AN ENGLISH SCHOOL FOUNDER IN THE ROMANIAN CULTURE

Carmen Antonaru
Lecturer,PhD. , Transylvania University

Abstract:The aim of this paper is to bring a contribution to the domain of English Studies in Romania through an incursion into the remarkable activity of Dragos Protopopescu, "a true school founder", as he was repeatedly called. Similarly to any critical study, this research has a dual structure; on one hand, it implies gathering the information about the topic of study, and, on the other hand, the critical interpretation.In this study the focus is on the way the English phenomenon was received during the period between the two World Wars from the perspective of Dragos Protopopescu and the part it played in the development of the English Studies in Romania.

Keywords: English phenomenon, Romanian literature, Anglo-Saxon cultural model

I.Introduction

Taking into account the fact that a biographical study, in the modern meaning of the term, consists of the research of a person's life and works, that it is the examination of a literary phenomenon within a larger context, I tried to make a selection of the most relevant of these constituents to define the personality of the Romanian scholar specialised in English Studies. Considering the fact that a modern literary monograph cannot be oblivious of the ensemble of literature and should not transform its object of study into an isolated phenomenon, that it is rather an integrative approach, the prospect of reflecting the "English phenomenon" Dragos Protopopescu on the Romanian phenomenon between the two World Wars appeared to be a proper approach. This analyse intends to reveal the way the English model was represented in Romania during the two World Wars, based on the studies published in this field by Dragos Protopopescu.

II. The limits of the study

This paper has set as its main interest an analyse of the "English phenomenon" exclusively from the perspective of the Romanian Anglist Dragos Protopopescu, systemizing the ideas and information gathered from his specialty studies and placing them within the larger framework of the intellectual movement between the two World Wars. Making an inventory of the English studies articles published by Dragos Protopopescu, the analysis applied here is meant to reveal the kind of information available to the Romanian English studies specialist of the time.

III. The different facets of Dragos Protopopescu's activity

An early and promising debut was followed by a fervent writing activity, illustrated by volumes of poems, short stories, plays, novels, essays, articles, chronicles, annotations of some of the cultural and political events from Romania and England, and, added to these, the university courses, school books, conferences on a varied array of subjects. The selection of

BDD-A28671 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:47 UTC)

these elements resulted in the image of an intellectual in search for his destiny in different areas of writing, literature and journalism, who migrated from poetry (*Poemele restristei/ Poems of Misfortune*, 1920; *Zvon de pretutindeni/ Rummors from all around*, 1921) to satirical and phantasy short story (*Iarmarocul metehnelor/ The Fair of Habits*, 1923), to novel (*Condamnati la castitate/ Condemned to Chastity*, 1935; *Fortul nr. 13 / Fort 13*, 1936, *Tigrii / Tigers*, 1940); he gave the measure of his talent in the essays gathered in the volumes *Pagini engleze* / *English Pages* (1925) and *Fenomenul englez / The English Phenomenon* (1936), and, to an exceptional degree, in his translations of Shakespeare.

The contradictory personality of Dragos Prototpopescu, both as a literate and as a human being, who begun its quest for expression in poetry, novel, theatre and essay, found his vocation as a translator and interpreter of Shakespeare and other great English writers, as an essayist and analyst of the cultural and literary British phenomenon, in a time when, for most of the Romanian intellectuals, Europe equalled preponderantly France. In fact, Dragos Protopopescu's perseverance in cultivating the anglo-saxon cultural model could be taken as eccentricity at the time.

IV. The formative years offer a bird's eye view on the life of Dragos Protopopescu. The research is based on the study of the manuscripts from the collections of the Romanian Academy Library and the Museum of Romanian Literature from Bucharest. Dragos Protopopescu's correspondence was thoroughly studied, and this analyse profited greatly from the information comprised in the letters that he addressed to Bogdan Duica, Mihail Dragomirescu, Ion Bianu, Ovid Densusianu, Al. Stamatiad, and so on.

The novels *Tigers, Fort 13* and the collection of short stories *The Fair of Habits* were scrutinised in search for outstanding moments in the life of the writer, which contributed to his making as a future Anglist. It can be said that by the age of 30, Dragos Protopopescu was already the well-known cultural personality and, although he was not the complete writer he whished to be, was potentially the most accomplished Romanian Anglist of the period between the two World Wars.

V. Dragos Protopopescu – the poet is based on the research of a few of the literary magazines *Viaţa nouă, Letopiseţi, Farul, Versuri şi proză* where some of the poetic attempts of Dragos Protopopescu were published. At his debut, as well as in his later literary activity, Dragos Protopopescu was guided and supported by Professor Ovid Densusianu. His adhesion to the symbolist and "anti-semanatorist" programme of the magazine *Viata noua* was due to his mentor, Ovid Densusianu, who occasioned in his magazine the publication of Protopopescu's symbolist poems.

VI. Dragos Protopopescu – Ph.D. presents the contribution brought by theyoung RomanianAnglist to the English cultural patrimony by the discovery of some of the writings of William Congreve. In a time when the public was attracted by Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Show's comedies, Dragos Protopopescu managed to capture the public attention with an interesting thesis about Congreve. His thesis revealed novelties about Congreve and their echo was soon heard: "Recently, the best literary science magazines in London published my articles, with the texts I found and other communications which stirred reactions. The biggest English critic alive, W. Gosse, sent me a letter the next day after the publication of my first article where he calls what I published *a big discovery*".

VII. Dragos Protopopescu – the journalist is a synopsis of the main Romanian publications where Dragos Protopopescu published. The themes of the articles selected in this

BDD-A28671 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:47 UTC)

chapter show the area of concern of the young Anglist relative to his social and political interests. To a better understanding of these facts, his articles were categorized by their literary or political content. The analyse is based in this chapter on a set of documents comprising the collections of the magazines where Dragos Protopopescu published: *Viaţa nouă*, *Cronica*, *Poezia, Flacăra, Viaţa românească, Ideea europeană Cugetul românesc, Sburătorul literar, Universul literar, Gândirea, Vremuri nouă, Cronicarul, Literatorul, Sărbătoarea eroilor, Luceafărul, Revista Fundaţiilor Regale, Saeculum,* and where he was an editor or director: *Calendarul* şi *Porunca vremii*, or director *Buna Vestire* and *Letopiseţi*. Most of these magazines are contained in the collections of the Romanian Academy and The Museum of Romanian Literature Libraries inventories.

VIII. Dragos Protopopescu – the writer focuses on the novels *Fortul 13* and *Tigrii*, inspired by the writer's incarceration at Jilava gaol with the charge of moral involvement in the terrorist actions of the Legion, the extreme right political party of the time. *Condamnati la castitate/Condemned to Chastity*,one of the first attempts at the picaresque genre in the Romanian literature, as well as the volume *Iarmarocul metehnelor/The Fair of Habits* are also included. At the end of this section an analysis of the critical reviews occasioned by the publication of the volumes discussed here is also included.

IX. Dragos Protopopescu – the playwright. The territory which constituted a constant attraction for him was that of the Romanian dramaturgy, maybe as a consequence of the poor reception by the literary criticism of his accomplishments as a poet and novelist. But his dramatic attempts suffered a similar fate and remained almost overlooked by the exegetes. His translations of plays, enacted at the National Theatre – although some of them were memorable shows at the time – were not properly appreciated by the commentators who preferred the so-called "scenic versions".

X. Dragos Protopopescu – the translator presents the most important part of his activity, that of translator of Shakespeare's works, which guerdoned his entire artistic life. nFollowing a vast literary and exegetic experience and a short journalistic and political activity, Dragos Protopopescu applied himself exclusively to translating Shakespeare's plays and poems, a work which he begun before the First World War, but continued during and after that. His translations are one of the truest expressions of a genuine cult for the English language and literature.

XI. Dragos Protopopescu – the university professor presents his didactic activity. Together with I. Botez, in Iasi and Petre Grimm in Cluj, he was the third professor of English language and literature, a distinction he obtained, unlike the others, by a PhD obtained at Sorbonne. As a professor, Dragos Protopopescu remained the same paradox-loving intellectual who poured his soul into his lectures, who abhorred monotony and eccentricity. Most of his students remembered the strong impact of his presence in the lecture room: refined elegance and modern attitude. An early and very promising debut was followed by an intense writing activity, consisting of poetry volumes, novels, short stories, plays, essays, articles, chronicles, critical studies, annotations on some cultural and political events from Romania and Great Britain, together with university lectures, school books and public lectures on varied topics. His most important contribution to the development of the Romanian English studies consists of his Shakespeare studies. It can be said, undoubtedly, that he was the first Romanian Anglist to give a

BDD-A28671 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:47 UTC)

genuinely original perspective on the English studies, supported on information he gathered, most of the times, directly from the source (he researched, for instance, the old English book collections at the British Museum and London University Libraries, in order to conceptualize the few pages concerning the old Anglo-Saxon literature from *Fenomenul englez/The English Phenomenon*).

The support for the *Shakespeare* university lecture the professor Dragos Protopopescu delivered at the University of Bucharest debuts by a short section – the first of its kind in the Romanian Shakespearean literature – describing the way Shakespeare's writings were received in his lifetime together with a review of the critical literature which proliferated around his writings over time. He revisited many of his previous constructs about the famous English playwright from his other studies. The professor gave a review of the literary writings of Shakespeare, but he was also interested in screening the critical literature generated by his writings over time. The second section of his English courses is titled *Romanul englez.* In the introductory lecture, the professor exposes his conception about the English novel, a phenomenon he calls the second important literary event conceived by the British spirit after Shakespeare: "If England speaks for the whole world with Shakespeare for the first time, the English novel expresses the British literary supremacy for the second time – England's genius is made conspicuous, set on a height for the whole world to follow. If Shakespeare, without any doubt or question is the highest peak the human creation could attain, the English novel reaches the second literary supremacy of the Albion". The third university course of Professor Dragos Protopopescu, *Gramatica vie a limbii engleze* is based on the linguistic material studied by the author. Professor Protopopescu "got away" from originality, as he himself stated, believing that "innovation in grammar is suspect. It means superficiality rather than knowledge". He considers that the originality of his course is in the new approach of the linguistic material. The diversity of the examples given in the course is an indicator of the vast degree of information the professor was able to gather; the ten thousand examples the professor provided in his grammar book illustrated his attempt at "a fresh reading of the English language".

XII. English Pages

His letters from London are an endeavour to describe the English cultural phenomenon to the fullest: theatre spectacles, exhibitions, concerts, sermons, depicting a "psychology of the city" and of the everyman. Dragos Protopopescu takes part in the intellectual life of the city: he can be met at the theatre and concert halls, at the Variety shows, he visits the painting exhibitions; at the Queen's Hall he listens to the concertos and does not avoid the sermons, the conferences and lectures of the well-known personalities of the epoch: Eistein, Seton-Watson, Rabindranath Tagore. He was one of the fist Romanian Anglists to specialize in the arcane of the British medieval literature, including those of the Anglo-Saxon period and of the beginnings of the British literature. He sees the English literature globally, as a specific form of manifestation of the artistic European phenomenon.

XIII. *The English Phenomenon* is his most notable book Among the features of *The English Phenomenon* he ponders upon are: the superior value of the literature, the originality of the civilization, the specifics of the political organization, the common traits of the population, based both on his personal experiences of the social, cultural and spiritual British life and on the study of the British literature, history and civilization. Through his study, *Fenomenul englez*, "Mr. Dragos Protopopescu endowed our libraries with the first abundant research and a good

BDD-A28671 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:47 UTC)

introduction into the spirit of the English literature from the beginnings up to today", as George Calinescu said.

XIV. Conclusions

Although these considerations may not offer a thorough, orderly, coherent and logically acceptable review of the facts, data and quotes gathered on this topic, I hope that this personal selection is able to portray the complexity of the works and personality of Dragos Protopopescu.

As it can be noticed, the diverseness of Dragos Protopopescu's works is amazing and, generally, confusing – as he wonders from symbolist stanzas to alternating epic with phantastic prose, without any sequential logic, makes dramatic experiments to reach, at the end, the profoundness of a literary research on English studies, of indisputable value, which establishes the personality of this contradictory portrait of an intellectual. Dragos Protopopescu can be considered one of the best informed exegetes of the universal literature, a master of a systematic method of research. He ennobled his profession by his intense literary and specialised activity which surpasses the creation of many of his contemporaries through the value of information and the themes he approached. Dragos Protopopescu is a distinct figure among his fellow universitarians, renown by the value of his works of literature.

He was given credit for his extensive knowledge even by his literary opponents, but he did not suffer of the celebrity complex comparing to those whose names endorsed writings on similar topics and he was able to separate the information of the fundamental texts he studied from the subjectivity of interpretation, taking for himself the right to offer his personal opinion. He had both enthusiastic admirers as well as unforgiving opponents, but he did not often enjoyed the neutrality of an objective appreciation, maybe because there was a certain amount of ostentation in his behaviour, as an attempt to clearly show his adherence to the European spirit. Nonetheless, his European substance was obvious.

The elegant, 'anglicized' Dragos Protopopescu, as Dan Grigorescu called him, was a steady admirer of the English culture and politics, of the Englishman from the street, but his personal political practice, completely opposed to his free manner of embracing the European and English spirit appalled. This is one of the tragic contradictions of this intellectual whose life did not flow on a straight line. Attracted, like Mircea Eliade, by the rhetoric of the extreme right political wing rhetoric, the Legion, and by their messianic and demagogic ideology , Dragos Protopopescu wasted too much of his energy to criticise, in *Calendarul* and *Bunavestire*, the weakness of the Romanian democracy and to support Garda de Fier. Sooner after his tragic death, his name was forgotten, first of all because he was one of the names on the list of officially and implacably forbidden authors.

"We will always remember him as we have known him, and especially as he wanted to be known and remembered: elegant, of an intentionally aggressive elegance, to be in a stronger contrast with the popular image of the bohemian, careless and unruly writer; always smoking pipe, to show his disregard for the cigarette butt of the slam; loquacious, provocative, ironical, appreciable to the wit of dialogue, of love, of poetry".

Dragos Protopopescu remains one of "the finest of our cultural personalities".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Dragos Protopopescu, *Un known Congreve, a Sheaf of Poetical Scarp.* National Culture, Bucharest, 1923.

BDD-A28671 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:47 UTC)

2. Dragos Protopescu, *English Pages*. National Culture, Bucharest, 1925.
3. Dragos Protopopescu , *English Phenomenon*. Bucharest, 1936
4. Dragos Protopopescu, *English Course, Shakespeare. Notes,* Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, litography. Bucharest, 1946
5. Dragoş Protopopescu to Ion Bianu: letter. 12 of March 1923, in: the Manuscript Collection of the Romanian Academy Library, S 64/DVI.
6. Dragoş Protopopescu, *Course of English. The British Novel* Notes, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, litography. Bucharest, 1946, p. 3.
7. Mircea Eliade, *Dragoş Protopopescu* (article from1949), in the volume. *Împotriva deznădejdii*, edition curated by Mircea Handoca; preface by Monica Spiridon, Bucharest, Editura Humanitas, 1992, p. 50.

BDD-A28671 © 2018 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:47 UTC)