

## THREE TWENTIETH CENTURY ARGENTINE WRITERS AND A SCHOLAR WHO SETTLED DOWN IN BUENOS AIRES

*June 9, 1870. Death of Charles Dickens at Gadshill.*

*Tuesday, June 9, 1959, annual meeting.*

*Today I have founded in Buenos Aires the Argentine branch of the Dickens Fellowship. I appointed Jorge Luis Borges honorary president and I keep the secretariat. We leave the official inauguration for the sesquicentennial anniversary of his death, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1962. As the weather will be warm, the celebration shall take place on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> of June at the Argentine Society of Writers (Sociedad Argentina de Escritores) with cold weather, a fire in the chimney and punch at the symposium. Miguel Alfredo Olivera.*

*Thursday, June 11, 1961.*

*Contrary to what had been decided before, the official inauguration took place on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1961 at the SADE with Jorge Luis Borges as chairman. M.A.O.*

*Tuesday, June 30, 1961.*

*The newspaper "El Mundo" dated 30/VI/1961 publishes a wondrous comment on the opening of The Dickens Fellowship Argentine Branch (Buenos Aires). M.A.O.*

*Tuesday, February 12, 1962.*

*Second visit to 48, Doughty St., Dickens' house (the first visit took place in 1958). I have paid the 30 shillings for making Miss Minards a member of the Argentine Branch. Mr. Graves is absent from London. M.A.O.*

The four entries transcribed are the only records existing in The Dickensian Diary, 1959, edited in London by Franey & Co. Ltd. They become an historical evidence of our entity as Argentine branch of the Dickens Fellowship. They were all registered by hand by Miguel Alfredo Olivera with red ink, Honorary Secretary.

Nevertheless, the Argentine origin of the present The Buenos Aires Dickensians- nowadays independent of the bonds which joined it to London after fulfilling a successful trajectory as a branch- goes back to dates which are quite previous to the ones registered in the Dickensian Diary.

The attraction that Charles Dickens exercised and still exercises in our country was awakened through the diffusion of his work and the celebrity that his writings acquired in a short time. As obligatory reading in English speaking schools as well as the Spanish speaking ones, the enthusiasm that teachers had not only were transferred to the students but also it left deep marks in the studious, writers and avid readers. It also reached small children through English governesses which were demanded from this side of the Atlantic.

It was thus how Jorge Luis Borges, Eduardo Mallea, Victoria Ocampo and in a particular way the group formed by Alicia Jurado, Miguel Alfredo Olivera y Patrick Orpen Dudgeon, started to gather in order to comment the works of the renowned English

writer and revive them through theatre representations, distributing among themselves the roles of the characters of his numerous novels and infinite number of stories.

#### VICTORIA OCAMPO

As to Victoria Ocampo, the first woman in the country to become a member of the Argentine Academy of Literature (Academia Argentina de Letras), at least two of her works underline her enthusiasm for Dickens, so marked during the years of her childhood, enthusiasm which would leave a sensitive mark in her future work as writer and essayist.

In the chapter "Childhood readings" which belong to one of her *Testimonies*, Editorial Sudamericana (South American Editorial), Buenos Aires, 1946, Victoria refers to "books of such quality as *David Copperfield* or *Telemachus*... read in a loud voice during English and French lessons, started to appear in the horizon of my literary conscience when I was around twelve years old". And in her *Autobiography I, The Archipelago*, Ediciones Revista Sur (Editorial South Magazine), Buenos Aires, 1980, she confesses that "she had great passion" for Dickens, that she read *David Copperfield* and "she wanted to be little Emily, that is to say, Steerforth's dog, nearly" and that the latter fascinated her as much as David. "Steerforth, David Copperfield's bad angel, with his physical beauty, his cold insolence, made me fall in love with him. I was not able to say why. I did not approve his conduct, nor his way of treating little Emily, but notwithstanding all this, I was attracted by him. ...when I arrived to the pages of the book where David finds Steerforth's dead body in the beach after the shipwreck; when I read that Steerforth slept in death as he slept in life,... I was not able to bear it and I nearly started to weep". "I, who at that time only knew death by hearsay, then I recognized its profile so feared.- There it was. It was the first time that I was truly facing it. And I was evidencing that what it has as most devastating, is the fact that it starts before it arrives, it starts in the middle of life". "When weeping Steerforth's death, everything of him that attracted me because of a similarity or a lack of similarity equally vertiginous, I was also weeping for myself. For my childhood that was leaving me, as I was starting to see it".

#### MIGUEL ALFREDO OLIVERA

As to Miguel Alfredo Olivera, he was not only the *alma mater* of the group of Argentine writers who used to meet together with other colleagues to celebrate and enjoy Dickens' works, but he also pronounced several lectures and published essays about him.

In June, 1957, Olivera, among other activities that they used to have, having Charles Dickens and his works as main subject, participated in the lectures that were held in the old National Library of 564 Mexico street where he spoke about "Dickens and the public readings", he collaborated with our ex chairman Eduardo Mallea in the inauguration of an exhibition of engravings that illustrated the original editions of Charles Dickens' works that the Argentine Association of English Culture (Asociación Argentina de Cultura Inglesa) offered in 1962 on the occasion of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the English writer's birth, he shared roles with Patrick Dudgeon in the representation of "The memorial Trial of Bardell against Pickwick" organized in 1970 by the Saint Thomas More Cultural Institute where, also in his position as President of the P.E.N. Club, he offered the lecture "Dickens, the novel and its characters" included

years later in his novel *Égloga*, Grupo Editor Latinoamericano (Latin American Editorial Group), Buenos Aires, 1995.

Panelist, writer and, during long, hardworking years, Honorary Secretary of the Argentine branch of the Fellowship, Miguel Alfredo Olivera faithfully backed the changes made in the institution founded by him and encouraged with his presence, both regular and valuable, the successive meetings organized by the entity. His lamentable death, which happened in 2008, left an empty space, not only among Dickensians and friends, but also in the ample cultural space of the country.

#### ALICIA JURADO

Alicia Jurado, both writer and essayist, member of the Argentine Academy of Literature (Academia Argentina de Letras), whose distinguished career makes it unnecessary any kind of introduction, is part of our institution since its very first days of its foundation, honoring with her presence and participation The Buenos Aires Dickensians.

According to our belief, there is nothing so much illustrative of the interest and influence exercised by Dickens over the XX century intellectual world of Argentina, than to cite some evocative paragraphs extracted from the lecture “Dickens, symbol of the Victorian era” given by Alicia Jurado on July 6, 2001, within the framework of our activities.

After describing the atmosphere of London in the middle of the 1800s and pointing out different aspects of the Dickensian writings, Alicia Jurado underlined during such occasion that, although for many persons Dickens’ books are memories of childhood or adolescence, she could not say the same as to herself: “There are authors that accompany us during our whole life” – the speaker affirmed. “Until recently I used to take out a volume of the many I had in the bookcase, in the beautiful Oxford University edition with its original engravings, and read, or most often reread, some of the stories”. After adding: “Many scenes coming out of his pen are indelibly engraved in my memory”, she evoked culminating moments of the numerous Charles Dickens’ novels that she had registered forever.

Alicia Jurado also remembered that “the Dickens Fellowship used to commemorate at the former SADE of Mexico street the date we now evoke. During those days – she said by way of testimony -, Miguel Alfredo Olivera, whose physical likeness with Dickens was remarkable, used to settle himself in a high desk and read, as he (Dickens) did until extenuated, passages chosen from his vast works.- But that was not all. We also used to amuse ourselves disguising and appearing before the audience as his characters. I remember “peque” (tiny) Lanuza, whose short stature and abundant circumference helped him to represent a Mr. Pickwick to perfection, and I remember myself disguised as Mrs. Gap, as a fat and boozier nurse, lined with pillows to increase my volume and serving punch to those present, that, according to Miguel, was the same recipe than Mr. Pickwick’s.- In another occasion I dressed myself as I could with a dress of that time, I combed my hair with *bandeaux* and I introduced myself as Dickens’ wife, from whom he separated after having eight children with her, telling the story of the couple from her point of view, which must have been quite different from which we might call the official story. ... We were then all young and we used to enjoy ourselves

greatly. Such moments have passed, but the taste for Dickens was never lost for me and that is why I am now speaking about him”.

With a bibliographic revision about the English writer, commentaries about his different novels and stories, and reflections as to his literary genius as well as to his enthusiasm to collaborate with his pen to correct the evils that afflicted the England of his time, the speaker ended her lecture she had made crowned with a great round of applause.

#### PATRICK O. DUDGEON

Our beloved *scholar*, writer and M.A. (Master of Arts) who has settled in Buenos Aires since 1936, in *Hotchpotch at Ninety*, Buenos Aires, 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2004, recognizes that when he arrived to Argentina for the first time to perform his task as professor of English, Latin, history of language and other subjects, he found a very high level in teaching not only in the institutions of Buenos Aires but also in those of other argentine cities and of Uruguay. His wide and outstanding trajectory in his teaching profession in the Asociación Argentina de Cultura Inglesa ( English Cultural Argentine Association) and the Instituto del Profesorado en Lenguas Vivas (Institute of Professorate of Modern Languages) Juan Ramon Fernández, among other learning centers, culminated later on in the Saint Thomas More Cultural Institute that Dudgeon founded and directed during many years.

An Irishman who really was born in Stanhope Street, Kensington Gardens, London, coming from an old traditional family of Kerry and who today asks himself “What happened to the old Irish Peerage?”, Patrick Dudgeon evokes Alec Guinness in that writing among the many actors who have assumed roles of Dickens’ characters in cinema, in the case of Guinness as the father of Marchalsea in “Little Dorrit”, and is pleased in thinking with certain cunningness and a lot of sense of humor that, in spite of his blood inheritance, “both were born in London in the year 1914”.

Patrick Orpen Dudgeon, cofounder of the Argentine Fellowship and my immediate predecessor in the chair, actively participated in the programs of the SADE old mansion, recalled by Alicia Jurado during her lecture given in 2001, and presided the very numerous meetings that he organized during years in the Saint Thomas More Institute. Several decades afterwards, at the time of being incorporated to the Dickensians’ circle, I myself may give testimony and at the same time boast of having tasted, at the Güemes street see, the famous *punch* of the Pickwicknian recipe.

Several essays about Dickens may be added to his work as poet, translator and stylist, among others, in July, 2000 Dudgeon titled “Charles Dickens, detective novelist” a work of analysis of more than a dozen of novels of that writer that deal with crimes and the following of trails that lead to resolve them. The citation of passages and the reference to detailed situations handled by Dickens with outstanding skill, serve Dudgeon as support in order to demonstrate his thesis.

Presently, among other tasks of an intellectual nature that keeps active his generous and restless spirit, Patrick O. Dudgeon, the teacher, the professor, the founder, our

brilliant “mutual friend”, continues to feed with works, notes and essays, unforgettable pages of our The Buenos Aires Dickensians Newsletters.

Maria Isabel Clucellas, Buenos Aires, 2011  
Translated by Silvia Kenny de Cavanagh

B.N.: At the moment this note was handed to be printed, we learnt of the death of our prestigious Dickensian and friend Mrs Alicia Jurado that took place on May 9<sup>th</sup> of this year. We did not wish to change the verbal tenses of our work in the paragraphs that refer to her distinguished person. Her trajectory shall always be present in The Buenos Aires Dickensians. To Alicia Jurado we dedicate our most heartfelt homage and esteem.