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DICKENS IN ROMANIA 1983-2013

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Abstract: *The article sets out to make a brief survey of Dickens' reception in Romania starting with the year following the publication of Grigore Vereş' landmark study Opera lui Charles Dickens în România (1982). It discusses the critical reception, referring to book-length explorations such as Grigore Vereş's Charles Dickens (1984), Monica Bottez's Recurrent Images in Charles Dickens's Work (1985), Mihai Rădulescu's Antropologia stilistică - lumea lui Charles Dickens (1995), Maria-Ana Tupan's A Discourse Analyst's Dickens (1999), comparative studies, such as Alexandru Mica's Fantasticul introspectiv și fantastical "voalat" ca sursă de cunoaștere la N.V. Gogol, E.A. Poe și Ch. Dickens (1993), Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston's To Kill a Text: The Dialogic Fiction of Hugo, Dickens and Zola (1995), Elena Morărescu's Universul copilăriei și imaginea copilului la Charles Dickens, Ion Creangă și Mark Twain (2006), and a variety of chapters in books and articles. It also includes a discussion of the Dickens translations published in this period, of the works translated for the first time, namely a selection of short stories, The Life of Our Lord, Pictures from Italy, Barnaby Rudge, A Child's History of England and of new translations of titles already translated, as well as a list of all these translations.*

The year 1983 was not chosen arbitrarily for the first year of the period covered by this survey. It was selected because in 1982 Grigore Vereş, a professor of English literature at the University of Iași, a great Dickens specialist, produced a thorough research on the Inimitable's reception in Romania, entitled *Opera lui Charles Dickens in Romania*. It is a book whose thoroughness and scholarly value was acknowledged by Richard Bales's review in *The Dickensian* of September 1983:

Not only has no stone left unturned, but it also seems as if the study of every Romanian writer and critic has been bugged and their desk rifled in search of *obiter dicta* about DickensAnd this is indeed a splendid feature of the book as a whole: a thorough familiarity with even the most up-to-date criticism, and sensible use of it within the apparently limited context of the study (Bales 119-20).

In his turn Grigore Vereş acknowledged his debt to previous researchers, such as Alexandru Duțu, Dan Grigorescu, Mihail Bogdan and Mihnea Gheorghiu, who patiently collected and explored the translations, prefaces, isolated references,

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diary entries, letters and then scholarly articles and studies that bear witness to the constant attention that Dickens has been paid in this country.

And as this review is dedicated to the culture of memory, I would like to take the opportunity and pay a tribute to the memory of Ana Cartianu, our great specialist in Victorian literature at the University of Bucharest, author of several inspiring articles on Dickens, and the professor who supervised both Grigore Vereş's and my own doctoral research.

This survey will deal with Dickens's critical reception and the translations of his works in Romania, but without too rigid a delimitation as the prefaces to the Romanian versions of Dickens's creations will be mentioned or discussed with the translations.

Critical reception

Grigore Vereş's *Charles Dickens* (1984), the second Romanian monograph on the author, (after Vera Călin's *Charles Dickens. Un prieten al celor asupriți*, 1952) marked a climactic moment in the critical reception of the novelist in Romania, producing a model of dedicated scholarly investigation, professional documentation and critical insight, all in a rich clear style that does not keep unsophisticated readers away.

The first of the nine chapters, entitled "Mimesis and Participation", starts from the idea that the romantic spirit did not disappear from English literature with the deaths of the great poets, but survived in the age that followed with certain mutations in the works of several Victorian writers, as happened with Dickens. The author also underlines the evolution of Dickens's art of narrative composition from the loose picaresque account to the complex narrative structure of his late novels. For Vereş, Dickens is a realist, romantic and symbolist all in one. In the following chapters Vereş offers minute and perceptive analyses of all Dickens's novels and tales in terms of themes, narrative structure, characters and setting, drawing synthetical conclusions on the infinitely rich art of Dickens, its affinities with Dostoevsky and Kafka, its modernity in spite of certain dated aspects and the fascination it keeps exerting on readers, "common" and sophisticated alike.

In 1985 Monica Bottez published *Recurrent Images in Charles Dickens's Work*. The book starts from the proposition that Dickens is a great social writer who recreates reality with specific romantic devices and techniques: the emphasis on imagination, the principle of contrast, the symbolic method, the concern for mythical and archetypal patterns, the concept of animated nature and a marked metaphoric or poetic use of language as opposed to the referential use characteristic of formal realism. The study views the image as the basic unit of the imagination which unites the external reality with the writer's subjectivity. It is based on the view of imagination expounded by Frank Kermode in *Romantic Image* as the image-making power of the mind at the expense of its rational powers. Dickens was not a systematic thinker but even an avowed anti-intellectualist, and at his best he used the artistic image, like the great romantic poets, as a complete fusion of form and meaning, spirit and body (Bottez 16). The study considers the image as a basic structural unit in the rhetoric of Dickens's novels. It traces an image or a cluster of images through a novel but it also relates functionally each cluster of images to the

other rhetorical means used by Dickens. It thus combines the interest in the social and psychological dimensions of Dickens's work with that in the anthropological structures of the imaginary.

The author traces the archetypal mould of numerous recurrent images and investigates them along with other images occurring at the level of the specific economy of every novel. Thus it demonstrates at the same time the increasingly complex rhetorical importance the image acquired in proportion to Dickens's more deliberate use of symbol as his mastery and control over his art grew firmer. The study groups the recurrent (clusters of) images them together in four chapters: "Light and Darkness, "The Stare", The Prison", "Nature and the Four Elements".

We may conclude that Romanian criticism in the 1980s tried to convey Dickens's rich complexity in keeping with research in Western Europe and America and a valuable history of his Romanian reception was also produced in this decade.

In postcommunist Romania, Alexandru Mica's comparative study entitled *The Introspective Fantastic and the "Veiled" Fantastic as a Cognitive Source with N.V. Gogol, E.A. Poe and Ch. Dickens* (1993) devotes a chapter (30-69) to a parallel between the Russian writer and Dickens. Mica dwells on Dickens's use of the fantastic frequently associated with the oneiric in the *Christmas Tales* and the intercalated tales in *The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. Then Mica more extensively comments on the direct influence of Dickens on Dostoevsky, Nekrasov and Gogol, particularly on the acknowledged inspiration that Gogol found in *Oliver Twist* for Grigorovitch's account of little Akulina's sufferings in *The Village*, and on the similarity between Chichikov and Ralph Nickleby. The chapter ends with the speculation that the writers' stylistic innovations may have been related to their comparatively limited education.

There have also been comparative studies of Dickens. One published by the Romanian-born Professor of Comparative Literature at Indiana University Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, *To Kill a Text: The Dialogic Fiction of Hugo, Dickens and Zola* (1995) uses Bakhtin and ideas of intertextuality to argue for the influence of *Notre Dame de Paris* on *Bleak House*. Another one is Elena Morărescu's 2006 study *Universul copilariei si imaginea copilului la Charles Dickens, Ion Creangă și Mark Twain* examines Dickens's portrayal of children's inner lives.

The next book-length analysis of Dickens's work, Mihai Rădulescu's *Antropologia stilistică – lumea lui Charles Dickens* (1995), argues that only Cervantes and Daumier have evinced an ability equal to that of Dickens to recreate a complete picture of their contemporary society. Rădulescu sets out to demonstrate in his book that Dickens's power of observation achieves such an art of character delineation that the description of facial expression, a gesture or an attitude condenses and conveys in a few lines an almost complete knowledge of the respective character.

Rădulescu programmatically dwells upon the non-verbal behaviour of secondary characters of nine Dickensian books – *Sketches by Boz*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He calls this "anthropological stylistics", studying the psychic mechanisms by which reality is perceived (e.g. personification, hyperbole, metonymy, symbolism). For the study of

behavioural tropes Rădulescu establishes a complex taxonomy. The author gives interesting examples of antonymic – dichotomous stylistic behaviour (where a certain conduct simultaneously negates itself in the same situational pattern) from *A Tale from Two Cities* and *Our Mutual Friend*. Rădulescu names “iasteron proteronic”(149) the stylistic behavioural pattern that refers to a conduct which reverses natural (chronological or logical) order of words, gestures, face expressions and attitudes putting first what should occupy a subsequent place in the sequence. He exemplifies it with Dickens’s picture of Mrs Jellyby, of her house and of her children. Dickens shows how Mrs. Jellyby’ adopts a “iasteron proteronic” behaviour in order to gain social prestige and conceal her ill features: she thus puts the improvement of education for natives of Borrioboola Gha in Africa before the improvement for the living conditions for the poor people at home, and before any duty of keeping her house and large family in order.

Maria-Ana Tupan derives from J. L. Austin, M.A.K. Halliday, Jenny Thomas, Jay Lemke and Norman Fairclough the theoretical tool adopted in her book-length study entitled *A Discourse Analyst’s Dickens* (1999). She benefits from deconstructive, feminist, poststructuralist approaches to Dickens, who, she says,” “sees the world as Kantian or Schopenhaurian representation, as phenomenological constitution” (57).

Tupan discusses the issue of power as a central theme in *Barnaby Rudge*, a historical novel concerned with the challenge of the existing system and the reestablishment of the *status quo*. She argues that the construction of the subject in Dickens’s novels is semiotic, grounded in the system of characteristic social practices. She focuses on intertextuality (the eighteenth –century mock heroic prose of Fielding, Sterne and Swift, Adam Ricardo, medieval drama) foregrounding the heteroglossia of *Barnaby Rudge* as corresponding to that of the society in which the action is set and the kaleidoscopic structure of the novel as inscribing its medieval, renaissance, neo-classic and pre-romantic facets.

Tupan’s discussion of *Bleak House* locates its originality in the two illocutionary sources that differ in gender, style and world-view, neither claiming to be “truthful to facts”(86) . She thus analyses the omniscient male voice and the subordinate role of the female narrator whose discourse of characterized by “inferencings, suppositions, assumptions” (93). In her analysis of *Great Expectations* Tupan dwells on the metaphoric structures that centre on the beacon, the gibbet and the prison and images of hierarchical arrangement based on the opposition low/ above.

More criticism on Dickens’s creation has appeared in course books published by various university presses. Thus at the University of Bucharest Ioana Zirra’s chapter “Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray’s Garrulousness Compared” (22-39) relies on the archetypal criticism of N. Frye and narratological analysis, insisting especially on *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*.

In Maria-Ana Tupan’s *British literature. An Overview* (2005), Dickens is allotted six pages where she discusses three of his novels, *Dombey and Son*, *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations*, in the light of such postmodern concepts as “the decomposing self” and “dialogic fiction”.

At Babeş-Bolyai University, Ileana Galea's book on *Victorianism and Literature* (1996, 2000) is a very serious study of the Victorian age, where Adrian Radu's chapter "Charles Dickens: Comedy and Romance" occupies 17 pages.

At Timișoara, the chapter Mircea Mihăieș devoted in his 1998 *Victorian Literature* to "The Inimitable" is entitled "Charles Dickens: The Triumph of Realism", a 25-page survey of all Dickens's novels presented from the angle of their realism, without overlooking the carnivalesque component of his work, his outstanding story-telling gift and the polyphonic structure of his later novels.

Monica Pillat-Săulescu (Bucharest) and Aloisia Șorop (Craiova) introduced the study of children's literature in the academic curriculum, allotting Dickens a prominent place in the syllabus

At Craiova, Victor Olaru's initial twenty-page chapter on Dickens in *Victorian Literature* (1999) was expanded to 75 pages in *Victorian Writers III* (2006) discussing the novelist's reputation, his method, his humour, pathos, his style and then analyzing his works chronologically.

At the University of Iași Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru published the book *The Victorian Novel* in 2004 where the chapter dedicated to "The Inimitable" is entitled "Tradition and Innovation: Charles Dickens" (14-31).

At the University of Constanța Adina Ciugureanu's *Victorian Selves (A Study in the Literature of the Victorian Age)* has two chapters on Dickens: "The World, the Self and the Realist Novel (W.M. Thackeray and Charles Dickens)" and "Fact, News and Fiction: Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*".

At the University of Suceava, Luminița Elena Turcu includes a three-page analysis of *Great Expectations* in her book on the English Gothic Novel.

There also have been interesting articles published in literary and cultural periodicals, journals and academic volumes, whose number increased recently, as the bicentenary of Dickens's birth drew nearer. Doina Cmeciu published "From *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* to the Shaping of Male Selves" in *Cultural Perspectives. Journal for Literary and British Cultural Studies* in Romania, a 2002 issue comprising eight more articles devoted to this novel and insisting on *Dombeyism* as a significant Victorian concept. Cristina Nicolae wrote on metaphors of loss and discovery in Chapter I of *Great Expectations*, Codrin Cuțitaru speculated on the significance of Jaggery and omniscience in "Cronica unui paricid epic", Ioana Zirra commented on passages from *Our Mutual Friend* in her "Presence and Pretence in the Dickensian Neighbourhood – A Pragmatological Analysis of Commonplaces Semantics", Monica Bottez discussed the notion of the "Noble Savage" comparatively in the writings of Frances Brooke, Susanna Moodie and Charles Dickens, Doina Cmeciu analysed the shaping of male selves in *Dombey and Son* and commented on 'The House of (Satis)Fiction in *Great Expectations*', Adina Ciugureanu dwelt on male bonding in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* and on the victim-aggressor duality in *Great Expectations*, Maria-Ana Tupan interpreted Auguste Dupin and Mr. Bucket as anticipations of Thought-Police, Felicia Burdescu wrote on Dickens's representations of the Victorian feminine ideal, Călin Lupițu mapped human liminality in *Great Expectations*, Irina-Ana Drobot explored London with Virginia Woolf, Graham

Swift and Charles Dickens, and Georgiana-Elena Dilă and Mihaela Prioteasa wrote on the more familiar topics of facing Victorian society in *Great Expectations* and imagination and mimesis in *David Copperfield*.

Translations

By 1983, most of Dickens's writings had been translated into Romanian: his *Sketches by Boz*, some of his Christmas books, and 13 out of his 15 novels, only *Barnaby Rudge* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* having been overlooked.

I shall begin with a 1982 volume not mentioned in Vereș's book, the only one of this kind so far, entitled *Charles Dickens. Pagini alese*, to which the editor, G. Pienescu, also provided an excellent and comprehensive presentation of Dickens's life and work as well as a bibliography of the Dickens translations in Romania. The excerpts are thematically grouped in nine chapters and are selections from eight Dickens creations (*Sketches by Boz*, , *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *American Notes*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*), the editor using the existing Romanian translations accurately specified. The volume also contains a short piece entitled "The Pair of Gloves" from Dickens's detective anecdotes, for the first time translated into Romanian, without however giving the name of the translator.

A new volume of short fiction appeared in 1983 under the title *Charles Dickens. Povestiri (Short Stories)* translated by Ionel Gologan and Virgiliu Ene, which includes "The Seven Poor Travellers," "The Holly-Tree," "The Wreck of the Golden Mary," "Perils of Certain English Prisoners," "Sketches of Young Couples," "Sketches of Young Gentlemen," "The Mudfog Papers" (three pieces), "The Pantomime Of Life," "Mr. Robert Bolton: The Gentleman Connected With The Press," "Some Particulars Concerning A Lion". The translators achieved good stylistic equivalences for the original text with a vivid rendering of the author's gift as a story-teller.

In December 1989 the communist regime was overthrown in Romania, and there followed a difficult period of transition back to a democratic system and a capitalist economy. In our field of interest the immediate result was a proliferation of publishing houses that try to supply the type of books in demand in a market regulated by free competition.

Under the atheist communist regime religion and the people who went to church were persecuted in Romania and many churches were demolished by the hateful dictator. The liberty of worship was one of the rights dearly paid for with hundreds of lives. People flocked back into churches, the Church being one of the institutions that appears to enjoy high public trust in post-communist Romania. Consequently the first new Dickens book that was offered to Romanian readers was *The Life of Our Lord* translated by Andrei Bantaș in 1990, a bilingual edition with a good, fluent and stylistically accurate Romanian version. The book was given two more translations, one by Marius Conceatu which also includes *Two Prayers* written by Charles Dickens for his young children, and one by Luana Stoica.

Other three Dickensian creations first become accessible to the Romanian reading public in this period: *Pictures from Italy* was translated by Gabriel Pleșea; "The Signal-Man" was included in the volume *Nine Bizarre Short Stories* translated

by Alina Luca; the translation of *A Child's History of England*, two volumes, was signed by Lucian Dunăreanu.

The translation of Dickens's novels gets nearer completion with the publication of *Barnaby Rudge* (1998), the Romanian version being given by Nicolai Stefan Popescu, the translator whose efforts had already rendered Romanian readers such masterpieces as *Little Dorrit*, *Our Mutual Friend*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He also supplies his readers with an ample Preface and comprehensive notes on Dickens's first historical novel. In Vereș's book (1982) there are detailed stylistic, syntactic and lexical analyses of N. Popescu's translations revealing both their merits and errors (see 154-156, 160-162, 176, 179-181). The translation *Barnaby Rudge* too is generally very good but there are also some unhappy equivalences, out of which I'll give just one example:

The passage "Leaning against the door-post of this, his dwelling, the locksmith stood early on the morning after he had met with the wounded man, gazing disconsolately at a great wooden emblem of a key"(Chapter 4), gets the following translation: "Sprijinit de canatul ușii acestei case, locuința lui, lăcătușul se deșteptă a doua zi dimineață devreme, după ce avusese loc întâlnirea cu cel rănit și privea abătut firma, o cheie mare de lemn" (58), where the Romanian version has the hilarious implication that the locksmith had slept leaning against his door-post.

There were also a lot of reprints and new translations after 1990. The most popular were the Christmas books and stories and the early Dickens creations, as well as *Great Expectations*. The new translations do not imply a critical attitude to the previous one(s), but they may be due to the policies of the publishing houses. Shorter versions of some books were published, such as that of *The Posthumous Documents of the Pickwick Club* (an adaptation reduced to 174 pages and translated by Dana Bărbulescu) and *Micuța Dorrit*, an adaptation for children by J. Marcireanu translated by Iulia Feldrihan.

Oliver Twist and *Great Expectations* appear to be the most popular Dickensian creations. Thus the older translation of *Oliver Twist* by Teodora and Profira Sadoveanu was four times reprinted by various publishing houses and a new translation was made by Irina Bernea. That *Great Expectations* is still a great success is proved by the old translation by Vera Călin being reprinted in 1992 by two publishing houses and two more Romanian versions being commissioned to Cornelia Nițulescu (1992) and Veronica Focșeneanu (1998), introduced by a Preface of Dan Grigorescu, the reputed professor of comparative literature.

The numerous editions of The Christmas books and stories demonstrate their enduring appeal. *A Christmas Carol* was immediately retranslated after the December 1989 Revolution by Doina Topor, by Sanda Aronescu and by Silvia Kerim, all of them good translations. Silvia Kerim also signed the dramatic script of *Poveste de Crăciun* that was brought out on records in 1992. A fourth version offers only fragments from the original in parallel with their Romanian translation made by Izabella Badiu and a fifth translation of gives it an adapted form by Mihaela Burlacu.

The Chimes was translated by Dan Starcu (republished as "The Magic Bell"), then under the title of "Toby's Story" and published in one volume with *The Battle of Life*, that was also given the changed title of *Dragoste de soră*.

We may therefore say that when the free market mechanism took over, it is the early Dickens creations, the Christmas books, *The Life of Our Lord* and *Great Expectations* that have been in greatest demand. But we would like to give a special appreciation to the remarkable enterprise of Adevărul Holding publishing house which rendered the Romanian reading public a package comprising most of Dickens's creations (previous or new translations, see Selective List of Translations) in an attractive and affordable collection, namely *Cronicile Clubului Pickwick*, *Colind de Crăciun*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *David Copperfield*, *Casa umbrelor*, *Timpuri grele*, *Poveste a două orașe*, *Marile speranțe*.

The conclusion of this long yet incomplete survey is that Dickens's writings have been constantly present in post-communist Romanian bookstalls and university bookshops, a rich food for both the general public's consumption and for academic commentary.

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Selective List of Translations

Short Fiction

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- (1992) *Poveste de Crăciun* (recording on CD), dramatic script Silvia Kerim, București: Electrecord.
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