

# Alexandru Popescu-Telega in the History of Romanian Hispanistics

## Review

*Alexandru Popescu-Telega în istoria hispanisticii românești. (2021): Suceava, Editura Universității „Ștefan cel Mare” by Carmen Lenuța Sveduneac*

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Carmen Sveduneac's book is the first monographic work dedicated to the activity of the Romanian philologist Alexandru Popescu-Telega, who can be considered a true pioneer of Hispanic studies in the Romanian cultural area. The result of a long and thorough research, sometimes impeded by the political circumstances that led to the obliteration of the merits of the Romanian philologist, the present work claims its importance precisely from the fact that it represents a recovery, restitution in the field of philological studies of a fundamental personality in the history of cultural studies Hispanics from our country.

Carmen Sveduneac has structured her book in five sections, along with the *Argument*, final *Conclusions*, references, and addenda.

In the first chapter, *Methodological, terminological and biobibliographic considerations*, the author outlines the analytical framework for Popescu-Telega's philological activity, starting with a brief presentation of the biography of the Romanian philologist, in which she emphasizes the unfortunate circumstances of his ostracism from the Romanian academic environment and from the history Hispanic studies in our country, i.e. the very reasons why his activity is almost unknown to Romanian specialists in Hispanic studies. As shown here, the causes of this process are varied: from the political context (interruption of diplomatic relations with Spain in 1946) to the academic one (elimination of the teaching of the Spanish language, literature, and culture subjects in Romanian universities

between 1948-1957) and the personal one (Popescu-Telega is suspected of espionage and the Security opens a follow-up file on his name). Such biographical elements are crucial for understanding the stages in the activity of the Romanian philologist, but also the reasons why his writings were inaccessible for a long period of time. The author outlines the cultural and scientific context in which Telega began his activity, compiling a table of translations, popularization articles, and studies on Hispanic studies published in our country from the 19th century (the first attempts to translate some works Spanish) until the '70s of the 20th century, when Telega dies. Thus, by referring to the activity of other philologists interested in the field of Hispanic studies, the author aims to establish the place of Alexandru Popescu-Telega among them and the role played by his writings in the dissemination and research of cultural information regarding the Hispanic cultural space in Romania. The second chapter, *The 19th Century. Writings about Spanish literature prior to Alexandru Popescu-Telega* continue the detailed presentation of Hispanic studies prior to Telega's works.

The third chapter of the book, *Alexandru Popescu-Telega in the Hispanic Studies of the 20th Century*, constitutes a detailed presentation of the writings of the Romanian philologist, periodized according to the criteria of the historical context (the interwar period, respectively the postwar period, each with its specific cultural and freedom of expression), in which the author also makes a classification of such writings according to content (translations, popularization works, scientific writings intended for the specialists). From the analysis of such writings, the author finds that Popescu-Telega was concerned not only with Spanish literature, but also with Hispanic linguistics, Iberian folklore or certain cultural, sociological, and historical aspects related to the Spanish people. Through the travel notes and stories, we discover personal facets of the Romanian researcher, passionate about the object of his research and dedicated to the knowledge and interpretation of all the details he discovers in his travels through Spain and in the friendship and work relationships he establishes with famous personalities from the Spanish culture. We appreciate the way in which Sveduneac often appeals to intertextuality, relating Telega's writings to other works with similar themes and constantly highlighting the degree of the emotional involvement on the part of Popescu-Telega in the narration of the cultural facts.

In the presentation of Popescu-Telega's *Grammar*, the author indicates that the copy she was able to consult seems to be "a copy that passed through the hand of censorship, possibly among the few that have been preserved (if not the only one in Romania)," and argues such claims on the basis of the elements highlighted in that copy, which indeed suggests that it is a justified opinion; this relevant

aspect, corroborated with the other information regarding the persecutions suffered by Telega, outline the context in which his work was silenced.

The existence of the fourth chapter, *Alexandru Popescu-Telega's contribution to the popularization of Cervantes in the Romanian literary space*, is motivated, says the author, by the fact that "the Cervantine exegeses constitute a massive part of Alexandru Popescu-Telega's activity, and his doctoral thesis, *Cervantes and Italy*, awakens his interest in Hispanic Studies." Naturally, one of the greatest universal writers of all time could not be absent from the sphere of interest of any specialist in the field of Spanish philology, especially in the pioneering period as such Sveduneac makes a brief presentation of the Romanian writings on the Cervantine work before Telega, but also in his contemporary period, and dedicates a significant part of the chapter to the three monographic works signed by Alexandru Popescu-Telega, *Cervantes* (1924), *Cervantes and Italy* (1931) and *Cervantes. Life and Work* (1944), comparing them with some studies signed by Tudor Vianu and Iorgu Jordan and pointing out the merit of Telega to interpret the work of the Spanish writer through the prism of the peculiarities of his biography.

In the last chapter, entitled *Alexandru Popescu-Telega, the translator*, the researcher focuses on Telega's contributions to the field of translation studies; this term indicates his interests both as a researcher of the translation process and as the author of numerous translations into and from Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian. For the first time, Sveduneac achieves to draw a complete inventory of the translations signed by Alexandru Popescu-Telega, retrieving some of them from the publications of the time; she establishes a solid theoretical framework regarding the necessity and opportunity of retranslation, analyzing the evolution of the concept of translation in the modern period and making a critical presentation of the first attempts to translate the novel *Don Quixote* into Romanian.

The comparative research in the fifth part of the last chapter unequivocally demonstrates the skills of the researcher, Carmen Sveduneac, in the field of translation and translation studies. The analysis of the translation solutions in the five investigated texts touches on matters of great finesse and subtlety, the author's pertinent observations being supplemented with some ingenious solutions that she proposes. The approach in this section of the paper is an original and interesting one, being the first comparative and contrastive analysis of the five translations, which the author collates with each other, but also with some French versions, with the intention of establishing the parentage of the translations and the relationships between these, but also the merit of Telega for offering the Romanian public "the first complete qualitative translation."

The present book is a valuable monograph in that it manages to reconstruct the philological activity of the first Romanian Hispanist to outline a chronology of important events in the author's life, despite the efforts of the communist regime to eliminate him from the specific bibliography and to highlight the major role Alexandru Popescu-Telega played in the promotion of the Hispanic culture in Romania and in the study of the Spanish language in our country. The work is coherent, and it is based on a thorough investigation, reflected in a solid critical apparatus and a vast bibliography. This is a necessary book that sheds precious light on the beginnings of Hispanic Studies in Romania.