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LITERARY AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BUILDING-METAPHOR IN THE ENGLISH "CULTURE OF SENSIBILITY"

A systematic employment of metaphorical language reveals a particular type of fictional world, which, though undergoing a process of "metaphorisation" (Temmerman, 2000), is deeply rooted in the real eighteenth-century universe (Culea, 2007). This will be proven in the analysis of some metaphorical structures of the language of construction/ building (books, texts and narratives) and de-construction/ruination/un-making in the eighteenth-century English "culture of sensibility" (Brodey, 2008).
Key-words: *metaphor, book-building, construction/deconstruction, ruin, sensibility, fragmentation*

1. Book-building. Constructing and deconstructing cultural models

The metaphorical process of building can go beyond producing or reconstructing a material entity, and thus the literary and cultural applications of the process bring to surface other representations, too. For instance, a text or a book[3] is an architectural design in itself, "a many-levelled house"[4] whose meanings emerge from the cooperative involvement of both author and reader. The author's intended meanings cannot reach their goal as long as the reader's response does not equally contribute to the gradual building of significance.

The narrative itself can be interpreted as a three-storey edifice whose identity may be shaped through naming, renaming, misnaming and unnaming acts[5]; the virtual building project allows re-arranging /re-structuring the three levels, in building up narrative participants' identity, plot identity and text identity. In the theoretical framework, concepts are first "deconstructed" and, then, in reconstructing them, we witness the rising of identity through the act of naming (building significance). The process is nevertheless a difficult one, as the "building" materials – names – are not easy to handle and there are so many stages to pass through in carrying out the building work"[6].

The book is also a cultural construct whose identity cannot exist outside the cultural context of its emergence. Moreover, it is given a material shape and a visible

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[3] For differentiations between the two concepts see Cmeciu, Doina, "Text and Discourse as Semiotic Web", in *Cultural Perspectives*, no. 12/ 2007, pp. 38–41.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 42.
[5] Nadia Morăraşu, *The Shaping of Narrative Identity through the Act of Naming*, Iaşi, PIM, 2007.
[6] *Ibidem*, p. 16.

identity "by and through five textual dimensions (para-, hypo-, hyper-, inter- and metatextual)"[7], which mark out all the meanings transmitted by its creators. Socio-historical factors also bring their contribution to the process of building meanings.

Books constitute types of textual communication which are primarily intended to offer access to knowledge, no matter what "knowledge" may circumscribe: knowledge of history, geography, religion, economy, politics, science, literature, education, or knowledge of the individual self, of individual wishes, desires, hardships, etc.

A book is a material and commercial object as well, and the book-building process is thus a complex one. Robert Darnton rebuilt this process taking into consideration all the agents contributing to the creation of this object and he placed the process in a spherical, active and multifaceted setting in which the intellectual ideas, publicity, economic and social influences, as well as the political and legal regulations act as the background for the "communications circuit"[8]:

> **Author** ↔ **publisher** → **printers** (compositors, pressmen, warehousemen: in their turn, they are supported with paper, ink, work force by the suppliers) → **shippers** (agent, smuggler, wagoner, etc.) → **booksellers** (wholesaler, retailer, street trader, binder) → **readers**[9] (purchasers, borrowers, clubs, libraries, book shops).

We cannot refer to texts and books without thinking back to the actual "birth" of the book in Western culture. Texts of various kinds had always existed under some physical form or another (slates, scrolls, etc.), paralleling the cycle of human evolution, but two important moments delineate the process of book-building along the centuries, namely the building of the **codex** and that of the **printed book** as early ancestors of modern books. Hence, between the IInd and the IVth centuries AD, the codex started to be increasingly used: its format resembled the modern book, with individual pages attached at the left-hand side, covered with cloth, wooden boards and some richer material[10]. Later on, during the Middle Ages, the circulation of books took on a more dynamic impetus mediated by Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in 1440[11]. By 1480, printing workshops were opened in more than 100 towns in Western Europe, and thus a "printing revolution" began. Obviously, the benefits of this invention were enormous: texts were now more enduring, more uniform, and more abundant. Print also supported the standardisation of written language and the spreading of languages such as French, Italian, German, or English.

Our interest here is not that of reviewing the entire history of reading and writing in the Western world, but we only want to spotlight the characteristics of the book-building process in the eighteenth-century England. Therefore, leaping from the

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[7] Doina Cmeciu, "Text and Discourse…", *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[8] Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?", in David Finkelstein & Alistair McCleery, eds., *The Book History Reader*, London & New York, Routledge, 2002, Ch. 2, apud Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World***,** Hampshire, UK, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, Figure 1.1, p. 7.

[9] Darnton also added, within the circuit, the binders who, in the Middle Ages were the readers themselves: most books were sold unbound as it was cheaper for both parties involved.

[10] Martyn Lyons, *A History…*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[11] Nevertheless, moveable type was not completely new, for it had been used in Korea some two centuries before Gutenberg's book-building design.

Middle Ages to the second half of the eighteenth-century, we are witnesses of a reading fever across Western Europe. Technological advancement changed the nature of printing and publishing and what the authorities were starting to fear was related to the new reading practices among the population, especially among women. More secular readings were favoured over the religious ones, and a wider selection of texts was available, such as pamphlets, journals and novels.

In the eighteenth-century England, the agents in the **process of book-building** could be divided in two major groups: those favouring the book-building process and those resistant to it, working against the creation, popularisation and dissemination of information by means of books. In the former class we find the author (the problem of authorship), the editor or the publisher, and the one towards whom the writing was targeted, specifically the reader (the problem of readership). Still, a part of the reading public was hostile to the proliferation of the so-called "ephemeral literature" which was a dangerous pastime among the population, and so, those readers took on the role of cultural critics voicing their opposition in newspapers, pamphlets or journals. The official limitation of authors' rights and freedoms was enacted under the form of censorship, the main agent in the anti book-building process, although England was by far the most democratic of the Western countries, since the Licensing Act of 1695 put an end to this act of cultural restraint. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church issued a "List of Prohibited Books" which was applied from the late sixteenth century until its abrogation in 1966. Thus, the official effort to limit the spread of information was antagonistic to the vital Enlightenment ideals of free communication, wide dissemination and open expression of ideas.

If book-building also refers to quantitative results, then new printing techniques (for instance, the stereotyping technique) enabled the issuing of cheaper books in ever greater amounts. For instance, by 1800, in Britain alone, 6,000 book titles were produced annually. Significantly, the increasing print consumption enlarged the dimensions of the reading public who was becoming more and more involved in the public sphere of human activity at all levels.

Among the printed production, the novel was the best sold item. The English novel in particular was a roaring success in many European countries. For example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* was the most popular novel, on top of the list even in French private libraries[12], most of the times being the favourite reading of French or even German women.

As far as the spaces of readership are concerned, generally, libraries in private homes were not always accessible to the women of the household who turned to the outside world of the city for their right to obtain information. They became the primary subscribers in the circulating libraries whose number exploded in the latter half of the century (only in London alone there were 112 circulating libraries)[13].

The most fashionable type of novel was the sentimental or moral novel which was considered, in many ways and by many people, a dangerous type of reading, a **ruined** and **ruinous type of text.** In fact, we reach here the apparently antonymic counterpart of the concept of building/making as a metaphorical process. In her

[12] Daniel Mornet, "Les enseignements des bibliothèques privées, 1750-1780", in *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 17/1910, p. 461, apud Martyn Lyons, *A History*…, *op.cit.*, p. 130.
[13] Martyn Lyons, *A History…*, *op. cit.*, p.131.

interdisciplinary study, Ingar Sigrun Brodey[14] discusses the eighteenth-century English people's charm with **ruination/ deconstruction/unmaking**, noticeable at least in two domains of human activity: in the **literary** and the **architectural** trends of the latter part of the century. Brodey identifies a structural parallel between the fake ruins or follies ornamenting the English garden and the intentional fragmentation present in the novel of sensibility[15]. If the building process renders suggestions of order, aspiration, perfectibility, or harmony, then ruination and fragmentation express anti-authoritarian ideals, new hopes, and they also point at looking for new values. The sentimental novel brought forth the spontaneous manifestation of inner wishes, desires and affliction, therefore escaping the constraints of reason and outer control.

2. Metaphorical representations in the "culture of sensibility"

Metaphorical concepts also entail that some fictional characters might understand and experience one thing in terms of another, a transfer that is manifested in the language used. The metaphorical concepts also point at some practices, most often individual practices symbolic of collective ones within the wider physical and cultural community of the eighteenth-century England, such as accumulation and expansion (building one's fortune, in D. Defoe's writings), material dispossession (followed by ruination, in T. Smollett's or H. Fielding's novels), the cult of virtuousness (avoiding ruination of the body, in S. Richardson's novels)[16].

Cultural trends – built on either material or ideological aspects – spotlight the cultural models specific for a historical period. If we discuss the metaphor of the ruin, then we should apply Lakoff and Turner's model of appreciating the relationship between essence and appearance concerning objects: if one knows how to observe correctly, then he will determine the essence by looking at the appearance[17]. According to this situation, the appearance of an object correctly sends to its essence as long as the aptitude of the viewer is a professional one. Consequently, the ruined object's building and appearance evoked the eighteenth-century people's yearning for naturalness, spontaneity and irregularity. The relation between institutional structure and value clearly showed that fragmentation was not necessarily bad or decayed; on the contrary, as the novels or architectural entities showed, the imperfect and the unusual were even more engaging than the perfect building.

It was during this period (especially the 1760s and 1770s) that sensibility became one of the major sources of morality and virtue, and it was used to justify the individual's independence from the authority of reason or external constraints, so as to liberate him/herself from social and/or ethical standards. But moral concerns were paradoxically perceived as dangerous as they subtly surfaced suggestions of sexual game and sexual enticement. Moreover, the sentimental writings were ruinous because they encouraged women to exert resistance to patriarchal control.

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[14] Ingar Sigrun Brodey, *Ruined by Design: Shaping Novels and Gardens in the Culture of Sensibility*, London, Routledge, 2008.

[15] *Ibidem*, xvi-xvii.

[16] Mihaela Culea, "Conceptual Metaphors in 18th Century English Novels", in *Proceedings of the International Conference "Individual and Specific Signs. Paradigms of Identity in Managing Social Representations"*, Bacău, Alma Mater, 2007, pp. 154-161.

[17] George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 148-149.

Bringing together literature and architecture, Brodey carefully describes the elements common to the fake ruins or follies and the novels of sensibility. The esteem for narrative or architectural ruin promoted the idea that liberation, the rejection of authority, and the endorsement of disorder, irregularity and asymmetry could express human feeling more authentically by avoiding the censorship of reason. It was feeling, rather than logos, that was the guarantee for genuine experience. Written or spoken words outlined the makeup of sensibility just as the iconic and the visual defined the picturesque: words and images were intimately intertwined at a time when landscape gardening, philosophy, and novel writing were not separate "realms of discourse". Writing, painting, gardening and architecture intimately blended into a single art[18].

Though apparently a ruining agent, this kind of writing also built the grounds for a new sort of readership, as it required commitment and even physical response from the reader (pity, sympathy, even crying or sadness). The display of human suffering, especially of female torment, elicited dynamic emotional responses from the readers who continuously re-experienced and re-built the text.

The **ruin** seems to have been the dominant motif of the period making its presence felt both in the architectural design of the English garden and in that of the novel of sensibility. The meanings of the concept itself circumscribe negative conditions or states: broken remains, a state of complete devastation, decay, collapse, or loss; failure or destruction[19]. And yet, in relation to the novels and gardens under discussion here, the ruin indicated the coexistence of ambivalent concepts: completion and rejection of completion, optimism and pessimism, regularity and irregularity, happiness and distress, democratic and authoritarian drives, tradition and innovation, etc. But the common purpose was that of suggesting authenticity, simplicity and genuine sentiment. At the same time, it brought man closer to a state of nature, to his origins, to a time when social norms and regulations did not impose their command upon the human being's free manifestation of the self.

Both art forms sought to arouse emotion from the viewer/reader and empathetic response by showing the imperfect, the disordered and the incomplete. Obviously, visual and narrative buildings made use of fragmentation under different forms. In the novel of sensibility, fragmentation is evoked by making extensive use of broken patterns of communication, where the insufficiencies of verbal communication are supplemented by the rich gamut of expressive non-verbal types of communication: fits, silence, tears, sobbing, gestures, looks, intonation etc[20]. The premise of their ample usage is that virtue is a passion, or that passionate behaviour transmits more valuable and authentic information. **Language** was then considered to be **ruined** since it could not wholly express the attributes of the self and the natural drives of our primary state of ingenuousness.

In the case of architectural ruins, architects and gardenists were trying to perfect the art of making a ruin look more ruined, and the plans in books[21] contained

[18] Ingar Sigrun Brodey, *Ruined…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

[19] www.encarta.msn.com

[20] Also see Mihaela Culea, "Desire and Confinement: The Body as Sequestered Object in *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*", in *Cultural Perspectives*, no. 11/ 2006, pp. 87-105.

[21] For example Robert Lugar's *Architectural Sketches for Cottages, Rural Dwellings, and Villas, in the Grecian, Gothic, and Fancy Styles, with Plans, suitable to persons of Genteel Life and Moderate Fortune*, 1805, quoted by Martyn Lyons, in *A History*…, *op.cit.*, p. 76. Also

designs of ruined classical temples, arches, colonnades, island precipices, wrecked walls, broken towers, irregular gardens, rustic bridges, etc., to be built on private estates and even in public areas. Follies, buildings erected for decoration on a gentleman's estate, were particularly trendy. Brodey even refers to the spectacle of sensibility which was intended to elicit sympathy, as in the case of hermit lodgings in the English gardens of the 1770s and 1780s, illustrating that rusticity and simplicity were much pleasing to the general public. Additionally, the imperfect and the atypical invited the viewer/reader to rebuild imaginatively the characteristics of a harmonious edifice, while it simultaneously suggested that perfection cannot exist, or that it could never render the tribulations of the soul.

The delight with the English garden (as opposed to the French regular-style in gardening architecture) was spreading all over Europe. Such a type of garden was purposefully irregular, not perfectly geometrical, simple, housing a great variety of plants, preserving a degree of wilderness, so as to express out-of-ordinariness and rejection of imposed outlines. The garden was a status symbol for reputation associated with sensitive and receptive souls[22]. The picturesque quality of architectural design rejected the norms of neoclassical uniformity, while it relied on the expressiveness of irregularity and informality.

Another idea supporting the positive assessment of the rhetoric of ruins shows that, from an aesthetic and moral viewpoint, ruins were not perceived as decayed glories of the past, as decrepit entities evoking times of yore, but they authenticated the everlasting authority of the past and the instability of the present.

The critics of the novel of sensibility censure its **moral ruination** present under the guise of moral instruction: because of its obsessive display of human ruin under the form of emotional and physical disease, instinctual drive and impulsive sexuality, the sentimental novel was considered to pervert the individual and the social self. On the other hand, we can speak of the **ruin of language** as it is the case of Laurence Sterne's reaction against the pre-established norms of narrating, or of writing: Sterne continuously challenged the referential and communicative power of words, thus building new modes of literary expression upon deconstructing the traditional writing modes. In *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, Sterne conveys the impression of an edifice which is ruined on the outside but habitable on the inside: the self-ironic narrator apparently allows the work of art to build itself, while he carefully erects it to accommodate his interests, or while witnessing his own impotencies at building it. At a structural and/or emotional level, the novels under scrutiny, as it is the case of Laurence Sterne's or Samuel Richardson's works, advocate that **fragmentation** in a building – at the level of the mind, speech, behaviour, or narrative representation – can best express genuine human experience. Therefore, the moral aesthetic of sensibility relied heavily on human ruin, just as ruined architectural buildings spoke of nature's seeming ruin.

The eighteenth century has also been accredited with the building of the private/ domestic sphere, a space where women were the central figures. Some critics consider that the domestic novel depicted a close, narrow space, but Margaret Anne

see Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening*, 1778, where he insists on the animated force of ruins to assist a dynamic form of communication with the spectator/viewer.

[22] Ingar Sigrun Brodey, *Ruined…, op. cit.*, p. 38.

Doody[23] argues that the building of domesticity, which is closely linked with that of sentimentality, involved the complex action of women in numerous fields, such as social life, cultural events, and even politics.

Coming back to the relationship between a building's appearance and essence, we may easily consider the flesh and the psyche as the two corresponding constituents making up the human being as a building. The eighteenth-century English male writers were particularly attracted to portray women characters, especially delicate females with a fragile fate. Bodily fragility was paralleled by mental and emotional vulnerability, and this type of feminine selfhood was seen as ruined and ruinous. Inner perturbations, dreams, nightmares, anxieties and diffidence, together with the entire arsenal of bodily gestures were characteristics of the feminine nature, whereas males were represented as unbreakable, rational, and successful. But Doody shows that, in the eighteenth century, it was also the male sex that was in danger of becoming "the sex without the psyche"[24]– as an example, we may think of Squire B's incapability to control his violent passions and instincts, in Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded.*

Though commonly viewed as ruined buildings – ruined bodies[25] with ruined minds – women as characters became more alluring to male or female novelists, as they represented the cultural locus of fortune, and the cultural depository of imagination and feeling. Numerous novel titles echoed the existence of female protagonists, a clear indication of the metaphorical identification of the woman's identity with the book itself: *Pamela, Clarissa, Roxana, Julie* etc. But women were also thinking beings, and women readers could easily become women writers themselves. Pamela's writing skills place her in the position of building her own fictional universe on the basis of real experience, and even the squire admires her "easy and happy manner of narration" (*P*, 301).

The central role of building one's identity on safe grounds as well as the depiction of the female body as a site of ruination can also be observed in the following proverbial phrase which may lie at the basis of the moral code and plot in *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*: "It is virtue and goodness only, that *make* the true beauty" (*P*, 20). The characters themselves realise the importance of the concept of ruin[26]: the design of the libertine squire, that of ruining Pamela's virtue, outlines the central conflict, as shown in many excerpts where the virginity of the body is identified with the highest degree of virtue:

> (1) (…) we enter'd the Court-yard of this handsome, large, old, and lonely Mansion, that looks made for Solitude and Mischief, as I thought, by its Appearance, with all its brown nodding Horrors of lofty Elms and Pines about it;

[23] Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, London, Harper Collins Publishers, 1997, p. 278.
[24] Ibidem, p. 279.
[25] For more information on the body as a matter for text in the eighteenth-century English literature also see Houlihan Flynn, Carol, *The Body in Swift and Defoe*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1990. J. Swift's or D. Defoe's texts also investigated problems of physicality: diseased individual or social bodies, diseased minds, etc.
[26] Here the ruin is the antagonistic equivalent of the cultural paradigm of virtue and even dictionaries record its archaic meaning as "loss of virginity; a woman's loss of virginity to a man other than her husband" (www.encarta.msn.com).

> And here, said I to myself, I fear, is to be the scene of my *Ruin*, unless God protect me, who is all-sufficient! (*P*, pp. 108–109)

> I dare say, you think yourself that he intends my ruin. I hate, said she, that foolish word; your ruin! Why, ne'er a Lady in the land may live happier than you, if you will (be ruined), or be more honourably used (*P*, p. 137)

There were other narratives which also made use of ontological metaphors and we find that emotions or moral characteristics are metaphorically seen as buildings which can be burgled ("Vice breaks in at the breaches of Decency", *MF*, p. 98), or plundered ("Vice came in always at the Door of Necessity", *MF*, p. 100).

Conclusions

If "architecture" – material or immaterial, as in the case of linguistic constructions – fulfills both functional and symbolic roles, then the study of architectural building in general offers valuable information about the ways in which people structure their experience using metaphorical building processes, or about the ways in which they build mental and emotional schemes.

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