.15, p. 663)

To these, we may add some conventional metaphors in which money is represented contrastively, with either positive or negative features:

- "Money is a liquid" (= an elusive object that is sought)
- "Money is power" (businesses, politicians, and marketers) or "Money talks' because money is a metaphor, a transfer, and a bridge. Like words and language, money is a storehouse of communally achieved work, skill, and experience."¹
- Money is both a drug, a strong incentive and an efficient tool (Webley and Lea, 2006)

'Think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread this, and don't know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!' (Book 3, Ch. 4, p. 521)

- Money is an object of desire (the key element in the discourse of the fortune-hunter).

'I have made up my mind that I must have money, Pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it.' (...) *'Have resolved, I say, Pa, that to get money I must marry money. In consequence of which, I am always looking out for money to captivate.'* (Book 2, Ch.8, p. 375)

- "Money is the *real brain* of all things." (*The Power of Money*, Marx, 1844)
- Money is the root of all evil.

"... every day he changes for the worse, and for the worse. Not to me – he is always much the same to me – but to others about him. Before my eyes he grows suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust. If ever a good man were ruined by good fortune, it is my benefactor." (Book 3, Ch. 4, p. 521)

Closely related with the idea that money is sought for personal profit is the conventional metaphor DEATH IS PROFIT in which death is represented through the acts of the scavengers of corpses down the river and those of the hordes of "peckers" of Harmon's fortune.

One of the most interesting things about the metaphorical language of *Our Mutual Friend* is the way that metaphors from one system slip continually into other systems. Among the most striking of these are the slippages between the economic system and what we might call the physical/material system, made up of signs having to do with the world of matter. Matter is represented very strongly, with dust, slime and excrement being only some of the forms it takes; far from being merely dead or inert, matter is continually being put back into productive circulation. The dust-heaps which stand at the centre of the novel are good examples of this. The heaps, though apparently just amorphous matter, represent potentially enormous wealth. They are in themselves a kind of capital which can easily be re-invested or put back into circulation; indeed, this is what happens at the end of the novel,

¹ Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (1964: 136).

with the mysterious carting away of the rubbish to some unknown but highly profitable destination. This profit comes not from what the material is but from what it can be made to mean within some system of exchange.

The human body is not exempt from this play of exchange and valuation. Throughout the novel there is a repeated movement whereby the human body is first stripped of value, reduced to mere dust, and then restored to the system of purchase and exchange. Lady Tippins, for example, is relentlessly taken apart by the narrative but unlike, say, Mrs. Skewton in *Dombey and Son*, these fragments are not just dead, but capable of being bought, re-assembled and perhaps resold:

Whereabout in the bonnet and drapery announced by her name, any fragment of the real woman may be concealed, is perhaps known to her maid; but you could easily buy all you see of her, in Bond Street; or you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article. (Book 1, ch.10, p.161)

In no other Dickens text is the association made more insistently between the body and systems of finance and commodity. Sometimes this may get a hilarious effect, as in the case of Mr. Venus who mistakenly uses a part of the body as money, when he gives a customer a tooth in his change:

The boy gathers up his change and has pulled the door open by a leather strap nailed to it for the purpose, when Venus cries out:

'Stop him! Come back, you young villain! You've got a tooth among them halfpence.'

'How was I to know I'd got it? You giv it me. I don't want none of your teeth; I've got enough of my own.' So the boy pipes, as he selects it from his change, and throws it on the counter." (Book I, Ch.7, p. 125).

2.3. Names as commercialized forms of language

Language itself is also a very important determining system in *Our Mutual Friend* and slips into association with the commercial code. Language often becomes a commodity, a medium of exchange, a means of power, or an item of currency. Literary language is something to be bought up for Boffin and for Wegg, something to be bargained for by the hour and the volume:

'What do you think of the terms, Wegg?' Mr Boffin then demanded, with unconcealed anxiety.

'Mr Boffin, I never bargain.'

'So I should have thought of you!' said Mr Boffin, admiringly. 'No, sir. I never did 'aggle and I never will 'aggle. Consequently I meet you at once, free and fair, with – Done, for double the money!'

Mr. Boffin ...assented, with the remark, 'You know better what it ought to be than I do, Wegg,' and again shook hands with him upon it.

'Could you begin to night, Wegg?' he then demanded.

'Yes, sir,' said Mr Wegg, careful to leave all the eagerness to him.

'I see no difficulty if you wish it. You are provided with the needful implement – a book, sir?'

'Bought him at a sale,' said Mr Boffin. 'Eight wollumes. Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wollume, to keep the place where you leave off. (Book 1, Ch.5, p.331)

However, the most frequently commercialized form of language is the proper name, which is both that by which we know ourselves and that by which language and other people know us. Dickens is also fascinated with the commodity status of the name in other novels, especially *Dombey and Son* where he proves that names can be bought and sold and people accept to be "called out of their names" at a fair price.

The strangeness of names as such is hinted at in the novel, in another conversation between Boffin and Wegg, in which Boffin, abstracting his name from himself, asks the

perplexed Wegg what he thinks of it. Wegg is equally put out by being asked for his own name and anxiously replies: "*Silas Wegg ... I don't know why Silas, and I don't know why Wegg*" (I:V, 88).

The arbitrariness of names suggests worryingly that the people to whom they are attached may equally be arbitrary and without intrinsic being. Nevertheless, the possession or use of other people's names becomes a means of exercising power; when Headstone informs Riderhood that he knows his name but refuses to reveal his own, Riderhood is irritated that his name "*seemed to be made public property on, now, and... every man seemed to think himself free to handle his name as if it was a Street Pump*" (Book 3, Ch.11, p.611). Riderhood gains a kind of revenge on Headstone by in turn renaming him 'T'otherest Governor' and consummates his revenge in the scene in which he confronts Headstone in his class-room. There, he first of all forces on Headstone the painful awareness of the public nature of names by making him write his name on the blackboard and having the children shout it out, and then forces him to 'answer to the name' of 'T'otherest Governor' (Book 4, Ch.15, p.863). At the end of this scene, Headstone slowly wipes his name off the blackboard, perhaps to hint at his imminent suicide, death being the only way to withdraw definitively from the determining force of systems. Headstone has, of course, undergone earlier on the indignity of being deprived of his name by Eugene Wrayburn who, remarking that 'your name cannot concern me' reduces Headstone merely to his social function with the bullying designation 'Schoolmaster' (Book 2, Ch.6, p. 288).

What is interesting is that the central character has no stable name, but rather a succession of names, John Harmon, Julius Handford, John Rokesmith, Captain. For Harmon, the only way to escape the web of systematic relationship is to slip away from his name, which ties him into those systems. Given that initial alienation from himself, however, it is difficult to find any other name or identity. His name enters a system of gift and exchange which no longer concerns him, the name being given by the Boffins to an orphan who dies.

There is also a close association between names and money. Names tend to hide the real relationships of power and exploitation in the novel, as evidenced by Jenny Wren's perplexity about who really is Pubsey and Co. — "*Can't make it out. Is Little Eyes Pubsey and the wolf Co? Can't make it out. Pubsey true to Co, and Co to Pubsey? Pubsey false to Co, and Co to Pubsey? Can't make it out*" (Book 4, Ch. 8, p. 793). Names also offer the means of exercising power as well as hiding it. 'Giving his name' as a guarantor of someone else's debt puts Twemlow himself into a chronic state of debt, and his 'name' becomes a negotiable asset when Fledgeby buys it up along with a job lot of 'queer bonds'.

2.4. The empowering force of wills

Crucial to the plot of the book, the succession of wills which Harmon makes are also important elements in the systematic slippage of language into money and vice versa. A will is after all a text in two systems, the linguistic and the financial, both expressing a meaning and also effecting a transaction. It not only refers to the transfer of money, but also, in a sense, carries out or performs the transaction it refers to. The terms of Harmon's first will are accurately presented at the Veneerings' meetings, where it is introduced as a conversational topic between interlocutors familiarized with the stipulations/bindings of legal contracts:

'His will is found' (...). 'It is dated very soon after the son's flight. It leaves the lowest of the range of dust-mountains, with some sort of a dwelling-house at its foot, to an old servant who is sole executor, and all the rest of the property – which is very considerable – to the son. He directs himself to be buried with certain

eccentric ceremonies and precautions against his coming to life, with which I need not bore you, and that's all – except' and this ends the story. (...)

'Except that the son's inheriting is made conditional on his marrying a girl, who at the date of the will, was a child of four or five years old, and who is now a marriageable young woman. Advertisement and inquiry discovered the son in the man from Somewhere, and at the present moment, he is on his way home from there – no doubt, in a state of great astonishment – to succeed to a very large fortune, and to take a wife.'

(...) Mr. Podsnap inquires what would become of the very large fortune, in the event of the marriage condition not being fulfilled? Mortimer replies, that by special testamentary clause it would then go to the old servant above mentioned, passing over and excluding the son; also, that if the son had not been living, the same old servant would have been sole residuary legatee. (Book I, Ch.2, p.57)

As we can see wills are texts which operate within specific contexts, legal, financial and linguistic, and derive their meaning from those contexts. Because of this, it is possible for the intention behind a will, like the intention behind any text, to be deflected. This is in fact what happens to Harmon's intentions, or one of them, since the money is firstly diverted from the hands of his son, its intended recipient: *But it was never to be; and the want of satisfactoriness is, that after all the money never gets to him.*" (Book I, Ch. 7, 136).

It's surprising that Boffin should feel anxiety about having to go through the detour of law to make his own will, and should be so concerned that it should be 'tight':

Make me as compact a little will as can be reconciled with tightness, leaving the whole of the property to "my beloved wife, Henerietty Boffin, sole executrix". Make it as short as you can, using those words; but make it tight.' (Book I, Ch. 7, 137).

Harmon's legally established will seems to produce a feverish multiplication of other texts, with the flood of begging letters which Boffin receives. Nearly a whole chapter (I: XVII) is given over to playful but appalled parody of the styles of these appeals for money, and it is clear that Dickens is as fascinated by the sheer proliferating 'textuality' of the letters, in their plurality of styles, as he is by the cupidity which they display.

What is also striking is John Harmon's ambiguous position at this point as regards the letters and the administration of the will.

It soon became apparent (from the knowledge with which he set out) that he must have been to the office where the Harmon will was registered, and must have read the will. He anticipated Mr Boffin's consideration whether he should be advised with on this or that topic, by showing that he already knew of it and understood it. He did this with no attempt at concealment, seeming to be satisfied that it was part of his duty to have prepared himself at all attainable points for its utmost discharge. (Book I, Ch. 16, 241)

As secretary to Boffin, the rightful heir has the job of coping with this nightmarish 'swamp' of letters, all of them making a claim on his fortune. As John Rokesmith, Harmon has moved into the position of secretary to his own affairs, which seem to have taken on a horrible life of their own. The letters are attempts to draw the *tight* will into transaction and exchange in an economy beyond itself (*'Oh the varieties of dust for ocular use, offered in exchange for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman!*' (Book I, Ch. 7, p. 259).

Naturally, wills are not only subject to dispute, claim and contention from outside, but can also be contradicted by other wills and codicils. In Harmon's case, the first leaves the fortune to his son, another one the crown and the last to Noddy Boffin. The "story of the Dutch bottle" told by one of the heirs in his confrontation to one of the contenders of the wills is in fact the struggle of coping with intricate legacy matters:

*'That Dutch bottle, scoundrel, contained the latest will of the many wills made by my unhappy self-tormenting father. That will gives everything absolutely to my noble benefactor and yours, Mr Boffin, excluding and reviling me, and my sister (then already dead of a broken heart), by name. That Dutch bottle was found by my noble benefactor and yours, after he entered on possession of the estate. (...)*That

Dutch bottle, he buried in the Mound belonging to him, and there it lay while you, you thankless wretch, were prodding and poking – often very near it, I dare say. His intention was, that it should never see the light; but he was afraid to destroy it, lest to destroy such a document, even with his great generous motive, might be an offence at law. After the discovery was made here who I was, Mr Boffin, still restless on the subject, told me, upon certain conditions impossible for such a hound as you to appreciate, the secret of that Dutch bottle. I urged upon him the necessity of its being dug up, and the paper being legally produced and established. The first thing you saw him do, and the second thing has been done without your knowledge. (Book 4, Ch. 14, p.859)

The legal relations between the three competing wills are less foggy, but there is nonetheless a sense of the drift and division of meaning, as Harmon's anyway ambivalent intentions are deferred. Of course, in the end, the money does go to its rightful recipient, but only as a result of a further revision of a will, effected by Mr Boffin, to give Harmon his share of the wealth.

You supposed me just now, to be the possessor of my father's property. So I am. But through any act of my father's, or by any right I have? No. Through the munificence of Mr Boffin. The conditions that he made with me, before parting with the secret of the Dutch bottle, were, that I should take the fortune, and that he should take his Mound and no more. I owe everything I possess, solely to the disinterestedness, uprightness, tenderness, goodness (there are no words to satisfy me) of Mr and Mrs Boffin. (Book 4, Ch. 14, p.860)

CONCLUSIONS

The complexity of the structure of economic relations in *Dombey and Son* is due to the way in which the economic isotopy enters into association with the isotopy of identity. The dominating structural frame within which meaning is produced is the opposition between openness and closure. The energy and direction of the narrative derive from the attempts made to vary the signifying positions, and from the need to mediate or resolve the main oppositions.

In analysing these novels, we come to realize that they are characterized by the economic language and imagery at all levels of the narrative. Thus, we may observe not only the presence of the financial imagery, but also the commodity status of names. As the most frequently commercialized forms of language, the latter are treated by many characters as both a particular possession and a mark of their private individuality. Wills, in their turn, represent linguistic power, but that power is not concentrated in those who make the wills but rather determined in the play of competition and avarice in the market of social relations.

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