

## Early Romanian Exegeses of Fowles's Major Novels: Translations and Critical Studies Published prior to 1989 and in the Early 90s

### La précoce exégèse Roumaine des principaux romans de Fowles: traductions et études critiques publiées avant le 1989 et au début des années '90

### Exegeza românească timpurie a principalelor romane ale lui Fowles: traduceri și studii critice publicate înainte de 1989 și la începutul anilor '90

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#### Abstract

*In this article we present the early Romanian exegeses of Fowles's major novels: translations and critical studies published prior to 1989 and in the early 90s. Fowles's translations published during this period prove two distinct things: firstly, that after a ten year long gap in between the translation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Daniel Martin*, the Romanian readership quickly caught on to Fowles's fiction and translations started to appear at an interval of two to three years; secondly, that the obvious reasons for this order was the reception of Fowles's novels abroad: the main reason for the translation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* before *The Collector*, *The Aristos* and *The Magus* which preceded it chronologically, must have been the huge success the novel enjoyed in many parts of the Western world.*

*Apart from the translations mentioned above, one can also point to a quite impressive number of critical studies, which actually form the core of any discussion of Fowles's reception in Romania.*

#### Résumé

*Dans cette papier nous présentons la précoce exégèse roumaine des principaux romans de Fowles: Traductions et études critiques publiées avant le 1989 et au début des années '90. Les traductions des oeuvres de Fowles publiées dans cette période démontrent deux choses différentes: premièrement, que après une interruption de dix années entre la traduction de *La femme du lieutenant français* et de *Daniel Martin*, le public roumain était déjà habituée avec les belles lettres de Fowles, et les traductions ont commencées apparaître au intervalles de deux o trois années; deuxièmement, que les motifs claires ont été la réception des romans de Fowles dans l'étranger: le motif principal de la traduction de *La femme du lieutenant français* avant de *le Collecteur*, *Aristos* et *le Magicien* qui l'ont précédée chronologiquement a été donnée par le succès immense de le roman dans beaucoup des pays de l'Occident.*

*Sauf les traductions mentionnées antérieurement, nous pouvons mentionner un numéro appréciable d'études critiques, qui forment en fait le nucléé de n'importe quelle discussion qui fait référence a la réception de Fowles dans la Roumanie.*

## Rezumat

În această lucrare prezentăm exegeza românească timpurie a principalelor romane ale lui Fowles: traduceri și studii critice publicate înainte de 1989 și la începutul anilor '90. Traducerile operelor lui Fowles publicate în această perioadă dovedesc două lucruri distincte: în primul rând, că după un gol de zece ani între traducerea *Iubitei locotenentului francez* și a lui *Daniel Martin*, publicul cititor român s-a obișnuit cu beletristica lui Fowles, iar traducerile au început să apară la intervale de doi sau trei ani; în al doilea rând, că motivele evidente au fost receptarea romanelor lui Fowles în străinătate: motivul principal al traducerii *Iubitei locotenentului francez* înainte de *Colecționarul*, *Aristos* și *Magicianul* care l-au precedat cronologic trebuie să fi fost dat de succesul imens al romanului în multe țări din Occident.

În afară de traducerile menționate anterior, putem menționa un număr apreciabil de studii critice, care formează de fapt nucleul oricărei discuții privitoare la receptarea lui Fowles în România.

**Keywords:** translation, novel, critical studies, reception, Romania

**Mots-clés:** traduction, romaine, étude critique, réception, la Roumanie

**Cuvinte cheie:** traducere, roman, studiu critic, receptare, Romania

## Introduction

Considering the impressive amount of articles and reviews published even before 1989, we can say that Romanian critics and readers have thoroughly “adopted” Fowles and have found no difficulty in relating to his literary ideology. The various re-issued translations of his major novels also point to the fact that he is still one of Romania’s favorite foreign authors. Fowles enjoys a popularity which has stood the test of the time and shifting literary, social and political paradigms.

## Materials

The work most Romanian readers would readily associate with John Fowles remains *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, translated into Romanian for the first time in 1974 by Adina Arsenescu [1]. The same novel was also translated by Mioara Tapalaga in 1994 [2], the translation being re-published in 2001 and 2002 by a different publishing house [3]. In the following we will present the list of Fowles novels translated into Romanian, in chronological order:

- *Daniel Martin* (“Daniel Martin”) – translated by Mariana Chitoran and Livia Deac (Editura Univers București, 1984);
- *The Magus* (“Magicianul”) – translated by Mariana Chitoran and Livia Deac (Editura Univers București, 1987 and Editura Minerva București, 1987); the translation was republished by the same publishing house in 1992 and 1994, and by Editura Polirom in 2002 and 2007
- *The Collector* (“Colecționarul”) – translated by Mariana Chitoran (Editura Univers București, 1993); the same translation also appears with the same publishing house in 1998, and with Editura Polirom in 2002 and 2007 (with an afterword by Dan Grigorescu to the 2007 edition)
- *The Ebony Tower* (“Turnul de abanos”) – translated by Livia Deac (Editura Univers București, 1993, Editura Polirom 2003);
- *Mantissa* (“Mantissa”) – translated by Angela Jianu (Editura Univers București, 1995, Editura Polirom 2003)
- *A Maggot* (“Omidă”) – translated by Veronica Focseneanu (Editura Univers București, 1995, Editura Polirom 2005)
- *The Tree* (“Copacul”) – translated by Veronica Focseneanu (Editura Univers București, 1999, Editura Polirom 2007)
- *The Aristos* (“Aristos”) – translated by Camelia Adina Arvatu and Irina Horea (Editura Univers București, 2002)

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the previous list of translations proves two distinct things: firstly, that after a ten year long gap in between the translation of the French Lieutenant's Woman and Daniel Martin, the Romanian readership quickly caught on to Fowles's fiction and translations started to appear at intervals of two to three years; secondly, that the obvious reasons for this order was the reception of Fowles's novels abroad: the main reason for the translation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* before *The Collector*, *The Aristos* and *The Magus* which preceded it chronologically, must have been the huge success the novel enjoyed in many parts of the Western world.

Apart from the translations mentioned above, one can also point to a quite impressive number of critical studies, which actually form the core of any discussion of Fowles's reception in Romania. In the following we will provide a chronological account of these critical studies:

- *John Fowlessiexperimentulromanesc*, by Ileana Galea (Steaua, XXXII, 9, 1981). Galea's critical essay focuses primarily on Fowles's narrative technique/s, nevertheless, without naming it/them explicitly postmodern. This fact is also stressed by Olga Stroia:

Ileana Galea mentions that Fowles interferes in the narration whenever he has to decide between a traditional or a modern alternative in the structure or plot of the novel. She also observes that at times, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* transposes the reader into the creator of the novel. Although the author draws attention in this article on postmodern elements she neither names them as such, nor does she mention any of the literary theoreticians of postmodernism. [4]

The author's point is that somewhere in the intricate course of the writing process (especially of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) Fowles loses touch to his authorial almightiness, the readers and even the characters becoming the real driving forces of the entire plot. His suggesting multiple endings for *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a further proof in this respect. What Galea somehow omits, however, is the fact that even Fowles's rejection to provide his readership with a clear-cut answer/ending to his narrative can be viewed as the ultimate expression of authorial power. Being the creator of his own universe, the writer can refrain from shaping it the way he knows his readers would want him to. Therefore, the postmodern reluctance towards traditional narrative could actually be the peak of the author's almightiness. Is granting freedom to others not the quintessence of power and might?

- *Polaritatea: Monolog autonom/Discursul naratorului conștient de sine*, by Gheorghita Dimitriu (Analele Universității București: Limbi și Literaturi Străine, 31, 1982). Much in the fashion of the previously mentioned critical essay, Gheorghita Dimitriu dwells on narrative technique and discourse in Fowles's work, drawing a thought-provoking parallel between Joyce's *Ulysses* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Her reasoning is based on the crucial difference between modern impartiality and postmodern self-consciousness in the novel. It is, however, debatable in how far Fowles really evinces impartiality in his work. As previously stated, his very choice of granting freedom to his readers and characters evinces a humanistic trait basically opposed to postmodern destructiveness.
- *John Fowles: Daniel Martin, teorie și practica literară*, by Monica Botez (Analele Universității București: Limbi și Literaturi Străine, 31, 1982), is an article focusing on the change in narrative techniques and ideology noticeable throughout the novels following *The Collector*. As this critical undergoing preceded the actual translations of the works, parts of it are descriptive in nature, trying to shed light on Fowles's work by comparing it to other literary top-rankers like Huxley or Gide. Botez's perspective is centered on the obvious movement from postmodern negation to humanistic balance in *Daniel Martin*: "Daniel Martin este romanul propriei sale geneze [...] profesie. [...] [Fowles] evoluează printr-un mai recent roman al său spre un conținut umanist opus spiritului negativist [...] al postmodernismului."

- *Un adaos de importanta comparativ mica*, by Felicia Antip (Romania literara 16, no.14, 1983) expresses the author's dissatisfaction with the overt and disturbing intellectual dimension of *Mantissa*: "Înainte de a citi *Mantissa* nu știamcât de searbădăpoate fi o carte care se îndărătniceștesă fie picantăpentru a scoateînevidențăcâteste de savantă." The obvious shortcoming of such an interpretation is its characterization of Fowles as an unmistakably postmodern writer. Felicia Antip suggests that Fowles did not have complete mastery of postmodern techniques, this fact resulting in the aridity of the novel. This obviously faulty reasoning could be the result of the Romanian critics' and readership's limited knowledge regarding postmodernism, characteristic of the period prior to 1983. (Antip's perspective was to be contradicted twelve years later by AndreeaDeciu in her review of *Mantissa* entitled *Parodiapostmodernismului*. Deciu, as well as other critics, consider *Mantissa* a parody of postmodernism.)
- *Colecționarii lui John Fowles*, by Liviu Cotrău (Steaua, 34, no.4, 1983), is a challenging article on the typology of the collector in Fowles's major works. Cotrău starts out by analyzing Clegg (the protagonist of *The Collector*) and reaches the analysis of De Deukans in *The Magus*. The common feature of all the characters belonging to this typology is the obsessive love which ties them to their collection, a love which finally turns them into "collected objects", too. One could establish a parallel to the creation process here: in spite of postmodernism's insistence upon authorial detachment and self-irony, the vital bond existing between the creator and the created is inescapable. The writing takes over the writer in a sort of magical game of give and take, the result of which is hard to define. In the end, one can never clearly establish whether the creator rules over his creation or the creation takes him over completely. This is the main reason why none of Fowles's collectors is able to survive once his collection has perished. The symbiotic relationship mentioned before being annihilated by one of the elements disappearing, naturally leads to the disintegration and subsequent destruction of the other.
- *Fabricarea iluziei: John Fowles, Magul*, by Monica Pillat (*Ieșirea din contur*, Editura Eminescu, 1985) poses the issue of the symbolic significance of character names in *The Magus*. The author offers a thought provoking interpretation of the name Conchis (pronounced by Fowles in a similar way to "conscious"), which she takes as hinting at the rigor of expression and the concentration of ideological content up to the point of hermetic closure.
- *De-a lungul unui secol*, by Silvian Iosifescu, includes a forty page survey of Fowles's main achievements as a writer (Editura Eminescu, 1986), quite often fraught by paradox and evincing debatable statements and reasoning, apart from the puzzling translation of *The Ebony Tower* as "Turnul de fildes". The various inconsistencies evincible in this critical essay are also noted by Olga Stroia:

Many ideas in this study are either strange and without support, or, they even contradict other critics' opinions. In this respect we mention Iosifescu's statement that *The Ebony Tower's* working title should have been 'metamorphoses' and not 'variations' as rather hazardous. As dictionaries define metamorphoses "a striking change in appearance or character or circumstances" and variations "the varied repetitions of a theme in a theme [...]" we realize how superficial and far from John Fowles's intentions Iosifescu's opinion was. He also lacked the least documentation to prevent from giving a false interpretation to the ending of *The Magus*. While critics and readers agree on the fact that "the ending is meant to be open, so it is unwise to infer a romantic closure from the Latin quotation that concludes the novel" Iosifescu writes: "Șocheaza în încheierea romanului renunțarea la deschideri și sensuri multiple, la planuri diferite de lectură." [5]

### **Conclusion**

In sum, we can safely state that John Fowles enjoyed and is still enjoying a complex critical reception in Romania. The existing scholarly papers, reviews, magazine and newspaper articles, as well as the re-editing of translations, allow us to look forward to an even wider and more elaborate reception of Fowles's works in the future.

### **References**

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- [2] *Iubita locotenentului francez*, Editura Univers, Bucuresti: 1994.
- [3] Polirom
- [4] Stroia, Olga. *The Literary World of John Fowles and its Reception in Romania*, p.165, Editura Alma Mater Sibiu, 2004.
- [5] Stroia, Olga. *The Literary World of John Fowles and its Reception in Romania*, p. 168, Editura Alma Mater Sibiu, 2004.

