E.A. POE'S HISTORICAL RECEPTION IN ROMANIA

Ancuţa GURBAN-DINU *

Motto: « Savez-vous pourquoi j'ai si patiemment traduit Poe? *Parce qu'il me ressemblait*. La première fois que j'ai ouvert un livre de lui, j'ai vu avec épouvante et ravissement, non seulement des sujets rêvés par moi, mais des PHRASES, pensées par moi, et écrites le par lui, vingt ans auparavant ».
(Charles Baudelaire, « Lettré à Théophile Thoré », 20 Juin 1864)

Abstract: *In this article our aim is, starting from the American author's influence on Charles Baudelaire, to follow the diptych Titu Maiorescu-E.A. Poe in "O cercetare critică asupra poeziei române de la 1867" (A Critical Survey of Romanian Poetry from 1867), "The Philosophy of Composition" and "The Poetic Principle", which will lead us, on the one hand, to the process of identification of E.A. Poe's translators and translations and, on the other, to the system of Romanian literature as a receptacle of E.A. Poe's work.*
Keywords: *Baudelaire, Maiorescu, Poe.*

E.A. Poe, American romantic author, poet, short story writer, novelist, literary critic and founder of the modern fantastic, had a significant influence on Romanian literature, starting from the 19th century. As French was known and spoken by a large majority of the Romanian intellectuals, E.A. Poe is discovered, read and translated through French versions signed by Émile Dourand-Forgues, Isabelle Meunier, Alphonse Borghers, Léon de Wailly, William Hughes, Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé.

E.A. Poe's influence on Charles Baudelaire

After 1845, when the American Publishing House Wiley & Putnam issues in New York E.A. Poe's suggestively entitled volume *Tales*, the first translations of his work start appearing in France. In the same year, *The Revue Britannique* published *Le Scarabée d'or*, while *La Démocratie pacifique : journal des intérêts des gouvernements et des peuples* published Isabelle Meunier's translations through which Charles Baudelaire discovered E.A. Poe. Thus, the Baudelaire's confession made to Armand Fraisse is interesting:

> En 1846 ou 1847, j'eus connaissance de quelques fragments d'Edgar Poe : j'éprouvai une commotion singulière. […] Et alors je trouvai, croyez-moi si vous voulez, des poèmes et des nouvelles dont j'avais eu la pensée, mais vague et confuse, mal ordonée, et que Poe avait su combiner et mener à la perfection… (Baudelaire, 1906: 176).

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The American literary critic Edmund Wilson considered Charles Baudelaire's discovery of E.A. Poe's work to be the critical moment of the symbolist movement:

> [...] a more important prophet of Symbolism was Edgar Allan Poe. It was in general true that, by the middle of the century, the Romantic writers in the United States – Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman and even Emerson – were, for reasons which it would be interesting to determine developing in the direction of Symbolism ; and one of the events of prime importance in the early history of Symbolist Movement was the discovery of Poe by Baudelaire (Wilson, 1931: 12).

Eugène Crépet wrote about M. Troubat's discussion with Poulet-Malassis in a letter from January 21st 1867 about his memorable encounter with Charles Baudelaire: « Il m'a montré tout ce qu'il aimait, lorsque j'ai été le voir : les poésies de Sainte-Beuve, les œuvres d'Edgar Poe en anglais ; un petit livre sur Goya [...] Voilà l'ombre du Baudelaire d'autrefois, mais elle est toujours ressemblante » (Crépet, 1906: 204).

Charles Baudelaire established E.A. Poe's notoriety within the cultural milieu of Paris by publishing his work in French in five volumes at Michel Lévy Frères Publishing House. The volumes are: *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856), *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1857), *Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym* (1858), *Eureka* (1863) and *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses* (1865).

It does not remain without an echo and, thus, E.A. Poe pervades, thanks to the poems and prose translated by Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé, into Western and Eastern Europe and, implicitly, into Romania, where, within a short time span, his work becomes much more respected and well-known than in the United States, where not even in the 20th century "[…] but Poe is not, as he is with the French and as he ought to be with us, a vital part of our intellectual equipment" (Wilson, 1955: 84). Charles Baudelaire's aim – « *Il faut*, c'est à dire je désire qu'*Edgar Poe*, qui n'est pas grand'chose en Amérique, devienne un grand homme pour la *France* » (Baudelaire, 1947: 380) – was reached as E.A. Poe became the only well-known American writer within the French literary circles.

One hundred years from Charles Baudelaire's statement, Julien Green reinforces the same idea in the pages of his diary, *Mon Amérique*: "For us, he was our big brother, the famous nocturnal companion, and he belonged to us much more than to the rest of the world" (our translation) (Green, 2012: 24).

Charles Baudelaire translated from E.A. Poe for seventeen years, starting from 1848, when he published *Révélation magnétique*, up to 1865, when, two years before his death, he published *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses*. Besides leaving us a uniqeu translation, Baudelaire decoded the labyrinths of Poe's universe in two critical essays: « Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres » and « Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe », published as forewords for the volumes *Histoires extraordinaires* (1856) and, respectively, *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* (1857).

The merits and efforts of Charles Baudelaire have made many critics to state that his whole system of beliefs and creation had been influenced by E.A. Poe. Eugène Crépet believed that Charles Baudelaire had turned E.A. Poe into a big brother, a disciple, an alibi,

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with whom he identified and whom he worshipped. One of the most beautiful remarks is by Charles Asselineau, Charles Baudelaire's friend, who highlights that the case of his friend's admiration for Poe was:

> […] une véritable « possession ». Il ne pouvait plus penser qu'à Poe, parler que de Poe ; la gloire du conteur américain le souciait plus que la sienne propre. Il vouait à Willis et à Maria Clemm, à l'apologiste et à « « l'ange gardien » » de son double d'outre-océan, une reconnaissance passionnée. À tout venant, où qu'il se trouvât, il s'enquérait si on avait lu son auteur, et parfois il entrait dans une véritable colère si on l'ignorait (Crépet, 1906: 93).

Georges Walter interpreted « la « fusion alchimique et pasionelle [des] deux artistes (n.n. Baudelaire and Poe) […] comme un pacte de sang » ». (Brix, 2003: 56).

While Charles Baudelaire was seduced by E.A. Poe's prose as he translated it so thoroughly that it became better that the original, Stéphane Mallarmé fell in love with Poe's poetry, which he would transpose in an exceptional manner into prose, illustrated by the famous Édouard Manet. The fact that Stéphane Mallarmé knew very well the poetic system from *La Genèse d'un poème* – included by Charles Baudelaire in *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses* –, is no longer a surprise to anyone. Mallarmé's confession to his friend, Henri Cazalis, is interesting as it shows his preoccupation for the production of the effects required by E.A. Poe:

> J'ai enfin commencé mon *Hérodiade*. Avec terreur, car j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots : *Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit*. Le vers ne doit donc pas, là, se composer de mots ; mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation (Mallarmé, 1995: 206).

How much Stéphane Mallarmé valued E.A. Poe is visible in the poem *Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe*[*], written in 1875, after the erection in Baltimore of a monument dedicated to the honor of the great American writer.

[*] Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change, / Le Poète suscite avec un glaive nu / Son siècle épouvanté de n'avoir pas connu / Que la mort triomphait dans cette voix étrange ! // Eux, comme un vil sursaut d'hydre oyant jadis l'ange / Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu, / Proclamèrent très haut le sortilège bu / Dans le flot sans honneur de quelque noir mélange. // Du sol et de la nue hostiles, ô grief ! / Si notre idée avec ne sculpte un bas-relief / Dont la tombe de Poe éblouissante s'orne, // Calme bloc ici-bas chu d'un désastre obscur / Que ce granit du moins montre à jamais sa borne // Aux noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur (Mallarmé, 1988 : 148).

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Marginal comments on *O cercetare critică asupra poeziei române de la 1867 (A Critical Survey of the Romanian Poetry of 1867)*

Firstly, E.A. Poe gets to be discovered and well-known in Romania as a poet and theoretician of the modern concept of "poetry" thanks to *The Philosophy of Composition*, *The Poetic Principle* and *The Rationale of Verse*, and later, as a short story writer. Our first reference aims at Titu Maiorescu, visibly influenced by the poetic principles of the Boston born American author.

In 1863, Titu Maiorescu, Iacob Negruzzi, Petre P. Carp, Vasile Pogor and Theodor Rosetti established, in Iassy, The "Junimea" Cultural Society and published, after only four years, the magazine *Convorbiri literare (Literary Conversations)*. Also, in 1867, Titu Maiorescu published the article *O cercetare critică asupra poeziei române de la 1867* (*A Critical Survey of the Romanian Poetry of 1867*) based, on the one hand, the renowned dichotomy between form and content and, on the other, the material and the ideal condition of poetry. In this study we can discover countless similarities with E.A. Poe's poetic principles, most likely a result of a common set of readings: Plato, Aristotle, Longinus, I. Kant, J.G. Fichte, G.H.F. Hegel, A.W. and K.W. Schlegel, F.W.J. Schelling, J.W. Goethe, J.C.F. Schiller, P.B. Shelley etc.

While in "Condiţiunea materială a poeziei" ("The Material Condition of Poetry"), Titu Maiorescu points out a distinction between poetry, as a domain of art (which makes use of images to create beauty), and science (which makes use of ideas in order to reveal the truth), in "Condiţiunea ideală a poeziei" ("The Ideal Condition of Poetry"), the Romanian literary critic visibly draws near E.A. Poe's esthetic, thus becoming the first Romanian to quote the American author in a note that tackles the ineffable: "Compare with Edgar Poe, the analysis of his poem *The Raven*, published in French in *Histoires grotesques et extraordinaires*" (our translation) (Maiorescu, 2005: 48).

As we know, Charles Baudelaire never published a volume with that exact title, but only *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses*. In this case, we can consider Titu Maiorescu's error to be a lapse in memory. He could not have read E.A. Poe's *The Poetic Principle* – based on conferences held between 1848-1849, and published posthumously (August 31st 1850), in *Home Journal* –, because in 1867, Charles Baudelaire had not yet been translated.

Titu Maiorescu discovered E.A. Poe through a French Baudelairian channel through *La Genèse d'un poème*, published in 1865, in the volume *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses*. His encounter with E.A. Poe was recorded by the Romanian literary critic in his diary, where in the summer of 1866 he mentioned his favourite writers: E.A. Poe and Arthur Schopenhauer: "Spielhagen – short novels. Always full of spirit, I read him with delight and gladly trace the influence of my favourites, Poe and Schopenhauer, on his writing" (our translation) (Maiorescu, 1984: 27). His interest for the American author is also evident from his shopping habits in Paris, where, among other things, he also buys the book „Poë (*Nouvelles*)" (*Ibidem*: 225). The separation from Poe's work becomes an ordeal, as he requests Petre Carp at 18/30 Sept. 1866 to return before long "[…] the fantastic short stories of E. Poe, a book which you borrowed one year ago" (our translation) (*Ibidem*: 345).

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Consequently, we infer that both Titu Maiorescu and E.A. Poe were in the 19th century the main promoters and theoreticians of the modern concept of poetry and had a key role in the reformation of the poetic system.

Translators and translations of E.A. Poe

As we have previously seen, E.A. Poe was discovered by the members of The "Junimea" Cultural Society thanks to Titu Maiorescu, through which I.L. Caragiale, Mihai Eminescu and Alexandru Macedonski came into contact with the american author's work. They will first read E.A. Poe through Baudelaire's translations and later bravely realized their own translations.

However, before they begin their work, the magazine *Independinţa română* (*The Romanian Independence*, 4th year, no. 17-21, Oct. 19, pp. 53-54; no. 18, pp. 57-58; no. 19, pp. 61-62; no. 20-21, pp. 65-66) published in the second half of the 19th century, more precisely, in 1861, the first Romanian translation of E.A. Poe, *Puţul şi pendula* (*The Pit and the Pendulum*), an anonymous version.

Six years later, in 1867, the short story *Ochelarii* (*The Spectacles*) is translated anonymously and published in *Gazeta de Iassi* (*The Jassy Gazette*, 1st year, no. 28, pp. 1-2; no. 29, pp. 1-3; no. 31, pp. 1-2; no. 32, pp. 1-2, no. 33, p. 1; no. 35, pp. 1-3; no. 36, pp. 1-3). In 1875, Dimitrie A. Teodoru signed with the pseudonym Const. Ramură the translation of the short story *Inima destăinuitoare* (*The Tell-Tale Heart*), in *Telegraphulu de Bucuresci* (*The Bucharest Telepraph*, 5th year, no. 853, pp. 2-3).

Nine years after Titu Maiorescu published the article *O cercetare critică asupra poeziei române de la 1867* (*A Critical Survey of the Romanian Poetry of 1867*), I.L. Caragiale published on January 30th 1876 – the day he turned twenty-four –, in the brochure *Timpul* (*The Time*, 1st year, no. 64, Jan. 30, p. 1; no. 65, July 1, p. 2; no. 66, July 2, p. 1), the translation *Dracul în clopotniţă* (*The Devil in the Belfry*). In the same year, on October 8th, Mihai Eminescu translated, with Veronica Micle, the short story *Morella* (*Morella*), which was published in *Curierul de Iassi* (*The Iassy Currier*, 9th year, no. 111, Oct. 8, pp. 1-2). Although the text was published anonymously, the translation most likely belongs to Veronica Micle, but Mihai Eminescu stylized it. The translation was reissued in October 1907, in *Arhiva Societăţii ştiinţifice şi literare* (*The Scientific and Literary Associacion's Archive*, 28th year, no. 10, pp. 428-433), and, two years later, in 1909, in *Evenimentul* (*The Event*, 27th year, no. 17, pp. 1-2; no. 18, pp. 1-2).

In 1878, I.L. Caragiale translated *O întâmplare la Ierusalim* (*A Tale of Jerusalem*), which was published on May 31st, in the brochure *Timpul* (*The Time*) (33rd year, no. 118, pp. 2-3). In the same year, between the 1st and 4th of July, he published *Sistema doctorului Catran şi a profesorului Pană* (*The System of dr. Tarr and prof. Fetcher*). The translations however do not stop here. On April 15th 1896, I.L. Caragiale translated *Masca* (*The Mask/Masque of the Red Death*), which he published in *Epoca literară* (*The Literary Epoch*, 1st year, no. 1, pp. 2-3) reissued successively in 1898 (*Calendarul Dacia*/*The Dacia Calendar*, pp. 95-99), in 1903 (*Curierul Olteniei/The Oltenian Currier*, 13th year, no. 536, pp. 1-3) and in 1909 (*Calendarul literar şi artistic/The Literary and Artistic Calendar*, no. 21-24, pp. 55-56,). On 3rd June 1896, I.L. Caragiale published in *Epoca literară* (*The Literary Epoch*, 1st year, no. 8, pp. 2-3) *O balercă de Amontillado* (*The Cask of Amontillado*), which was

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republished in 1898, in *Calendarul Dacia* (*The Dacia Calendar*, pp. 89-94). It must be specified that all the translations by I.L. Caragiale from E.A. Poe are noted to be „after Poe", so they are adaptations, which are very close to the American author's model.

It is interesting to notice that E.A. Poe did not influence only "Junimea" Society members, but also started to pervade into the opponents circle – the symbolists. Amongst these, Alexandru Macedonski is the first one who, in November 1887, translated in *Revista independentă* (*The Independent Magazine*, 9th year, pp. 50-54), the short story *Metzengernstein* (*Metzengernstein*). The short stories title also contains the comment: "This tale is half imitated, half translated from Edgar Poe (n. A. M.)" (our translation).

Considering that fact we have analyzed the problem of translation and not that of imitation, the next normal step is to establish what the translation of E.A. Poe's work in Romanian implies. The clearest explanation comes from Ștefan Augustin Doinaș:

> Translating Poe does not necessarily mean imitating […], but realizing – in the language in which you translate – the same difference in expression, the same individualization effort which Poe realized when we compare it to his native language.
> The tendency towards form, the aspiration towards a unique content of what a valuable translation is, not its external, geometrical identity between the original and the translation (our translation) (Doinaș, 1974: 259).

Conclusion

In Romania, from the second half of the 19th century up to the present, E.A. Poe's name is mentioned in dictionaries, anthologies, encyclopedias, as well as historical and critical studies in books and cultural magazines. This only proves, once again, the essential role the American author had in the historical and critical conscience of the Romanian culture and society, starting with Titu Maiorescu, continuing with the translations of Mihai Eminescu, I.L. Caragiale, Alexandru Macedonski. They had the decisive role in Romania, a role which in France belonged to Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry and Stéphane Mallarmé.

We conclude the present article by highlighting Vincent Buranelli's ideas which concentrate our aforementioned concepts:

> [...] Poe has the right to claim the title of the greatest American poet, short novelist and literary critic. […]. Poe's activity was diverse: poet, story teller, critic, artist of humor and terror, of beauty and fantasy, genius of the gothic and the satire, a romantic, realist, symbolist, surrealist […]. Poe should be judged foremost not as a poet, prose writer or critic, but as all of them at once. Only in such a manner could his amazing mastery in literature becomes evident (our translation) (Buranelli, 1966: 182 pass.).

We can rephrase Charles Baudelaire's wish – « *Il faut*, c'est à dire je désire qu'*Edgar Poe*, qui n'est pas grand'chose en Amérique, devienne un grand homme pour la *France* » (Baudelaire, 1947: 380) –, with our critical discernment: he must, we'd want it, Edgar Poe, who is not very renowned in America, to become a great author in Romania.

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