

# “I want my eyes...”: Blindness and Perception of the World in Polish Translations of Charles Dickens’s *The Cricket on the Hearth*

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## Abstract

The article discusses Polish translations of Charles Dickens’s *The Cricket on the Hearth* in terms of the vocabulary related to the blind girl Bertha, one of *The Cricket*’s characters. The translations are compared and juxtaposed; the way their authors managed to talk about Bertha’s disability is presented within the context of both political correctness and the practices of the Polish publishing houses in the twentieth century.

Keywords: blindness; Charles Dickens; disability; literary translation; Poland; reception

For the history of medicine,<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens’s novels are full of interesting examples of various forms of disabilities.<sup>2</sup> Dickens’s disabled characters create a large and impressive “portrait gallery”, and Dickens always presented them with extreme care, which has been pointed to by a number of scholars and doctors of medicine.<sup>3</sup> Physiological descriptions of the paralyzed Cleopatra, or the dramatic stages of little Paul’s illness in *Dombey and Son* expand the semantic capacity of the novel and its informative functions. The discussions of the doctors who do not know how to help Dombey’s dying wife serve as a satirical tool thanks to which Dickens mocks the doctors’ level of medicine and their snobbism. Mr. Dick (*David Copperfield*), Barnaby Rudge (*Barnaby Rudge*), Artur Clennam’s mother (*Little Dorrit*), “Joe the fat boy” (*The Pickwick Papers*),<sup>4</sup> or the doll maker Jenny Wren (*Our Mutual Friend*) are among the sick or the disabled characters; even when they are only minor characters (Mrs Clemman or Jenny), their portrayal is always done diligently and competently. The

language they use is individualized: these characters communicate with other characters using their own idiolect and special phrasing. It is worth to reference Paul Marchbanks who sees Dickens as a manifestly humanitarian writer who defended the intellectually disabled (3).

Translation-wise, the idiolect of the disabled could be a challenge for translators. In order not to make a mistake when translating peculiar phrases, idioms, synonyms, euphemisms, various associations and shortcuts in the disabled character's idiolect, the translator obviously needs to know the source language and the target language, and have some background in medical issues related to a given illness.

My main issue in this article is to analyze Dickens's Christmas story *The Cricket on the Hearth*, and its Polish renditions. *Cricket* was published in 1845, and it was Dickens's third Christmas book. The plot of this novella revolves around a carrier, John Peerybingle, his young wife Dot, their baby boy and their nanny Tilly Slowboy. The eponymous cricket (whom Paul Schlicke (128) called "the story's supernatural agent") persistently chirps on the hearth and acts as a guardian angel to the family. One day an old man comes to visit John and Dot, and stays with them for a few days. Another character is a poor toymaker, Caleb Plummer, who works for Mr. Tackleton. Caleb has a blind daughter, Bertha, and a son, Edward, who traveled to South America and was thought dead. Tackleton is about to marry Edward's beloved May, but she does not love Tackleton. Tackleton suggests that Dot has allegedly cheated on her husband and shows John a secret scene where Dot embraces the mysterious man who stays with the Peerybingles (he is younger than he seems). John feels hopeless. In the end, it is revealed that the strange man is Edward who has returned home in disguise. Dot shows that she has been faithful to John. Edward marries May before she is scheduled to marry Tackleton. However, Tackleton's heart is melted by the Christmas season, like Ebenezer Scrooge in *Christmas Carol*, and he gives up trying to marry May. The novella is divided into three chapters entitled "Chirp the first", "Chirp the second", and "Chirp the third".

Let me concentrate on the subplot, related to Bertha and her father. They live in poor conditions and work for the heartless and cruel Tackleton. Caleb persuaded Bertha that their shabby house and the cruel employer are pleasant and kind<sup>5</sup> (some Dickensian scholars see Bertha as *an overprotected daughter*) (Newlin 108). Based on her father's lies Bertha slowly falls in love with Tackleton, and is shocked when she learns about his engagement to another woman, May. Caleb's deception is well intended, but his confession compounds Bertha's distress. In his characteristic anaphoric structure Dickens emphasizes how far removed from reality Bertha was. In the following quotation we can see the extent to which he refers to her solely by her impairment; he defines her by it as if it were her only characteristic:

The Blind Girl never knew that ceilings were discoloured, walls blotched and bare of plaster here and there, high crevices unstopped and widening every day, beams mouldering and tending downward. The Blind Girl never knew that iron was rusting, wood rotting, paper peeling off; the size, and shape, and true proportion of the dwelling, withering away. The Blind Girl never knew that ugly shapes of delf and

earthenware were on the board; that sorrow and faint-heartedness were in the house; that Caleb's scanty hairs were turning grayer and more gray, before her sightless face. The Blind Girl never knew they had a master, cold, exacting, and uninterested-- never knew that Tackleton was Tackleton, in short; but lived in the belief of an eccentric humourist who loved to have his jest with them, and who, while he was the Guardian Angel of their lives, disdained to hear one word of thankfulness. (Dickens, *The Cricket on the Hearth* 182-3)<sup>6</sup>

In other words: Caleb has been lying to his daughter, telling her about the external world and people in a much idealized way. He did it out of his love for Bertha to try and shield her from knowledge of the evil, poverty, and ugliness which surrounded them. When Bertha finally learns the truth, she exclaims: "It is my sight restored. It is my sight!" (223). Bertha obviously did not suddenly gain her sight; she uses this expression metaphorically. Bertha regains her sight by discovering the world that had been hidden from her. The translator and the reader need to differentiate between the real and metaphorical meanings of the words "sight" and "restored sight". Earlier Bertha says: "If I could be restored to sight this instant, and not a word were spoken, I could choose her from a crowd! My sister!" (221). In *Cricket*, the phrase "restored sight" is used two times, but each has a different meaning. This could confuse a translator. The phrase is said by a blind person, therefore we are not surprised to imagine that such an event could happen to her (having her sight restored); but when this person uses the phrase metaphorically, then translating it can be troublesome.

Charles Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth. A Fairy Tale of Home* (1845)<sup>7</sup> has enjoyed great popularity in Poland, despite the fact that the text itself arrived in Poland rather late. All of the Polish translations of Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth* were made in the twentieth century. The first one, by Antoni Mazanowski, was published in Poznań in 1914. The second translation was made by Maria Feldmanowa whose *Świerszcz u ogniska* was published in Kraków in 1923, in the series "Biblioteczka Powieści" nr 2. It was reprinted in Warszawa in 1928 in the third volume of Dickens's *Works*, edited by Wilam Horzyca. The same translation but with the translator's married name (now it was Maria Kreczowska) and the modified title (*Świerszcz za kominem*) was published by Gebethner and Wolff in Kraków in 1946, right after the Second World War. It is identical to the previous version. The only differences concern spelling; in 1936 new rules related to spelling, orthography and punctuation had been laid down. In 1954 a Warsaw publishing house "Czytelnik" issued Feldmanowa's translation as a "shortened version" (it cut off the scene in which John feels torn coming back from the picnic, and he sees some peculiar figures which function as a substitute for judging his wife's behavior). The editors stressed that this translation was "revised and edited" ("przejrzany i opracowany"). Revising this text resulted in adding footnotes which explained some aspects of British culture. The edition was designed for schools (the print run was 30.000 copies, which was not a lot, considering the reach of such a powerful publishing house as "Czytelnik"). The name given for the translator was Maria Feldmanowa-Kreczowska (it was the third version of the same author's name). In 1952 two mass publications were issued: a prestigious Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich in Wrocław put out *Świerszcz* edited by Zbigniew Żabicki

(the name of the translator was not given), and “Czytelnik” published a “corrected and supplemented” edition of Aldona Szpakowska. In 1955 a new translation by Krystyna Tarnowska was published by “Czytelnik”, and to this day this is still the most popular version of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, and several generations of the Polish readers of Dickens have grown up with Tarnowska’s text.

Looking at these translations in chronological order allows us to observe various individual translation choices, and to locate them on the map of the translation tendencies in Polish culture.<sup>8</sup>

### **To see with someone’s eyes**

In part 2 of the story, right after Tackleton comes and informs Bertha about his upcoming wedding with May, Bertha becomes sad. The news and Tackleton’s unpleasant comments about her make her suspicious. In order to stop the flow of melancholy Bertha says to her father: “Father, I am lonely in the dark. I want my eyes, my patient, willing eyes” (189). The semantic field of the words “lonely” and “dark” oscillate around the images of loneliness and lack of knowledge. “Dark” signifies things/people that are black, gloomy, mysterious (“to be a dark horse”), murky or dingy. English idioms use “dark” with a secret and ignorance (to keep sb in the~; about sth~; keep it~); “dark” may also signify solitude and longing for someone. Bertha’s euphemism - “I am lonely in the dark” - emphasizes her helplessness and hopelessness. Caleb does not know yet that his daughter loves Tackleton but he already senses that Bertha will be unhappy *because* of him. Polish translations offer a range of interpretations of the sentences in question:

a) “-*Znudziłam się w ciemności, ojczulku. Potrzebne są mi oczy, moje cierpliwe, usługujące oczy*” (a 57).

(b) “- Ojczy, *jestem sama w ciemnościach. Potrzeba mi teraz twoich oczu, zawsze śpieszących mi na pomoc*” (b2 51; b3 75).

(c) “- Ojczulku, tak mi jakoś *smutno* w ciemnościach. Zażęskniłam za *moimi* oczami, za *moimi* cierpliwymi, dobrymi oczami” (c 62).

Grammatically speaking, these sentences are fairly simple to render in a foreign language and should not be problematic for translators. However, the emotional and semantic context which determines Bertha’s mental state prompts various interpretations; each translator emphasized a different aspect. Example (a) introduces the word “boredom”: “I have been bored in the darkness, father. I need eyes, my patient, useful eyes”. This translation does depart from the original, presenting Bertha as a vain doll who does nothing, and as a result she feels a discomfort because of a lack of things to do. Example (b) follows the original: “Father, I am alone in the darkness. Now I need your eyes which would always help me”. It also uses the Biblical intertext (*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*, John 1.5) which might have been employed by Dickens. Example (c) means: “Papa, I feel so sad in the darkness. I have missed my eyes, my patient, good eyes”. The

closest English equivalent to the Polish “smutno” is “sad”. If Bertha indeed had wanted to say that she is sad, then Caleb would have (or should have) probably asked her for the reason of such sorrow. The word “sad” then would have triggered a sequence of questions and answers concerning the reasons for Bertha’s sadness. The examples (a) and (c) use Polish equivalents but also apply an interpretation of Bertha’s mental state. These interpretational intentions are not, however, successful. They directly name what is hidden between the words; they impart a literal meaning to senses which cannot be named verbatim, as Bertha wants to keep her emotions secret.

There is a more important difference here as well. In the original Bertha says “I want my eyes”. In translation (example b), the pronoun “my” is replaced by the pronoun “your”. “My eyes” mean: “you, father, are my eyes, I could not cope without your help and you bridge the gap between me and the world”. Following the original text, in the example (c) the pronoun “my” is repeated twice (“I have missed my eyes, my patient, good eyes”), which signifies the highest level of Bertha’s and Caleb’s identification. In the perception process, Bertha does not exist without Caleb.

Example b (“I need your eyes”) may suggest that in some situations, Caleb’s sight is Bertha’s tool to learn about the world. This interpretation proposes that Bertha is more autonomous: in some situations she does depend on or need Caleb to cope with daily activities, but in others Bertha is sufficiently self-dependent. Philologically speaking, the change of “my” into “your” is a serious error; the translator’s modification, however, matches Bertha’s character. She is quite self-reliant in her opinions if she kept her love for Tackleton secret for a long time. This “philological” mistake channels the reader’s attention to Bertha’s feelings. Caleb is her guide through the external and material world, but in terms of her emotions Bertha is self-contained and independent. Interpreting Dickens’s sentence in this way justifies the translator’s inaccuracy.

As we have mentioned, eventually Bertha learns the truth about the actual look of the house. Dot admits that it is “very poor and bare indeed. The house will scarcely keep out wind and rain another winter” (223). She also adds: “it is as roughly shielded from the weather as your poor father in his sack-cloth coat” (223). Caleb tries to justify his lies: “Your road in life was rough . . . and I meant to smooth it for you. I have altered objects, changed the characters of people, invented many things that never have been, to make you happier. I have had concealments from you, put deceptions on you, God forgive me! and surrounded you with fancies” (222).<sup>9</sup> At first Bertha is shocked and stunned, but after a while she divulges: “It is my sight restored. It is my sight . . . I have been blind, and now my eyes are open” (223). In terms of grammar and vocabulary, this statement is not particularly difficult to translate. The level of medical and cultural competences in translation can be a challenge, though. The Polish versions of *Cricket* offer the following solutions:

(a) “- *Przejrzałam, przejrzałam!* - wykrzyknęła. - *Byłam ślepa, teraz mi się oczy otworzyły*” (a 122).

(b) “- *Odzyskałam wzrok!* - zawołała. - *Byłam ślepa, a teraz mam widzące oczy*” (b2 108).

(c) “- *Odzyskałam wzrok! Odzyskałam! - wykrzyknęła. - Byłam ślepa, ale teraz widzę!*” (c 126).

Dickens used a play on synonyms here. The Polish translations follow his intention: first a short phrase is used, then it is repeated, and finally the picture is broadened. Semantically, example (a) conveys Dickens's idea well. “Przejrzałam” means “I have seen through”. Etymologically this word is related to “żrenica” (“pupil”, a part of the eye). Polish dictionaries list various similar words, mostly verbs (“przeźrzeć”; “przejrzeć”; “przejrzewać”; “przezierać” (*Słownik języka polskiego* 5, 90-91), as well as “ujrzeć”; “uchwycić wzrokiem”; “zobaczyć” (7, 257)). In contemporary Polish language this is an outdated word. It was also rarely used at the time of the publication of this translation (1914). It was employed in folklore and in liturgy. Such introduction of the historic, biblical and folklore context into the translation applies associations of style which unnecessarily channel the reader's attention to the context itself and distract them from tracking Bertha's confession. “Odzyskałam wzrok” (examples b and c) is a universal phrase and independent from the circumstances. In Polish it can be used literally (the eyes were covered by the eye-lids and now they are open; the eyes can see better after a surgery) and/or metaphorically (I have understood something; I have learnt the truth about someone or something). Both usages are acceptable, as Dickens also allowed for two meanings. Example (b) is problematic. “Mam widzące oczy” literally means “I have seeing eyes”. It is an active present participle. “Seeing eyes” is an unfortunate tautology. Perhaps the translator's aim was to emphasize Bertha's joy (she is now able to learn about the actual look of the world and people), but instead it caused the reader's disorientation.

In the Polish language the noun (and adjective at the same time) “ślepy” (“blind” with negative connotations) is to be found in all dictionaries. During the nineteenth century it was gradually replaced by “niewidomy” (sightless). “Ślepy” was used in folklore and in careless speech. It is associated with contempt, supremacy, sometimes with pity. Using “ślepy” included an element of negative emotions towards a person who cannot see. The noun “niewidomy”, which became popular in twenty-first century, is neutral and politically correct; it is descriptive and does not contain or trigger negative emotions. The nineteenth-century Polish-English dictionaries, which could have been used by the Polish translators, record a high level of usage of the word “ślepy”. Very rarely are other synonyms offered, for example “sightless” which the dictionaries described also as “ugly” and “hideous” (“brzydki”, “szkaradny”) (Chodźko 1, 161, 312; 2, 29, 176, 293; Rykaczewski 161, 312).<sup>10</sup>

Polish translations differ from the original by the diverse usage of the words “ślepy” and “niewidomy”. In *Cricket*, the word “sightless” is used in the beginning of the following sentence: “The Blind Girl, still upturning the blank sightless face” (201). This is taken from a fragment in which Bertha interacts with different characters, and the narrator persistently refers to her as “the Blind Girl”. Using this adjective in excess may seem risky. The author needs to distinguish cautiously between this word's literal and metaphorical sense; he also designates the context to specify the meanings of the word “blind” and its emotional potential. In terms of style and aesthetics, the frequent repetition of a word often demonstrates lexical deficiency of the work; the work then risks a monotony of style. A translator faces a double dilemma: he/she

needs to be imaginative in order to replace the lexical meaning with the contextual sense; what is more, in case of surplus of repetitions in the source text the translator has to choose between a range of synonyms. The translation may not fulfill the condition of philological equivalence. Dickens defies the monotony of style in a simple way: he replaces “the Blind Girl” with “Blind Daughter”. It allows him to maintain a relative diversity of style. It is not a sophisticated literary technique. We need to observe, however, that such plethora of word repetitions is used only in relation to Bertha and the Cricket. These repetitions form microtexts with the excess of one word. In the readers’ memory, such fragments solidify and trigger empathy towards the disabled girl and the cricket that does not let in evil into people’s hearts.

Let us compare the statistics:

Expressions	Chirp the Second	Chirp the Third
“Blind Girl”	23	9
“Blind Daughter”	5	1
“Blind” (child, Bertha)	3	6
Total	31	16

As we can observe, “Chirp the second” introduces the personal noun “Bertha” 3 times; “Chirp the third” - 25 times. In *Second* there are 15 pages on which Bertha is an active character. In “Third”, Bertha remains active on 5 pages. The average usage of the name “Bertha” is 2,7 for “Second” and 5 for “Third”. The conclusion is as follows: a short scene in which Caleb confesses his deceit “activates” Bertha. She becomes a self-reliant subject and a more autonomous person. She ceases to be “Blind Daughter”; she is more “Bertha” rather than “Blind Girl”, too. This regularity is also to be seen in Polish translations. Through the epithets which mean “incurable eye disease” they stigmatize Bertha more seldom than the source text does. The translations use the noun “dziewczyna” (a girl) or “córka” (daughter). In the Polish renditions of *Cricket* Bertha’s disability is dimly outlined. Instead of the philological equivalent “ślepa” (blind) the Polish translators use the word “niewidoma” (sightless) which is both a noun and an adjective. A chronological list of the Polish translations shows that Dickens’s statistics of the phrases “Blind Girl” and “Blind Daughter” was not a model for Polish translators.

Publication year	Chirp the second	Chirp the third
(a) 1914	Ślepa córka - 5 Ślepa dziewczynka 12 Niewidoma 5	Ślepa córka - 1 Ślepa dziewczynka 0 Niewidoma 2

(b, b1, b2) 1923, 1929, 1946	Ślepa córka 4 Ślepa dziewczyna 12 Ślepa (noun) 11	Ślepa córka 1 Ślepa dziewczyna 2 Ślepa 12
(c) 1988	Niewidoma córka 4 Ociemniała córka 1 Niewidoma dziewczyna 16 Niewidoma (noun) 1 Ślepa (noun) 0	Niewidoma córka 1 Ociemniała córka 1 Niewidoma dziewczyna 7 Niewidoma (noun) 0 Ślepa (noun) 3

The pair of words “ślepa” - “niewidoma” suggests that 1) using a concrete word is an individual decision of each translator (Feldmanowa-Kreczowska did not use the word “niewidoma”); 2) in the last 50 years the Polish translations used a more miscellaneous vocabulary in terms of incurable eye diseases; 3) during this time the expression “ślepa” was eliminated from the text due to its dismissive tone. As early as 1914 there appeared a tendency to replace the word “ślepa” with a more neutral “niewidoma”. The development of medicine and pedagogy caused the translations to be carefully edited in terms of their political correctness. After the Second World War Poland was a communist country. The communist authorities used a preventive censorship in the printing of books and journals, and they often changed the language of the translations. A good proof of such practice is an analysis of two Polish editions of *Cricket* from 1954. They were designed for schools and based on Feldmanowa-Kreczowska’s version which was corrected (we do not know the author of the corrected text) so that the disabled Bertha could serve a didactic function for school children.

Let me present the statistics:

Date of publication	Chirp the second	Chirp the third
(b2) 1946	Ślepa dziewczyna 2 Ślepa córka 4 Ślepa (noun) 11	Ślepa dziewczyna 2 Ślepa córka 1 Ślepa 12
(b3) 1954	Ślepa dziewczyna 1 Ślepa córka 1 Ślepa (noun) 0	Ślepa dziewczyna 0 Ślepa córka 0 Ślepa (noun) 6



	Niewidoma dziewczyna 10	Niewidoma dziewczyna 0
	Niewidoma córka 4	Niewidoma córka 0
	Niewidome źrenice 1	Niewidome źrenice 0
	Niewidoma (noun) 6	Niewidoma 5

The corrections are very consistent. The word “ślepa” was replaced by “niewidoma”; by doing so it was possible to regulate the language of the translations customizing classics of literature to the new didactic needs. It scarcely disturbs Dickens’s intentions. In fact, Dickens himself would probably have welcomed such changes in his text if their aim was to spread the good in people.

### “Where is your hand?”

Looking at Bertha’s gestures and movements we have to state that Dickens was not consistent in creating her portrait. In “Chirp the second” Bertha is quite independent when it comes to her moving around the house. Tackleton says: “Bertha! . . . Come here”. The girl responds: “Oh! I can come straight to you! You needn’t guide me!” (188). She knows her way around; what is more, she knows it and is proud of it. Later on she becomes powerless and asks Caleb to bring May to her, and, when May comes and touches Bertha’s arm, the girl turns. Does it mean that she did not hear May’s approaching footsteps? Bertha surely is capable of locating objects around her. She also masters the world of sounds; but spatial orientation is difficult for her. In John’s apartment Bertha asks May: “‘Mary’, said Bertha, ‘where is your hand. Ah! Here it is; here it is’” (221). At times Bertha knows how to move around, and at other times she needs to be guided (she asks May to move further from Caleb and she says “More this way” (223)). Bertha’s overall portrayal in the novella is not clear. When she learns the whole truth about her father’s love for her, Bertha’s gestures are fast and fierce. She moves as if she could see and was physically capable of any activity, for example: “The Blind Girl broke away from her [Mary]; and throwing herself upon her knees before him, took the grey head to her breast” (223).

Stronger than it is in the source text, the Polish translations emphasize Bertha’s violent moves. The translators create a picture of a sequence of moves, and they employ an accumulation of verbs to do so:

“Ślepa dziewczynka *wyrwała się z jej rąk i rzucając się na kolana przed ojcem, przycisnęła jego głowę do swej piersi*” (a 122).

“Ślepa *odbiegła od niej i padła przed ojcem na kolana, tuląc jego siwą głowę do swej piersi*” (b2 108)

“Niewidoma *odbiegła* od niej i *padła* przed ojcem na kolana, *tuląc* jego siwą głowę do swej piersi” (c 135).

The meaning of “odbiegła” is close to the English “run away” or “run off”. The vision of Bertha running fast is not coherent with the picture of Bertha who needs her friend’s helping hand. This scene may demonstrate Dickens’s uncertainty in relation to disabled people’s physical and perceptual capabilities. The readers of another of Dickens’s novels, *Barnaby Rudge*, may have similar doubts. One of its characters is Stagg, a blind man. The very last minutes of his life are described in a way that presents him as neither disabled nor non-disabled:

He was loudly called on, to surrender. He ran the harder, and in a few seconds would have been out of gunshot. The word was given, and the men fired. . . . He had been seen to start at the discharge, as if the report had frightened him. But he neither stopped nor slackened his pace in the least, and ran on full forty yards further. Then, without one reel or stagger, or sign of faintness, or quivering of any limb, he dropped. (Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge* 534)

Stagg has a good sense of space and direction; he helps himself with a stick. Dickens described his disability competently:

His eyes were closed, but had they been wide open, it would have been easy to tell, from the attentive expression of the face he turned towards them - pale and unwholesome as might be expected in one of his underground existence - and from a certain anxious and quivering of the lids, that he was blind. (61-2)

Stagg was shot but manages to run for about 40 meters; he is depicted in accordance with hunting descriptions. Some animals, after they have been shot, manage to run several meters before they eventually fall and die.<sup>11</sup> Stagg is presented as one of such animals - powerless and vulnerable, whose only way out is flight. The reader, however, who has been watching Stagg’s slow moves and his penetration of the surrounding space with the stick, is confused. It is hard to believe in such a sudden transformation of the blind man into a running deer. 40 meters of run is a distance which introduces a cognitive discord in the creation of the blind man. In this respect, Bertha is depicted more professionally. Her characteristic feature is hugging people and touching them with her face. These reactions signify Bertha’s strong need for emotional ties and signals of trust. In the descriptions of Bertha in *The Cricket* the narrator devotes a lot of space to describe human movements.

In “Chirp the second”:

The Blind Girl took his hand and kissed it; held it for a moment in her own two hands; and laid her cheek against it tenderly, before releasing it. (187)

While speaking, she had released May Fielding's hands, and clasped her garments in an attitude of mingled supplication and love. Sinking lower and lower down, as she proceeded in her strange confession, she dropped at last at the feet of her friend, and hid her blind face in the folds of her dress. (202)

In "Chirp the third": "'Mary', said Bertha, 'where is your hand! Ah! Here it is; here it is!' pressing it to her lips, with a smile, and drawing it through her arm" (220).

Dickens's consistency in these descriptions could be explained by the fact that during his visit to the United States in 1842 he was profoundly interested in the pedagogical methods of working with the blind. Bertha's portrayal was based on Laura Bridgman, the deaf and blind girl whom Dickens met during his visit to the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston (and later described in his travelogue *American Notes*, 1842).<sup>12</sup> Dickens modeled Bertha's reactions and moves in *The Cricket* after his earlier behavioral depictions of Laura.

Bertha uses a wide range of colors: "blue", "bright blue", "blessed sky", "red sun", "bright light" (187). Cognitive linguistics has proved that blind children experience similar difficulties with learning the names of colors as non-disabled children (Landau and Gleitman; Krzeszowski, Marek, and Piskorska). Bertha's repository of vocabulary is not different from other characters' lexicon. She poses questions, receives answers, remembers them and knows how the world looks like (except those parts of the world her father has lied to her about). Bertha also orientates herself in the surrounding space and has no problem classifying objects and shapes. The range of verbs which she uses is quite poor. Bertha asks about how the world looks like, but she is less knowledgeable about events and actions; she is less concerned with the reality of movement and changes happening in a given time. In the portrayal of Bertha Dickens emphasizes a belief that the blind have a good perception of space, but the notions related to the flow of time may be an obstacle in their optimal functioning in society.

Dickens's novella *The Cricket on the Hearth* was seen by critics as a story of secrecy, misinterpretation, and forgiveness (Reed 157). Dickens's work surely sensitized the British public to the suffering child, as John Sutherland (467) observed in his review of Jules Kosky's *Mutual friends. Charles Dickens and Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital* (1989). We should point out the distinction between impairment (the fact that she cannot see) and disability (the reality that is constructed for her). Her not seeing is problematized by the fact that Caleb has lied to her about everything in the world. He constructed an artificial reality for her. Blindness is no longer a disability. Societally we construct that as problematic - building an environment of stairs and barriers which prevent them from accessing things. Bertha was not cognitively impaired; she understood it when the reality was explained to her. Blindness can be (and frequently has been) socially constructed. Bertha could not perceive the world accurately because the world constructed by her

father was false, not because she could not see. This is demonstrated at the end - still blind she says: now I can see, and I am not blind. In his presentation of Bertha Dickens seems to understand the social model of disability.

As the translator Giuseppe Manuel Brescia observed, “dialects, idiolects and sociolects, obviously, are perceived as such based on how they differ from what is considered as the standard language”; “Translators face a challenging task when they want to carry over that uniqueness in the target language. Idiolects actually represent a different challenge, since a character’s voice will be perceived as peculiar because of its unique, idiosyncratic features”. Polish translators of *Cricket* managed to carry over the uniqueness of Bertha’s idiolect, but some of them, as we have seen, did not escape transforming Dickens’s phrases and adapting them to the need of the projected readers.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> We could argue that this is also the case for the history of disability. Disabled people have been trying to break free of the perception that they are the domain of doctors and medicine. The social model emerged largely out of that desire.

<sup>2</sup> As Meir Kryger tells us, when Dickens died, the *British Medical Journal* published an obituary for him (obviously, this was years before his clinical descriptions fascinated doctors). Martha Stoddard Holmes, writing for the LITMED web page, discusses *The Cricket on the Hearth* solely as a story of Bertha and her father. In the commentary to the story she says that "Dickens's representation of Bertha Plummer as tragically removed from the world of courtship participates in stereotypes about blindness and femininity that linger into the twentieth century. His extension of Bertha's blindness to a cognitive dullness is an example of the sociological phenomenon of 'spread', in which one disability is assumed, without evidence, to produce impairment to other physical and mental functions". Furthermore, it is emphasized interestingly that there had been an assumption "that blind women do not marry. Non-fiction of the time documents both the fact that blind women did marry, and the severity of Victorian anxiety about hereditary transmission of disabilities. These fears made it both exciting to place blind women in courtship plots and imperative to keep them from achieving marriage". For an insightful discussion on Bertha see Gitter.

<sup>3</sup> As early as the nineteenth century J. C. Dana wrote a paper entitled "The Medical Profession as seen by Charles Dickens" with the list of Dickens's characters who are called "medical men" (doctors, students of medicine). In his article "Dickensian Diagnoses", Russell Brain (a physician from the London Hospital and the Maida Vale Hospital for Nervous Diseases) talks about different Dickensian characters from his medical perspective, proving Dickens's skill in portraying illnesses and their symptoms. Cf. Axel Petzold, "Optic Neuritis: Another Dickensian Diagnosis" and "Dickensian Diagnoses"; Russell Brain, "Dickensian Diagnoses". Ahmos L. Pahor mentions Dickens's meeting with Laura as an inspiration for his creation of Oliver in *Doctor Marigold*. See "Charles Dickens: orthopaedics and the handicapped".

<sup>4</sup> Joe's daytime sleepiness contributed to the condition which was called "the Pickwickian Syndrome": the triad of obesity, hypersomnolence, and signs of chronic alveolar hypoventilation. See Fredric Jaffe, Dimitri Markov, Karl Doghramji.

<sup>5</sup> As Ruth Glancy (64) observed, what inspired Dickens was Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale*, "which tells the story of May, a young woman who takes advantage of the blindness of her old husband, January, to have an affair. But while Chaucer makes fun of the old husband, Dickens, in the Christmas book and in *David Copperfield*, leads the reader to sympathize with the young wife's attraction to a man her own age but then affirms her fidelity to the older husband".

<sup>6</sup> Dickens, Charles. *The Cricket on the Hearth. The Christmas Books*. London: Penguin Popular Classic, 1994. 155-234. All quotations from *Cricket* are taken from this edition, with page numbers given in brackets right after the quote.

<sup>7</sup> Caleb and Bertha are also main character of the short story "The Toy Maker and His Blind Daughter", designed for children.

<sup>8</sup> I will be referring to the Polish translations according to the letters and numbers indicated after each of the following references:

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  - ---. *Świerszcz za kominem*. Przekład M. Kreczowska. Kraków: N.p., 1946 (b2).
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  - ---. *Świerszcz za kominem: bajka o domowym ognisku*. Przekład K. Tarnowska. Wrocław: N.p., 1988 (c).

<sup>9</sup> Caleb sees her being blind as something to pity. For more information of such a view of disability see Beratan 29. Caleb sees her being blind as something to pity.

<sup>10</sup> This part of my analysis is also an example of how disability is constructed by things external to the individual. There is nothing inherent to blindness that elicits pity or contempt; in this case it is the translators' choices that construct Bertha as pitiable (though some of this clearly comes from Dickens's own construction).

<sup>11</sup> Stag's name plays into this, as a stag is a male deer, the type of deer most often hunted.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmos L. Pahor mentions Dickens's meeting with Laura as an inspiration for his creation of Oliver in *Doctor Marigold*. See Pahor, "Charles Dickens: orthopaedics and the handicapped". A. J. Carter talks about Dickens's legacy in terms of his impact on sick children and medicine. Carter also presents some of Dickens's children characters who are physically ill or disabled (Nicholas Nickleby, Tiny Tim). See his "A Christmas carol: Charles Dickens and the birth of orthopaedics".