Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov • Vol. 5 (54). No.1 - 2012
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies

DRAGOS PROTOPOPESCU, THE ACADEMIC LEGACY

Carmen ANTONARU[1]

Abstract: *This paper aims at presenting the first and maybe the greatest Romanian Anglicist of the inter-war period. I especially focused on introducing him as a Professor of English at the University of Bucharest. I also summarized his investigations into the English literature, and I revealed his former students' memories.*

Key words: *Dragoş Protopopescu, Anglicist, University of Bucharest, academic legacy*.

1. Introduction

"For me, - his former student, Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, remembered - Dragoş Protopopescu remains above all the professor whose presence, intelligence and erudition I enjoyed in my student years. His presence itself was an elegant performance. Making his way through the corridor packed with students that led to the Hasdeu amphitheatre (2nd floor), the professor's silhouette brought a note of vestimentary distinction, not very usual for our professors. A blue overcoat tailored after the latest fashion, an "Eden" hat (as it was called after the name of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Great Britain), a briefcase (which was very rare at that time) that he used to carry permanently, in which, as people said, he kept manuscripts of his Shakespearian drama translations, completed his figure" (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga 7).

2. The Courses

On December 18th 1923, at the University of Czernowitz, in front of twenty students, mostly German speakers and two Romanian women students, Dragos Protopopescu was performing his inaugural lecture of his course on English Language and Literature, which had been given by then by Professor Leon Keller, the author of the volume "History of English Literature in the 19th Century", written in German. In his lecture, Dragoş Protopopescu tried to present that side of the English literature which "can make it closer, more intimate to us , in other words, the classical base the English writing, like any other universal writing, was built century by century reaching eternity" (Protopopescu, 1925).

The topic of the lecture was called *The Latin value of English culture* and had a unilateral, and I would say *ad rem* point of view, using a modern word: opportunist" (Protopopescu, 1925).

[1] Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania.

BDD-A20139 © 2012 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:50:50 UTC)

Through that lecture, the professor wanted to emphasize the classicist note, often incomprehensible, of the English culture, but mostly to arouse the interest of my students, especially of the Romanian students, in the English civilization, appealing to the soul, everybody's soul, and still ours, the soul of Rome the British soul often identified itself with by a competent and assimilating culture" (Protopopescu, 1923).

In another article appeared in *The Voice of Bukovina*, entitled *The characteristics of the English language and nation,* the popularization lecture held by Professor Dragoş Protopopescu was presented, on Tuesday, March 31st, in which he stated: "One of the most significant features of the English people is the pleasure with which they deepen in silence, that being the reason why the English people have been called a silent nation. But the English people are an active, worthy, manly nation, if we accept the division of nations according to their nature. [...] This exemplary simplicity in the language appears both in any Englishman's behaviour and in his everyday life. The English are a manly, simple, deep, loyal and noble nation, very proud of their language". (Protopopescu, 1923)..

Two years later, on 26th January, Dragoş Protopopescu was appointed full professor at the department of English language and literature and on April 6th, 1925, the professor was delivering at The University of Czernowitz the lecture entitled *The Latin character of English literature*. "Czernowitz just happened to have, before Cluj and Iasi, the first department of English in the country held by a full professor." The professor pointed out that in the academic year 1924-1925, his course was attended by over forty foreign students and by the same two Romanian students. He regretted the lack of Romanian students:

> "I even venture to soften a reproach addressed to the Romanian student. My reproach is based on statistical figures. Last year the course in English was attended by one student, while this year no student has attended it!" (Protopopescu, 1923).

Dragos Protopopescu tried to justify that by the absence of the English language in the high school curricula and of a large didactic perspective: "As a Romanian professor, who studied at the English and French schools, I used last year and I shall go on using a method of transition, on a medium term, able to make the distant and grim values of the English culture more accessible to the student through interpretations and directions typical of the French school, permitting thus the ideas and soul of the North to permeate the light prism of the Latin mind" (Protopopescu, 1923).

Regarding this inaugural conference of the course, an article appeared in *The voice of Bukovina* which stated: "On Monday, April 6th, at 5 p.m. professor Dragoş Protopopescu, a full professor at the department of English language and literature, held his inaugural course in the University Hall, in front of the Minister of Bukovina, Mr. I. Nistor, the University Rector, deans, professors and a distinguished and numerous audience of Czernowitz. After advising the Romanian students to start studying English literature, professor Dragoş Protopopescu points out in an exquisite manner the character of the English, that dualism between a practical materialism and the most enthusiastic idealism and reveals clearly and meaningfully how this racial feature is reflected both in the descriptive epic and lyrical genres of the English literature and in the Anglo-Saxon philosophy. This interesting conference was listened to very attentively by a numerous audience and rewarded with long and warm applause" (Protopopescu, 1923).

BDD-A20139 © 2012 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:50:50 UTC)

In the same issue of *The Voice of Bukovina* they specified that "Professor Dragoş Protopopescu, PhD will deliver his popularization course on Tuesday, April 7th and on Wednesday, April 8th , talking about a type of an Englishman, Dr. Samuel Johnson. The lecture starts at 6 p.m. in room VII of the University" (Protopopescu, 1925). In the yearbook of the University of Czernowitz the name of Dragos Protopopescu was recorded under position 11 in the academic years 1926-1927 / 1927-1928, professor at the department of English language and literature, born at Călăraşi, Ialomiţa County, in 1892, obtained his degree in 1915, Ph.D. at Sorbonne in 1924, substitute teacher in 1923, full professor on January 26th, 1925. (University of Czernowitz yearbook, 1928).

In 1935 professor Dragoş Protopopescu published together with Irina Balmoş, lecturer, an *English language manual for the 5th grade*. The report on this manual state: "The teachers followed the instructions and the requirements of the curriculum goals. This fact appears very clearly both in the rules and in the examples given. The transcription of the texts to read and of the exercises given as homework with phonetic symbols and the use of the phonetic transcription for the new words that appear as we progress and for the irregular verbs is very good – the correct pronunciation being one of the major difficulties that anyone who wants to learn English comes across." (Protopopescu; Balmoş, 1935).

The manual is thus structured as not to realize how we overcome one by one the language difficulties" and, finally, "to realize that we master a great part of the English language" (Protopopescu; Balmoş, 1935). In the end of the report, it was considered that the manual fully deserved the approval and that it would be welcomed by all the teachers who, until then, had used to resort to foreign books. Thanks to its teaching qualities, this manual was still used in the years following the war, before the unique manuals were introduced. After getting his PhD degree, Dragoş Protopopescu became the third Professor of English Language and Literature in Romania, beside I. Botez, at Iaşi, and Petre Grimm, at Cluj, his academic title being obtained, unlike the others, abroad. At the end of the academic year 1939-1940, Professor John Burbank, full professor at the English Language and Literature department of the University of Bucharest, founded with the support of the British Government in the autumn of 1936, found out that his contract had expired. In 1940, October 1st, Dragoş Protopopescu was transferred from Czernowitz to Bucharest and appointed full professor of the same department. His assistant was appointed Mrs. Ana Cartianu, a graduate from Bedford College, London.

3. The history of teaching English at the University of Bucharest

Teaching of English at the University of Bucharest began in 1936, later than at other universities in Romania. The department of English of the University of Iasi had started its activity in 1917, under the leadership of Professor Ioan Botez, and that of the University of Cluj in 1921.The study of the English language and literature at the University of Bucharest has a much older tradition.

The first famous scholar in this field was Ion Eliade Rădulescu, who, in 1830, made the translation of Byron's poetry based on French versions. In 1848, C.A. Rosetti made the first translation directly from English into Romanian of the dramatic poem *Manfred* by Byron.

Ion Ghica is among the intellectuals who wanted to make known the Romanian history and culture in England. The first

BDD-A20139 © 2012 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:50:50 UTC)

university professor of Bucharest having good knowledge of English and who used in his research the works of the great British and American linguists of his time, mentioned by Dumitru Chitoran in his article entitled *Studies of Anglistics at the University of* Bucharest, (Chițoran, *The history of studying foreign languages at the University of Bucharest* 1980, p. 92.)

was Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu. To prepare his *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae* (1887 – 1898), B.P. Hasdeu used *The New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, edited by James Murray.

Among the illustrious professors of Alma Mater in Bucharest, Dumitru Chitoran mentiones Nicolae Iorga, professor and rector of the University of Bucharest. Through his publications in English and conferences held in British and American universities, Nicolae Iorga was particularly concerned with the promotion of the Romanian culture. Among those who referred to Shakespeare's work in their studies were Titu Maiorescu and Constantin Dobrogeanu Gherea, well-known professors of the University of Bucharest. (Chițoran, 1980).

Through the works *English Romanticism* (1934), *Contemporary English Romanticism* (1926), *Shakespeare in Romania* (1931) and other Anglistic studies, Marcu Beza marked the beginning of a new phase of literary Anglo-Romanian relations, continued successfully by Dragoş Protopopescu.

In the University of Bucharest yearbook from 1940-1941, we could find a record of the classes taught by Dragoş Protopopescu, one hour per week: Shakespeare, resumed with a certain constancy in the upcoming years, and contemporary English theatre. At his seminars, he discussed "Elizabethan works", two hours a week.

4. The students' memories

His former student Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga recalled with pleasure the two years of seminar (the 3rd and 4th year), which made possible a close proximity with Dragoş Protopopescu: " I received an analysis of the novel *The Egoist* by George Meredith". The constant concern of the professor was, according to his former students, interpreting the text. Of course, from Shakespeare, "in the 3rd year, we insisted on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and in the 4th year on the superb *The Tempest*. I say superb, because the professor, with the little help of our interventions, would take out, like hidden jewels, the deep meanings of this strange, almost esoteric play. And because my colleague, Lola Klekner, and I used to give him, in his opinion, the most appropriate suggestions, he nicknamed us Doctor Klekner and Doctor Dumitrescu" (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga 7).

> "So did I dare, after a while- remembered Zoe Dumitrescu Buşulenga – to show him, when I found him alone one day in his office, a few sonnets by Shakespeare on which I had been working for a long time. [...] I gave him my sheets with a trembling hand. Very amused, he took them with a familiar gesture and put his leg on the chair next to him. Then, leaning his elbow against his knee, he began to read. He was smiling; occasionally he reread slowly an English verse, the equivalent of that I had given to him. It seemed to me that Sonnet XVI stopped him for a longer time, as well as a stanza from the sonnets about the connection between love and the four constituent elements of the human being [...] He ended by looking at me laughing, and asked:"Do you really want to deny my opinion about the untranslatability of Shakespeare's sonnets. I stuttered: "Oh no, sir, but..." intimidated like a child who did something wrong. And then he gently said: "Still, go on trying, it might work". (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga 7).

BDD-A20139 © 2012 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:50:50 UTC)

Another former student of Professor Dragoş Protopopescu, Antoaneta Ralian, remembered the first translation she had done being a student in Letters in Bucharest:

> "In English we had as a professor the famous Dragoş Protopopescu, who gave us plenty of English literature to read. And having not enough copies, I used to read translating on the spot". (Magdalena Boiangiu, 2006).

Dragos Protopopescu and his assistant, Ana Cartianu, gave birth to numerous generations of Anglists.

> "They are antediluvian figures, but they were great professors who knew how to attract you, to imbue you with literature. We worked on texts, made a lot of translations at the seminars. With Dragos Protopopescu we studied Shakespeare weeks on end, we worked hard for each word". (Simonca, 2005).

Leon Levițchi and Andrei Bantaş, his other former students, describe Professor Dragoş Protopopescu as "a brilliant speaker, cultivating intelligence and irony, very impressive with his real Anglo-Saxon elegance (a well-known pen drawing by Victor Ion Popa depicted his pipe, which, as I learned, he never separated from, not even during his lectures).

Most of his former students remember the strong impression that he made upon them with his elegant presence within the department, with the modernity of his attitude, through the lively tone of his course which made the information seem more easily accessible and which proved a superior didactic sense. The amphitheatre in which professor Dragoş Protopopescu delivered his lectures „was full of students and the doors remained open after the course started. He would wear an impeccable suit, with a tie in sober colours, very modern; he welcomed his audience with a smiling face, as if he were preparing for a dialogue, not a course". (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, 2001).

> "As a form of greeting, the professor said two or three witty phrases, and then started the course with a voice devoided of "stentorian sounds". "His deep thought, full of substance, was flowing warmly; lyrically I should say, to those who were listening to him mesmerized". Even if he was talking about phonetics, or about the structure of the eighteenth-century novel, or about the pre-Romantic and Romantic poetry, his former students remembered "his low tone when reading love poems by Lady Winchelsea or John Keats, he took you with him in a world of intelligence from sensitiveness released by the contingent. The course ended in a burst of applause". (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga 7).

5. The conferences

The attention of Dragos Protopopescu always turned to the *English phenomenon* through the themes of the specialized conferences held at the Dalles Hall, Radio and the National Theatre: *Byron*, January 18th, 1942; *English Renaissance Theatre*, February 15th, 1942; *Today's American Poets*, March 15th, 1942; *Shakespeare's Comedies*, April 19th, 1942; *English Romantics*, September 23rd, 1942 (Dalles Hall), at the National Theatre (*Shakespeare's comedies*, March 18th, 1942,; Bernard Shaw, May 13th, 1942; *Octavian Goga Theatre*, October 10th, 1942 (at the National Theatre and at the Radio), on topics belonging to both national and universal culture. In addition to the university curriculum, these conferences held in English by the professor, his assistant and his students, one hour weekly (on Saturday from 12 a.m to 1 p.m.) are recorded in the University of Bucharest Yearbook.

The popularization of foreign culture was one of the duties assumed by the Romanian intellectuals, especially after the war had cut off ties with the West. The scientific activity in the years 1940 – 1941 and 1941 – 1942 includes the following

BDD-A20139 © 2012 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:50:50 UTC)

books: translations in verse from Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, second edition, *Shylock*, second edition, *Antony and Cleopatra* "presented to the National Theatre, being printed and performed"

> "There were years of serious and intense study, led by the brilliant intellect of this very demanding professor who made us become familiar with and appreciate to the extent any great literature deserves. The bibliographies for the exams were enormous, as, for example, the one for the English novel; over one hundred titles. And I read them all, because you could not appear in front of the professor with poor information. Much bibliography we had for the Shakespearean studies, even much more complicated as compared to that for novels. You would meet another spirit at the exam: severe, incisive, without improvised pleasantries. But, if you were on the same wavelength with him, informed and controlling the essential elements, you would rediscover his usual liveliness and humour". (Dumitrescu-Buşulenga 7).

Antoaneta Ralian, one of his former students, tells us: "my professor of English was the famous Dragoş Protopopescu. Unfortunately, I met him immediately after the war, when he had become very sad. But even so, Dragoş Protopopescu was a terribly interesting man, a scholar with a very wide horizon of knowledge and understanding, but, unfortunately, nervous, annoyed, confused... He was no longer the one I used to know". (Pleşu, 2007).

When Andrei Pleşu asked Antoaneta Ralian: "How was Professor Dragoş Protopopescu?", she answered: "As a professor, he was tremendous, with an extraordinary power of understanding and sensibility. I am not one of those who say *back in my days*..., but I don't think that professors like Dragoş Protopopescu exist any longer. You could feel how he was transmitting, how he was offering you... how he was offering himself". (Pleşu, 2006)

References

1. *Anuarul Universităţii din Cernăuţi*, Pentru anii de studiu 1926-1927 / 1927-1928, Cernăuţi: Editura Universităţii, 1928.
2. Boiangiu, Magdalena, "Pe noi ne-a interesat traducatorul", *Dilema veche*, nr. 122, 26 mai (2006): 4.
3. Chiţoran, Dumitru, *Studii de anglistică la Universitatea din Bucureşti*, vol. *Momente din Istoria Învăţământului Limbilor straine.* Bucureşti: Tipografia Universităţii, 1980.
4. Dumitrescu Buşulenga, Zoe, *Alte pagini engleze*. Bucureşti: Editura Universal Dalsi, 2001.
5. *Glasul Bucovinei*, Cernăuţi, 8 aprilie, 1925, an VII, nr. 1801.
6. Pleşu, Andrei, "De la Dragoş Protopopescu la B.U.G. Mafia", *Dilema veche*, nr. 122, 26 mai (2006).
7. Pleşu, Andrei, "Drumurile traducatoarei", *Ziarul Financiar*, *Ziarul de duminică*, 13 aprilie 2007.
8. Protopopescu, Dragoş, "Caracterul de rasă al literaturii engleze", *Glasul Bucovinei*, (1923): 3.
9. Protopopescu, Dragoş, "Din caracteristicile limbii si neamului englez", *Glasul Bucovinei*, (1923): 2.
10. Protopopescu, Dragoş, Irina Balmoş, *Manual de limba engleză pentru clasa a V-a secundară*, Bucureşti: Editura Cugetarea, 8 aprilie, 1935.
11. Protopopescu, Dragoş, "Valoarea latină a culturei engleze", *Glasul Bucovinei*, (1925): 1-2.
12. Simonca, Ovidiu, *Observator Cultural*, 10 mai, 2005.

BDD-A20139 © 2012 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:50:50 UTC)