

POSITION PAPER

*Dickens' Influence and Reception in Portugal*¹

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The study of Charles Dickens' literary reception in Portugal is still largely unaccomplished or incomplete, having to take into consideration, on the one hand, most of the history of the production, distribution and consumption of his works, and, on the other, the specific conditions and reading habits of the Portuguese. Another important factor still to be observed is the change occurred in the generic form in which the original text has been successively presented to the Portuguese public (monthly instalment, publication in a volume, collection of selected works, author series). Either through direct translation from the original version in English or through the intermediation of a third idiom (predominantly, the French one), in integral or truncated, condensed, adapted or abridged versions, Dickens' oeuvre has slowly moved from the margins to the centre of the translated literature system of Portugal and has eventually reached the same canonical space that is attributed to it internationally (Almeida Flor, 11). But the analysis of Dickens' reception in any country will also have to consider other semiotic systems, namely the theatrical, cinematographic and televisioned ones, especially those destined to mass consumption, either in audiovisual or in cartoon form. Such irradiation indeed proves that Dickens' narrative art incorporates values that are susceptible of attracting a very heterogeneous Portuguese public, both in terms of age group and average cultural level.

The nineteenth-century British novel travelled slowly to the southern European continent and mostly through France, a country that maintained a great editorial activity and whose language was comparatively more accessible. British authors became gradually known in several Mediterranean countries mostly through French translations; this was the case of Portugal, where the French cultural model was still largely predominant in the first decades of the twentieth century (Machado de Sousa, 13). Besides the language barrier, another problem in the reception of Victorian novelists and especially those of social or humanitarian focus (including Dickens, Gaskell, etc.) was the very different social context lived in those countries. The issues debated in England, at the height of the Industrial Revolution, were not felt in Portugal and thus commanded less interest. Indeed, they were especially distant due to the situation of almost permanent warfare during the first half of the century in Portugal: the French invasions and the Liberal wars, which did not allow for the development of the arts and letters (Machado de Sousa, 13).³

¹ In the writing of this paper I am greatly indebted to Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa, Emeritus Professor of the Universidade Nova of Lisbon, who is one of the foremost authorities in the reception studies of English authors in Portugal.

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³ Between 1807 and 1812, Portugal was occupied and involved in the Peninsular War against Napoleon, conflict which left the country in a state of devastation. Some years later, in 1820, there was a liberal revolution aiming to implement a constitutional monarchy. This would lead, in turn, to the Liberal Wars that raged between 1828 and 1834. Finally, in 1846-47 civil war broke out. It was only ended when foreign powers intervened. In the late 19th century, while some European countries were transformed by the industrial revolution, Portugal remained a poor, agricultural country, where illiteracy was common.

The first text by Dickens that was published in Portugal, as early as 1839 and signed as ‘Boz’, was “A True Story: The Inkeeper of Andermatt” (1838), when he was still an unknown author outside England. This early date was an exception in an otherwise very late reception; and the short story was indeed the most frequently translated genre amongst us until the end of that century, around 1876, the late year in which *Oliver Twist* (1837-8) or *The London Thieves* began its serial publication in the *Popular Diary* of Lisbon. The instalment format, more practical for translators due to its shortness, was also used for other novels: *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (serialised between 1880-81 in an Oporto newspaper); *A House to Let*, or a *House with Script* in the Portuguese translation, and *A Tale of Two Cities* or *The Marquis of Saint-Evremond or Paris and London in 1793* (title of the Portuguese translation) were serialised in 1887-88; another title for the same novel was *The Guillotine* (1924). *Great Expectations* (1860-61) came out as late as 1889-90 in a Madeiran newspaper and with the Portuguese title of *The Great Hopes*; and, finally, *The Adventures of Mr. Pickwick* (1836-37) was introduced only in 1897-98, in Lisbon, and in a three-volume format. As for *David Copperfield*, it would only be translated in 1909, but with great success as the nine different versions published until 1999 may attest.

In some cases, the titles directly suggest French translations, and many short stories and novels were also abridged or condensed, including during the twentieth century. The most popular short-stories that were translated and published between 1839 and 1876 were *A Christmas Carol*, *The Haunted Man*, *The Black Veil and Horatio Sparkins*. Machado de Sousa registered twenty-eight versions of the first story since 1864, under different Portuguese titles: *Mr. Scrooge’s Christmas*, *The Old Miser’s Christmas*, *Christmas Ballad*, etc (17). In the 1960s and 70s, the official Portuguese television chose different film adaptations of this story to be presented during the Christmas seasons, and at least four of which were translated by Machado de Sousa herself. The first register of a movie exhibition that she found in the National Cinemateque was Bill Murray’s adaptation entitled *Scrooged* of 1988, which was followed by a humoristic one in 1992 by Brian Henson – *The Muppets Christmas Carol* (Disney); a 2000 film was directed in the USA by Roman Polanski, another was the 2008 French version of Arnaud Desplechin and, finally, there was the controversial Robert Zemeckis version of 2009 (Machado de Sousa, 18).

But until the publication by Cruz Coutinho of a collected edition in 1864, Dickens seems to have been just a name, of which the translators themselves knew practically nothing. Indeed, the introduction to *Scenes of English Life and a Christmas Carol in Prose. By Charles Dickens*, the full Portuguese title of the edition, containing mostly stories from *Sketches of Boz*, is a biography of the one that the author claims to be “the most popular of all the contemporary English novelists” (quoted in Machado de Sousa, 18). Coutinho’s selection of texts is said to be justified by the precocious existence of “that fresh colouring, the nervous cheerfulness, and the caustic but just observations that constitute the most salient qualities of Charles Dickens’ talent” (18). The evaluation of what the author designates as “the human qualities” of Dickens would soon be transposed to the appreciation of the person of the writer himself. As is a tradition with us, references to the novelist begin to emerge in Portugal with more frequency after his death; the first obituary was published in July 1870 and, from this moment onwards, we find numerous references to Dickens by the

two most important Portuguese writers of the period, Eça de Queirós and Ramalho Ortigão, perhaps those with the closest contact with contemporary England.⁴

Both authors refer the above mentioned human qualities present in the novelist's works: "the love for the small, the simple, the weak, the oppressed" of "the divine Dickens who wrote *Copperfield*" (Queirós, 1870 and 1878); "the one who shed a new kind of tear from human pity and tenderness" (Ortigão, 1887). Pedro dos Reis, in his 1888 Biographical Notice to the translation of "The Haunted Man", declared in his turn that "Literarily, Dickens had always a target in mind: to defeat the defects of the English character, the hypocrisy and the selfishness, under any form of presentation" (quoted in Machado de Sousa, 19). And he significantly added that Dickens had appeared in the right moment, when the English public was already weary of Walter Scott's novels and when new alternatives had not yet materialised (19).

In the early twentieth century, the consensual features attributed to Dickens by Portuguese editors and translators were in the same line: 'solidarity in misfortune' and 'humour'. For example, Teixeira Botelho commented in 1925 that "Dickens, following the great movement in favour of the unfortunate, [...], versed the humanitarian novel" (quoted in Machado de Sousa, 20). As an illustration, he cites *Oliver Twist*, "where he paints with impeccable truth some of the lowest and most miserable forms of life in London" (20). Much later on in the century, in 1978, another translator, Daniel Gonçalves, in his introductory note to *The Christmas Carols* would still emphasise that "these are stories of combat – combat for social justice, combat for the dignification and humanization of the marital bonds through a fuller understanding of the wife by her husband" (20). The first known critical essay that was written on Dickens was an extensive one by Gentil Marques, and it was published in 1945 as an introduction to a new translation of "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain" (in Portuguese, "The Man and the Spectre"). He summarises thus Dickens' role in the development of the novel: "Today, when so much is being said about the social novel and about the role of the modern novelist as an educator and as a critic -- it is unfair and ungrateful to forget that Dickens was one of the most feverous precursors of those new literary currents. [...] to defend the rights of the unfortunate, to show the horrors of their lives, to expose the blots of society." (quoted in Machado de Sousa, 21). Only towards the end of the twentieth century do we find specialised academic works on Dickens' oeuvre; and these were written mostly by Professor Álvaro Pina. In 1985, he analysed *Bleak House* in an article published in the Journal of the Faculty of Letters of Lisbon; in 1986, he wrote on *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations* in the critical volume entitled *Dickens: The Art of the Novel* (Horizonte Universitário Series, Lisbon).⁵

⁴ According to Machado de Sousa, also Jaime Batalha Reis, who fulfilled diplomatic functions in England immediately after Queirós, mentioned Dickens a few times in his *English Review*, containing articles published in 1888. But, in contrast with the praiseful comments of his contemporaries, Reis only refers that "Dickens spoke badly of England" (quoted in Machado de Sousa, n. 4, p. 19).

⁵ Álvaro Pina is Full Professor in the Faculty of Letters of University of Lisbon, member of the editorial board of *Revista Cultural Studies* and the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, and founding member of the *Association for Cultural Studies*. He also wrote monographs on Jane Austen, George Eliot and D. H. Lawrence.

Well before the contact of the Portuguese with the greater novels of Dickens, the general public had been vaguely familiar with his name in another artistic area, the theatre, a known favourite of his. Although not very extensive, his theatrical production had some impact in Portugal. *No Thoroughfare* (1867), a drama in five acts, written in collaboration with Wilkie Collins, was translated into Portuguese as *The Abyss* from the French, and performed in 1869 in the Theatre of Príncipe Real (Lisbon). And it would be brought to the stage again in 1875, significantly completing fourteen performances between 11 and 19th April. The critical reception of this work was highly favourable, extolling “the great imagination” of Dickens and the “brilliant qualities that he possesses”, as “the most fertile English writer of adventurous episodes” (Pedro Vidoeiro, in *O Contemporâneo*, a Lisbon journal).

Regarding the greater novels, and according to Machado de Sousa, the first to be translated into Portuguese was *Oliver Twist or the Thieves of London* (the full Portuguese title), by Francisco da Silva Vieira, being published from March 1876 to January 1878 in the Lisbon periodical *Diário Popular* (23). It was translated again, this time directly from the English, by Augusta Martins, and published in another periodical (*Comercio do Porto*), from April to October 1879. The next work to be chosen for translation directly from the English by the same translator, and for serialization in the same periodical, between July 1880 and June 1881, was *Nicholas Nickleby* (23). At the turn of the century (1900-09), a first global opinion of the English novelist could be found in an illustrated Portuguese encyclopedia by Maximiano Lemos:

Dickens had the precious gift of writing in a firm, nervous, neologistic language. His style is not at all classical, being even at times vulgar; but this artistic flaw is greatly compensated for by the exactness and the picturesque of expression. Like no other fellow countryman, he possesses the spirit of what is called *humour* [...]: a spirit of light subtle satire, contained in both wording and ideas. His novels, being rather long, have an incomplete composition, despite his enormous and deserved popularity, [...] (quoted in Machado de Sousa, 24).

The great complexity of Dickens’ plots, often combining different stories that end up being presented independently, must have suggested the criticism of ‘incomplete composition’, a feature that Edgar Poe had already noted. *The Pickwick Papers* is perhaps the most representative product of this technique, but is also considered by many as one of his best works.

This novel was indeed the only one selected by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa to be part of the set of works contemplated by the Queen Victoria Memorial Prize that he conquered in 1903 at the Durban and Cape of Hope University.⁶ Pickwick is the only hero of Dickens to appear – and several times too – in the poet’s fragmentary texts of literary criticism and to be considered by him as “the supreme and enveloping delight of his first adolescence” (quoted in Simões, 1973: 69). In his posthumous collected *Pages of Aesthetics and Literary Theory and Criticism*, we can also find the following idiosyncratic reference: “Mr Pickwick belongs to the sacred figures of the world history. Please, do not tell me he never existed [...] the majority of these figures have had a vivid presence in the lives of a huge number of miserable consulates.

⁶ Besides *The Pickwick Papers*, Pessoa possessed in his home library only two other works by Dickens: *Christmas Books* and *Bleak House*.

Thus, [...] a human being *can* reclaim the personal knowledge and a clear vision of Mr. Pickwick.” (309).⁷ As Machado de Sousa has mentioned, the opinion that Pessoa has expressed about the Dickensian universe seems to be rather unique, and probably not only in Portugal: “It is a human world, therefore women do not have in it any importance [...]. Dickens’ women are carton and sawdust to stow their men in the voyage from the oneiric spaces. [...] / Dickens’ women are puppets, but so all women are after all. [...]” (310).⁸ Another curiosity was a Portuguese attempt to finish *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), interrupted by the author’s death, and to whose 23 chapters the translator Mário Domingues added another 15 chapters of his own in 1958 (27).⁹

The real Dickensian boom occurred in Portugal during the later twentieth century, when the majority of his novels and a great quantity of his stories were tirelessly translated, reedited and adapted. *David Copperfield*, considered his best novel by many, and *Oliver Twist*, another favourite, stand out in the translations that were edited by João Nascimento, respectively, between 1969-1971 and 1974-2004. Their inclusion in outstanding collections like Portugália Editora’s “The Universal Novels”, the Círculo de Leitores’ “Classics of Universal Literature” and Editorial Verbo’s “Juvenile Classics” certainly attest to this sudden popularity. The latter collection, in particular, draws attention to the way Dickens’ novels came to be seen in Portugal predominantly as juvenile literature. Given the relative but notorious absence of children’s literature in the Portuguese market, which only offered moral or Sunday School books, novels that told child-related or narrated tales as many of Dickens did, were suddenly in high demand. Indeed, Dickens was among the first novelists to ‘put a child at the centre of a novel’, thus contributing significantly to a totally new narrative perspective or standpoint. The widespread of juvenile magazines that took place from the 1930s and 40s onwards, brought about comic book publications such as *The Spark*, *The Mosquito*, *The Goblin* and *The Knight Errant* (translated Portuguese titles) that included some of Dickens’ stories. Probably as a consequence of this, a work on *The Child in the Novel of Charles Dickens: a contribute to the study of children’s literature* (translation of the Portuguese title) by Margarida Morgado was issued in Lisbon, in 1988.

Apart from its undeniable value for the expansion of juvenile literature and its eventual academic interest on the part of some scholars, for Machado de Sousa, there were no real influences of Dickens’ work in Portugal (28). She attributes this to the significant delay in his European reception (as well as that of other Victorian writers), which did not allow for fruitful associations or comparisons with the situation lived in other countries, and notably Portugal (28). Regarding her own critical appreciation of the writer, Machado de Sousa finds it difficult to avoid Taine’s well-known opinion: “At bottom, the novels of Dickens can be reduced to a single phrase, which is: Be good and love; there is no true joy except in the emotions of the heart; sensibility is all the man. [...]” (28).¹⁰ And, indeed, this earlier assessment regarding the sentimental

⁷ This is my translation from the original in Portuguese quoted by Machado de Sousa.

⁸ This is my translation from the original in Portuguese quoted by Machado de Sousa.

⁹ This ‘unauthorised continuation’ develops the plot to its most logical conclusion in full Dickensian style, focusing mostly on Jasper’s guilt, like the majority of the other sequels.

¹⁰ My own free translation from the original in French, quoted in Machado de Sousa: “Au fond, les romans de Dickens se réduisent tous à une phrase, et la voici: Soyez bons et aimez; il n’y a de vraie joie que dans les émotions du cœur; la sensibilité est tout l’homme. [...] » (Taine, 1866-71 : 66).

strain of his narrative art seems also to conform to the later Dickensian critical fortune both at home and abroad (including, in this case, Portugal).

Regarding specifically the translation history of Dickens in Portugal, it is very important to mention the work developed by the scholar Alexandra Assis Rosa, who has recently published a complete catalogue of the works by Dickens that were translated and published until 2010.¹¹ It includes a bibliographic database, which registers the first Portuguese translation for each work by Dickens published in Portugal in periodical or book forms and, whenever pertinent, different subsequent retranslations.¹² According to her conclusions, and respecting the relative position occupied by different authors, Dickens is indeed the most translated and retranslated canonical British writer of the 1700s and 1800s in Portugal (39).¹³ This happens in spite of the outstanding introduction of Byron and Scott in the early 19th century, authors translated by some of the most reputed names of Portuguese Romanticism, as Alexandre Herculano and Almeida Garrett. She singles out, in particular, the late year of 1930 as the one in which the cultural products derived from the Anglophone spaces started to find significant receptivity amongst us, with a marked emphasis on the literary narrative (44).¹⁴ Rosa identified several explicit references to a gradual predominance of the interaction with Anglophone cultures from this decade onwards and, in particular, after the 1840s, when the influence of Anglo-American modernism became felt through T. S. Eliot and the generation of Jorge de Sena (48).¹⁵ After World War II, and with the political and cultural reorganisation around the USA, the number of translations from the English increased to more than a half of the total, most of which by Portugália Editora. Besides Dickens, who achieved a total of 51 translated works between 1839 and 1973, names such as those of George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, D. H. Lawrence, Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Herman Melville, became finally accessible to the Portuguese readers.

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¹¹ Assis Rosa is a lecturer in the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon and a researcher in CEAUL (Centre of Anglo-American Studies of the University of Lisbon). Her catalogue is inserted in *Charles Dickens in Portugal* (2012), a publication designed to commemorate the bicentenary of Charles Dickens in Portugal, together with an exhibition of biblio-iconographic documents in the Portuguese editorial context.

¹² The database, named *Intercultural Literature in Portugal (1930-2000): A Critical Bibliography*, is accessible online since late 2010, presently integrating data up to 1955 (<http://www.translatedliteratureportugal.org/>).

¹³ Rosa considers a set of fourteen canonical writers of the British literary narrative, from Daniel Defoe to George Meredith. Charles Dickens is closely followed by Walter Scott: the first had 15 works translated three or more times and the second had 8 works.

¹⁴ The three last decades of the 19th century had been completely dominated by the French influence, to such an extent that even Eça de Queirós complained that in its cultural outlook Lisbon resembled a cheaper Marseille (quoted in Rosa, 47). The problems derived from the *British Ultimatum* of 1890 made things even worse, and there were complaints from some Portuguese intellectuals that the works of even the most celebrated English writers were a sealed book to the majority of readers (quoted in Rosa, 47).

¹⁵ Jorge de Sena is one of the most important Portuguese poets of the second half of the 20th century, but he was also an outstanding essayist, a fiction writer, a playwright and a tireless translator of the poetry and prose of writers from a variety of languages and periods. His published works extend to more than a hundred titles. Relevant in this context are: *A literatura inglesa: ensaio de interpretação e de História*, Cultrix, S. Paulo, Brazil, 1963 . *Inglaterra revisitada*, Edições 70, Lisbon, 1986 . *Sobre o romance: ingleses, norte-americanos e outros*, Ed. 70, Lisbon, 1986. *Sobre literatura e cultura britânicas*, Relógio d'Água, Lisbon, 2005.

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