

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES (CP)

EDITORIAL

The articles of this issue bear the flavour of *-ism*, a productive suffix whose semantic sphere expresses ideas contained in a school or trend (Romanticism), a system or principle ((Darwinism, Conservatism); it shows a state or quality of a person or of an action (barbarism, heroism); it emphasizes an attitude - be it social, political, artistic - (Puritanism, Victorianism); it displays a peculiarity in language (Americanism).

The suffix¹ is like a 'label on a bottle' displayed on the counters of a 'fair'. It groups attitudes under one umbrella; it establishes the 'rung' a person chooses to posit *him./herself* on; and, it exhibits a sum of differences whose traces merge into distinctive discursive marks.

Why, then, *Dombeyism* (within Victorianism) out of so many *-isms*?

Firstly, because Charles Dickens's Text is considered to epitomize the spirit of the Victorian age.

Secondly, because *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail, & for Exportation* (published in serial form from October 1846 to April 1848; its first cheap edition being brought out in 1858) constitutes "a turning point for Dickens the man and the writer" (*The Dickens Companion*).

Thirdly, because this novel contains, as if in a nutshell, the traits of the *-ism* suffix, which not only 'hold and bear' the marks of an age, but also display a change of attitudes from Victorianism to modernism. On the one hand, the reader may discover the desire to preserve the old image of the master of a House, of a father and husband whose life is made up of cold, stiff principles - (apparent) respectability, stability, calm peaceful domestic atmosphere and the haughtiness of the one who takes pride in everybody's depending on him -; on the other hand, there are strong elements/'germs' of modernism: the building of 'new' towns; the setting up of firms founded on a 'new' economic system; the shaping of 'new' identities, of a 'new' mentality, of 'other' centres of power', the re-structuring of the system according to the demands of a 'new' market, or

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES (CP)

the gliding of interest towards *new Pauls*, that is, towards a much-longed-for domestic harmony, yet never really pleasing and accomplished in an age of the railway (hurrying up towards 'other' forms of challenging speeds).

Dombeyism unfolds the image of an odd selfishness, metonymically suggested by the 'House of Dombey and Son' run by 'money is God', a motto hiding behind it an all-devouring system which perverts consciousness, destroys relationships and dries up any source of life. But it also contains the remedy for such oddities and rigid rules, a remedy which ironically grafts itself on the previous image through absence. It is the absence of *home*, of *warmth*, of (interpersonal) *communication*, which turns the 'world of Dombeyism' into a pathetic question whose answer cannot satisfy the interlocutor, after all!

Fourthly, because of the Victorian view on children and the symbolic signification acquired in Dickens's novel. The image of the baby who is taken from his mother's breast - of the child, generally speaking, who is forbidden that magic bond existing between mother and offspring, a bond capable of offering comfort, safety and protection for the latter - might serve any culture (not only Victorian) as a standard of unnaturalness in interpersonal relations, and, by extension, as a symbol of Victorian cultural discourse: the nature - society relation itself.

Fifthly, because *Dombeyism* and what it stood for in mid-nineteenth century Victorian England, is still very much with 21st century people (not only British subjects!). The outlining of the particular features contained within such *-isms* might make readers discern attitudes, strategies and styles specific to their own cultures. The different perspectives on *Dombeyism* in this volume are meant to offer varied lanes for further discussion and comparative analysis.

Doina Cmeciu
Stefan Avadanei

Notes

1. There are two more suffixes associated with *-ism*: *-ist* and *-ize*. The noun-forming suffix, *-ist*, shows an adherent of an *-ism* creed (Marxist, Darwinist); somebody who uses a thing (violinist); a person concerned with something (paleontologist); or, a person who does something expressed by a verb in *-ize* (Romanticist - romanticize).