

explorations



Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature

REVIEW

Aleksandra Budrewicz. 2015. *Dickens w Polsce: Pierwsze Stulecie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego.

Marlena Marciniak (University of Opole)

DOI: 10.25167/EXP13.17.5.9

In *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* Wolfgang Iser, one of the founding fathers of reception theory, states that “convergence of the text and the reader brings the literary work into existence” (1974, 275). In tune with Iser’s concept, Aleksandra Budrewicz’s recent study *Dickens w Polsce: Pierwsze Stulecie* [*Dickens in Poland: The First Hundred Years*] (2015) explores how Dickens’ novels, short stories and plays were ‘given life’ by Polish readers between 1839 and 1939. Budrewicz significantly expands her examination to include the reception of the widely renowned writer’s life, borrowing thus from comparative studies and touching on the biographical criticism as well. Aleksandra Budrewicz’s interdisciplinary project has turned out well in the field of Dickens studies, where it is rather hard to succeed, due to saturation of the market with abundant works on the novelist and his rich oeuvre. The idea to make contemporary readers familiar with the ways in which Dickens and his texts were presented, celebrated, interpreted, neglected, utilized, reworked, etc., and finally incorporated into Polish language and culture is a capital hit. The book not only fills in a shameful gap in Polish publications on Dickens, but also helps to understand how Polish literature evolved in relation to other European literatures.

Aleksandra Budrewicz has risen to the tough challenge of finding, gathering, analyzing, systematizing and clarifying a multitude of miscellaneous materials concerning the reception of Dickens and his works in Polish literary and non-literary discourse over a century. Such a diversity of sources (including translations, press articles, advertisements, library catalogues, puzzles, posters, poems, reviews and radio programs) gives a comprehensive picture of the presence of Dickensian elements in Polish culture from the second half of the nineteenth century to the outbreak of the Second World War. Furthermore, such a long time span enables the author to examine the process of encountering, processing and incorporating texts representing different cultural contexts. It is worth adding that the background information about historical, social, political and economic forces determining the functioning of Polish nation after the three partitions, provided by Budrewicz throughout her work, constitutes an

Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature, 5 (2017), pp. 87-89

invaluable key to understanding the reactions (or lack of them) of Polish audience to Dickens' fiction and life. The thematic and diachronic organization of each chapter makes this monograph coherent and perspicuous even to non-academic readers.

The first chapter of *Dickens w Polsce* scrutinizes diverse signs of the novelist's substantial popularity in Poland. Budrewicz shows evidence that translations of Dickens' works, as well as his travels, public readings and charity activities were regularly commented on in the Polish press. The author notes that despite a high rate of illiteracy, poverty and multilingualism of the Poles living under the regimes of Prussia, Austria-Hungary and Russia there was a widespread interest in both literary and socio-cultural endeavors of the English writer, whose financial and artistic successes were frequently used by Polish reformers to promote pro-capitalist and philanthropic attitudes.

In the next chapter Budrewicz explains a rather limited presence of Dickens in Polish literary studies in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some critics mentioned Dickens in their discussions on the development of realism in prose, and the role of the novel in promoting moral ideals. Similarly, little attention was paid to the anniversaries connected with Dickens' life, analyzed in chapter three. Aleksandra Budrewicz attributes this neglect to the complicated political situation of the country, in which celebrations of historical events were prioritized in order to preserve national identity of the divided society. In such circumstances all attempts to commemorate Dickens and his texts must be viewed as manifestations of great honor and respect.

Chapter four of the monograph deals with the theme of Dickensian sense of humor. Comical elements prevalent in his novels inspired Polish critics to analyze various models of humor, the moralizing effects of laughter, and the feasibility of translating satirical and ironic aspects from foreign literatures. As Budrewicz demonstrates in the following part of her book, Dickens' works had considerable influence on Polish writers also in other areas. She has detected numerous references to names of characters, titles of novels and famous quotations present in Polish fiction and press of the given period. These manifold allusions attest to the general knowledge that Polish readers had of Dickens' oeuvre. The author of *Dickens w Polsce* states that a few Polish writers were even called "'Dickens's students' in terms of imitating his realistic writing style, sense of humor, as well as 'social critique' oriented attitude" (Budrewicz 2015, 317). In chapter six she presents parallels between Dickens' masterpieces and the writings of numerous major and minor nineteenth-century native writers, such as Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Bolesław Prus, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Kornel Makuszyński.

Chapter seven is devoted to the representations of the English novelist's literary output in Polish theatre, film and radio. Although the initial attempts to stage his works failed to attract large audience, from the 1920s onwards the plays and operas based on Dickens's stories, especially *The Cricket on the Hearth*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Little Dorrit* and *David Copperfield*, enjoyed great popularity among Polish fans. The same texts turned into radio performances accompanied by acoustic special effects met with enthusiastic receptions. As far as film adaptations are concerned, Polish reviewers concentrated mainly on foreign, particularly American, productions.

The final chapter of the book contains a wide range of poems dedicated to Dickens, or mentioning his protagonists and their adventures. These poetic responses to his works vary from sentimentalized reminiscences of childhood readings of his novels, to the expressions of bitter disappointment with the world, which did not resemble the reality where 'good always wins' created by Dickens, as Europe was on the verge of war. All in

all, such a vast array of references to his oeuvre demonstrates that Dickens has rooted in Polish literature and culture for good.

In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Oscar Wilde provokingly states: “Books are well written, or badly written. That is all” (2016, xiii). In my opinion, Aleksandra Budrewicz’s *Dickens w Polsce* represents the first type of books in this witty classification. The author, without doubt, spared no effort to make it interesting, well-organized and thought-provoking. The amount of materials that she had to search through is impressive, and the subsequent neat arrangement of the data evidences her great analytical and interpretative skills. The list of Polish translations of Dickens’ works included in the appendix constitutes a precious source of information, and deserves due recognition. What is more, the striking number of examples, quotations and samples that Budrewicz has included in her study may appear almost overwhelming to less experienced readers, nonetheless the relaxed, occasionally even humorous, tone of presentation, exemplified by the plural “we” (e.g. 128), produces a relieving effect. The present monograph will appeal not only to the experts in Polish literature, but also to all (Polish-speaking) Victorianists and Charles Dickens admirers. *Dickens w Polsce*, like the eponymous personage himself, helps to bridge the gaps between different cultures, literatures and languages. Thanks to such publications the readers can understand that national identity crystallizes out of the network of interconnections that together lay the foundations of common European heritage.

REFERENCES

- Budrewicz, Aleksandra. 2015. *Dickens w Polsce: Pierwsze Stulecie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego.
- Iser, Wolfgang. 1974. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wilde, Oscar. 2016. Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde, xiii-xiv. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

AUTHOR’S BIO: Marlena Marciniak, PhD, is assistant professor at the Institute of English, Opole University. She specializes in Victorian fiction and culture, as well as gender studies, especially masculinity studies. She has published several book chapters and articles in academic journals on the Victorian concepts of fatherhood, married life and male homosocial relations, as well as on the nineteenth-century ideals of manliness. In 2015 she published her first book entitled *Towards a New Type of Masculinity: The Ideal of Gentlemanly Masculinity in Victorian Prose*.

E-MAIL: marciniakm(at)uni.opole.pl