

# “EL ARTE DE LA TRADUCCIÓN”, BY ALEJANDRO CIORANESCU<sup>1</sup>

José Francisco Ruiz Casanova

jose.ruiz@upf.edu

Universidad Pompeu Fabra

## Abstract

Alejandro Cioranescu's work (1911-1999) as a researcher in Comparative Literature was developed in Spain since the fifties. Cioranescu is not only author of the first modern manual of Comparative Literature written in Spanish but his interest in this discipline issues (exchanges, contacts, translation) remained present over more than four decades in his Spanish bibliography. This work recovers one of the Romanian philologist article that may well be seen as his *ideal* for literary translation.

## Resumen

La labor de Alejandro Cioranescu (1911-1999) como estudioso de la Literatura Comparada se desarrolla en España desde la década de los cincuenta. Cioranescu no es sólo autor del primer manual moderno sobre Literatura Comparada escrito en español sino que su interés por los temas relativos a esta disciplina (intercambios, contactos, traducción) se mantuvo presente a lo largo de más de cuatro décadas en su bibliografía española. Este trabajo recupera un artículo del filólogo rumano que bien podría entenderse como su *ideal* para la traducción literaria.

**Keywords:** Alexandru Cioranescu. Comparative Literature. History of Translation. Literary Translation.

**Palabras clave:** Alejandro Cioranescu. Literatura Comparada. Historia de la Traducción. Traducción Literaria.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the English version of “El arte de la traducción”, según Alejandro Cioranescu” by José Francisco Ruiz Casanova. It was not published on the print version of MonTI for reasons of space. The online version of MonTI does not suffer from these limitations, and this is our way of promoting plurilingualism.

## 1. Introduction

History, specifically academic history, is not always fair and benevolent, not always generous nor loyal, sometimes, to which should be their guiding principle: the recognition of the facts and the assessment of the contributions made by those who have studied a subject.

When such studies are made from a personal intellectual framework, outside institutions (especially academic institutions), it is more than probably the work of a lifetime constitute at the end a single line of bibliography, a brief comment in a footnote or in the worst case, come to constitute a legacy that hopefully someone will recover, late or unexpectedly, in an exercise of historical claim on historical studies. If, unfortunately, this occurs, the *scientific community* can appear surprised by unknown ideas or data, by the germination of such data and ideas in other works that, in turn, obviated the quotation, or, in the worst of the cases, the plagiarism.

Our country has not been precisely cradle and shelter for comparatists. In fact, until at least the early fifties of the last century it is difficult to find examples of what can be understood by studies of comparative literature, although some publications used (and abused) of such title, in fact, to provide volumes today might be considered as panoramic manuals of universal literature<sup>2</sup>.

From the fifties, the contributions of some disciples of French comparatists schools, either in the form of translated volumes, either original works (as in the case of Cioranescu), open a perspective of analysis and study which contributed some reference works such as Guyard, Pichois and Rousseau, or Weisstein, among the main known in Spain, but not the only ones. Parallel to this, hispanic studies had been shaped a way of studies on sources and influences, both singular works on specific authors and works with a panoramic perspective: the example of model *A in B* began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the some writings of Menendez Pelayo and is extended to the present<sup>3</sup>; and same occurs with model *A and B*, probably less frequent, but with high interest in the excellent work of Joseph G. Fucilla (1953).

From all this it can be understood that the “continuity of Comparative Literature”, in the case of Spain and Spanish academic institutions, has been always committed and submitted their area of knowledge to the intersections (sometimes interferences) with other areas previously established and apparently immovable. Such was, in one of his last works, the thesis of Claudio Guillén:

En España, pese a su interés de unas individualidades muy notables, y de congresos y publicaciones, no se ha establecido la disciplina como institución autónoma en la Universidad, puesto que no ha sido aprobada por el Ministerio del ramo como área de conocimiento. Su posición es periférica y subalterna. La Literatura Comparada ha quedado adscrita a la jurisdicción de la Teoría de la Literatura y puesta en manos de los catedráticos de esta asignatura. Nos hallamos ante una aberración local, que carece de interés general, ya que se debe a condiciones

<sup>2</sup> I will quote, in this sense, the translation of Loliée's work by Hermenegildo Giner published in 1905 under the title *Historia de las Literaturas comparadas*, Madrid, Daniel Jorro editor, and the handbook of Juan F. Yela Utrilla, *Literatura española comparada con las extranjeras*, Lérida, Urriza Ed., 1928.

<sup>3</sup> On this topic I discussed in “La melancolía del orangután. El origen de los estudios A en B: Menéndez Pelayo y su *Horacio en España* (1877)”, in *Dos cuestiones de Literatura Comparada. Traducción y Poesía. Exilio y Traducción*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2011, 31-39.

anecdóticas, como el autoritarismo mal organizado del Ministerio y el oportunismo de los profesores interesados. (Guillén 2001: 103)

And if this situation was referring to the period, at least, of 1980-2000, in which the rise of comparative studies, the new avenues of research of traditional philology and the birth of the Faculties of Translation foreshadowed a more promising future, nothing more can be said about such studies for years to come.

So, returning to the thread topic, if the location of Comparative Literature has traditionally been uncomfortable for Spanish academic institutions throughout the twentieth century or, better to say, it was nonexistent, now to wonder what might be the impact, importance, or reception of a work conceived as a basic manual on Comparative Literature, written by an author not permanently connected to the University, also written in the sixties, and published by a small canary print house, to wonder the significance of such a work requires us now, as I said to make an exercise in historical claim.

## 2. Alejandro Cioranescu and his *Principios de Literatura Comparada*

The Romanian philologist and Alejandro Cioranescu (1911-1999) had a doctorate at the Sorbonne with a thesis *L'Arioste in France, des origines à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (1939), result of four years of work and which had been closely followed in its preparation by teachers of French comparative school in that time: Fernand Baldensperger (whose lectures he attended as a student), Paul Van Tieghem and Paul Hazard<sup>4</sup>. Cioranescu was added, with this monumental work, to the ancient french comparative tradition in *A in B* model, whose first study in France was *Goethe in France* (1904) by Baldensperger<sup>5</sup>. The general European political circumstances and, in particular, of his country warped his diplomatic career and his relationship with the French academic world<sup>6</sup>, so that in 1948 went on to teach French at the University of La Laguna and there, but never as full-time professor, continue until his retirement in 1979.

It is in the context of this canary university, and immersed in other multiple topics of his interest (topics ranging from the translation of Italian or French literary works, the study of classics, Spanish history and the figure of Columbus in particular, topics on canary culture or bibliographic essays<sup>7</sup>), Alejandro Cioranescu taught, in 1963, “a brief course in comparative literature” which will be the drafting of a fundamental work in literature and in comparative studies of Spanish, being the *Principios de Literatura Comparada* (1964) the first manual of introduction and theoretical analysis of the discipline In Spain, as well as approach to the research ways Comparative Literature offers to Philology<sup>8</sup>.

This is not the place to repeat the importance of this Cioranescu's book, nor to talk now about comparatism concepts formulated by his author, comments, on the other hand, discussed in detail by Voicu-Brey. My interest, here and now, is to recover some of the ideas on translation that Cioranescu reflected both in *Principios de Literatura Comparada* and in a late article eloquently titled “El Arte de la Traducción”.

<sup>4</sup> For this particular episode and the circumstances of the defense and reading of the thesis must be read pages by Lilica Voicu-Brey, *Alejandro Cioranescu. Biografía intelectual de un comarpatista*, Instituto de Estudios Canarios, La Laguna (Tenerife), 2006, especially the chapter about his stay in Paris (66-78).

<sup>5</sup> About this model and its validity and Hispanic contributions, see the work cited in footnote 2.

<sup>6</sup> L. Voicu-Brey, *op. cit.*, 79-89, describes in detail not only debugging Cioranescu policy promoted by the coming to power of the Romanian Communist Party, but also how the author's efforts to re-establish academic ties in France were unsuccessful at the time, having died two of his most loyal supporters: Hazard, in 1944, and Van Tieghem, in 1948. In its canary professional career mediate Antonio Tovar, who had met in Spain in the early thirties during some works in the Archivo of Simancas.

<sup>7</sup> For example, his *Bibliographie de la littérature française au XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1959), “admirable instrument of work for every student of French literature” in the words of Antonio Tovar.

<sup>8</sup> About the book, the circumstances of its publication, the validity of its proposal and comprehensive analysis of its content, see L. Voicu-Brey, *op. cit.*, 209-438. My contribution to such claim is a short text entitled “Alejandro Cioranescu y los orígenes de la Literatura Comparada en España” in the volume edited by Andrés Sánchez Robayna, *Alejandro Cioranescu: De la Literatura Comparada a los Estudios canarios*, Instituto de Estudios Canarios, La Laguna, 2009, 25-32 (reissued with some changes in *Dos cuestiones de Literatura Comparada. Traducción y Poesía. Exilio y Traducción*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2011, 41-49).

Let's start with *Principios de Literatura Comparada*. In this book of only 130 pages, Cioranescu use the concept of "relationship", the basis of comparative theory, in order not only to organize their study but also to talk about its possibilities. The author begins with a simple concept and builds around a whole theory of comparative literature: if "comparative literature is the study of relationships between two or more national literatures" (Cioranescu 1964: 29), the variability of nuances that the concept of "relationship" takes demands a more precise definition of comparative literature: "the study of causal relationships between two or more literatures separated by language borders" (Cioranescu 1964: 38). Therefore, following the thesis of Van Tieghem, the theoretical framework of the *principles* enunciated by Cioranescu is based on the following:

Si se toman en consideración las posibilidades que se ofrecen a la comparación literaria, se podrá establecer que ésta conoce y estudia tres clases de relaciones, que son las *relaciones de contacto*, las *relaciones de interferencia* y las *relaciones de circulación*.

The first ones answer to the classic model of "sources and influences", the second ones discusses about "the phenomenon of interpenetration and coincidence", the latest study literary characters and what is now known as thematology.

In the case of the first category of relationship, the contacts, Cioranescu draws his attention to the concept of mediation, and to accomplish this task, he uses examples on travelers and language teachers and the translators. If translators are intermediaries between two languages and two cultures, it is obvious that translation stands as one of the main ways (not the only one) for knowing and make to know *the other*.

Everything said so far may sound as a cliché, as known concepts ranging and decanting nowadays in translation studies, but we can't forget the context in which these words were written and published: Spain at the beginning of the 1960s. So, in those years, obviously, few attributed to translation a key role in shaping of national literatures, even though we counted, in Hispanic studies, with works such as Margherita Morreale's monography devoted to Boscán and his translation of Castiglione (1959). It would have to go back to work of Menéndez Pelayo to find a claim about the importance of the study of translations. Cioranescu just wrote one and a half page about this in his brief handbook, and there we can read:

El estudio de las traducciones parece el más fácilmente asequible para el investigador principiante. Nada más simple que coger una buena bibliografía nacional, la española por ejemplo, e ir fichando todas las traducciones impresas, e incluso manuscritas, de Molière. El resultado será una bibliografía de las traducciones de Molière al español, cuya utilidad es innegable. Pero debemos añadir enseguida que un trabajo de esa clase sólo merece el calificativo de comparatista por sorpresa. En realidad, incluso si va acompañado de comentarios más o menos literarios, es un simple trabajo de bibliografía; y es sabido que todos los trabajos de bibliografía son útiles, comenzando por los malos.<sup>9</sup>

Once we understand the importance (not the absolute primacy or priority) of bibliographic studies, Cioranescu is obliged to give some methodological indications in the manual, for him, the work of documentation and data collection is important, but even more the textual work, because textual, comparative, stylistic and historiographical studies on translations reveal themselves, as literary translation itself, as one of reasons of Philology:

La tarea del comparatista consiste en determinar el interés y la significación de la traducción, teniendo en cuenta su coincidencia con una moda o su oposición a la misma, el interés generalizado o la afición singular, el compromiso cultural o profesional, la congenialidad o la

<sup>9</sup> And this is what the author that he had assembled a bibliography of French literature of the sixteenth century says. It has, however, reason: it is enough if we see a catalog of research, dissertations, conference papers and contributions in the last twenty or twenty-five years to realizing that such orientation of Translation Studies (in regard to the history of translation especially literary) has been the dominant.

oposición del traductor a su autor; en analizar los procedimientos del traductor, sus conocimientos de la lengua y de ambientación en general, sus problemas y sus soluciones, su soltura y su fidelidad, su servilismo y su personalidad, la significación de los matices que añade y la explicación histórica y cultural de su enfoque y de su interpretación, en fin, estudiar en conjunto el resultado del encuentro de dos personalidades y, a través de ellas, de dos culturas diferentes, y la nueva resonancia adquirida por la obra original en su nueva forma desnacionalizada. Todo ello no es fácil, no se ha hecho a menudo con tanta amplitud de criterio; también es preciso añadir que una pauta tan completa no será igualmente útil en todos los casos.

Debe tenerse en cuenta, sin embargo, que el estudio de las traducciones es un capítulo de la literatura comparada injustamente considerado como de importancia secundaria; y que sus resultados a menudo son sumamente aleccionadores para la mentalidad artística de una época o de un país.

You can not say more in less lines. There are, in this Cioranescu’s synthesis, the most important avenues of research these and translation and its history that have been applied in Spain since the early eighties: reception, cultural comparison, the translators’ writing, their aesthetic affinities, stylistic trends and influences, the impact of translated texts in foreign literature, the question between fidelity and free style in translation... It is enough of we read what Van Tieghem had written three and a half decades before to appreciate, in its proper place, not only Cioranescu theoretical contribution in Spanish context, but their filiation to the French comparative school and his work as an intermediary between these ideas and the Spanish culture of that moment:

Quand on parle aujourd’hui de traduction, on a dans l’esprit une reproduction intégrale et aussi fidèle que possible, dans une autre langue, d’un texte donné. Il s’en faut que les traductions qui ont joué un rôle dans les échanges littéraires aient toujours répondu à cette définition. [...]

Toutes les fois qu’un auteur ou un ouvrage a été traduit dans la même langue à plusieurs reprises, la *comparaison des traductions* offre un utile champ d’étude. On suit par ce moyen, d’âge en âge, les variations du goût et les nuances de l’impression qu’a produites le même écrivain sur des générations successives. [...]

Pour s’expliquer ce que les traductions offrent de caractéristique, il est souvent besoin de connaître les *traducteurs*. Leur biographie, leur carrière littéraire, leur situation sociale, font comprendre leur rôle d’intermédiaires. [...]

Les renseignements les plus précieux nous sont donnés par leurs *préfaces*. Lues avec critique et discernement, elles nous apprennent beaucoup sur les idées propres de chacun et le système de traduction adopté, ou soi-disant adopté, par lui.<sup>10</sup> (Van Tieghem 1931:160-167)

Cioranescu’s ideas refer not only to Van Tieghem and their French masters thesis but also Menéndez Pelayo, for whom the study of translations should be one of the pillars of the establishment of a national literary history<sup>11</sup>, hence that set out in the *Principios* so succinctly, and added to this, perhaps, the experience of Cioranescu as a translator (Moréas, Dante or Mary W. Shelley, among others<sup>12</sup>), the author returned in 1990 to the subject in his article “El arte de la traducción”.

### 3. Cioranescu and “El arte de la traducción”

“El arte de la traducción”, published in 1990, is like a summary of the entire path of a

<sup>10</sup> In this sense, Marius-François Guyard writes in his book *Comparative literature* [1951: “While the study of translations is ungrateful in itself, is not without value, it teaches us something about the translators. If your personality is off, reflect and illustrate the taste of a group or an era. If powerful or at least quite original, it is understandable, considering his work, why and how the greatest writers suffer abroad, such transformations can truly say that there is not one Shakespeare, but many Shakespeares as nations and centuries in which we have tried to translate”.

<sup>11</sup> And in this sense, the words, published in 1967, of Claude Pichois and André -M. Rousseau : “ The study of a first translation belongs to the receiving literary history ” (cf. *Comparative Literature*).

<sup>12</sup> See the “Bibliography of Alexander Cioranescu” included in L. Voicu-Brey, *op. cit.*, 519-522, in what refers to translations, then revised and expanded bibliography in: L. Voicu - Brey, *Alexandru Cioranescu. Bibliografie, 1930-2010*, Targoviste, Editura Bibliotheca, 2009.

comparative fellow, the author who, in several languages (Romanian, Italian, Spanish, French or English) had formulated his ideas in different essays about what he considered central theme of Comparative Literature: literary Translation, its methods, theoretical approaches, practical and projection.

Calling the translation as a “humble service”, Cioranescu prepares the ground for the explanation of why such activity was not only despised, or neglected, by readers and literary scholars but also, and as a result of this, the translator had been the silent part of those cultural actors that no “merit” is attributed to. The first question is why “we have doubts about the translator as a writer”<sup>13</sup>:

La traducción en sí es una empresa difícil. Me pregunto si no es más difícil que escribir literatura y ser original. Escribir versos o prosa se le da a uno, o no se le da; la traducción es un escrutinio constante y un cacheo pesado de los conocimientos, de la imaginación y de la honradez intelectual. (Cioranescu 1964: 9)

Cioranescu considers therefore everything Steiner includes in his concept of pre- information, and adds to these issues which are derived from the environment and context in which the translation is performed (including, among other things, the concept of literary fashion); therefore, the translation is not only mechanical art, but necessarily a cultural art that is conscious about the context in which the resulting product is going to be integrated.

After this, our author considers much more mundane issues, such as the fact that the translation, so often determined by the editors (or their companies) has increasingly become the translator, in the worst case, in someone who “does not has an obligation to love what you are translating” (Cioranescu 1964: 10). A long tradition founded on aesthetic affinities, on love for what must be disclosed in the target culture or the texts that it is necessary to interpret and reinterpret (for example, the classics) ends subsumed by commercial reasons, fashion, deadlines, fleeting interest and the most elemental and crudest mercantilism. When this happens -and it happens in so many cases- the worth of the resulting text is just a product capable of being read, well written in the target language or not, well edited or not, well translated or not. And, as a result, Cioranescu invokes the History of Translation in order to remember that:

Los grandes traductores son siempre los que ejecutan un trabajo que les ha prendado y sueñan con llegar a la categoría de coautores [...] La naturaleza de la traducción, considerada en sí misma, es decir como un discurso literario cualquiera, no parece necesitar, pero tampoco excluye la intervención de una función creadora, en el laboratorio de su confección. (Cioranescu 1964: 11)

Hence one of the obligations of criticism, also theory, is that of drawing attention to the creative process, the elements involved in it and the worth of the result. Given this creative drive, a need of reading as literary translation is, we can't speak about extreme theories –with the shape of fatal determinism- like the impossibility of translation. It is obvious that translation can reach extreme levels, even impossibility, but it is also true that “the translation is more a desire than a necessity” (Cioranescu 1964: 11).

When Cioranescu writes about the eviction of the translation by the theory, he opens a margin for a possibility: the “secret understanding between the text and the translator” (Cioranescu 1964: 11), that escapes from any general theory. In this sense, the words of Cioranescu are close to the thesis of Paul Ricoeur (2005: 36), when he defined translation as “incomprehensible theoretically but actually practicable” or when Antoine Berman defines it as “*Culturellement parlant, elle est ethnocentrique; littérairement parlant, elle est hypertextuelle, et philosophiquement parlant, elle est platonicienne*”.

For Cioranescu (1964: 12), “a mystery in good translations” exists. This observation leads him to talk about the theme of “performativity of speech”, for him this is a distinctive feature of

<sup>13</sup> I could not agree more with Cioranescu thesis, as I wrote in my work “La escritura del traductor”, in J. F. Ruiz Casanova et al., *De Poesía y Traducción*, Madrid, Biblioteca Nueva, 2005, 7-45.

the literature and also is an alchemy or return to an original language, lost, through the form of new words. In short, translation is a performative act and, in the case of a good literary translation, the equivalent to the creative process:

El poeta sabe remontar a las fuentes y decir las cosas, no con la razón, sino con la fe y con el corazón. Nosotros no podemos sino seguirlo por estos caminos inéditos, que son en realidad los más viejos; y por esto, por habernos enseñado el camino que permite encontrarnos con nosotros mismos, estamos felices con él.

[...] Esto es también lo que esperamos de la traducción. La responsabilidad del traductor, sea cual fuese el tipo de discurso literario que está interpretando, es obligarnos a admitir la performatividad de su propio discurso. (Cioranescu 1964: 12)

Cioranescu believes in the ability, need and creativity of translator. All that is a mixed, obviously, of practice, experience, culture, use of language, work, criticism, reflection, etc., but none of all this is crucial, even if it is learned or not. Literary translation is an art, and for this reason:

Este arte no se enseña, sino que se descubre o, si no, sigue sepultado en la oscuridad de los primeros contactos con la palabra. El traductor, al igual que el poeta, sabe o, más correctamente, siente cuál es el vocablo que le conviene usar, la metáfora a la que la imaginación sigue siendo sensible, el sintagma que sugiere con mayor eficacia lo que las palabras no saben aclarar, o lo que no conviene aclarar. Todo ello viene a significar que el traductor debe ser, ante todo, escritor nato. Es una perogrullada que a menudo olvidamos. (Cioranescu 1964: 12)

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## BIONOTE / NOTA BIOGRÀFICA

Doctor en Filología Hispánica por la Universidad de Barcelona (1993) y Profesor Titular de Literatura Española e Historia de la Traducción en la Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) desde 1997. Sus campos de estudio abarcan desde la edición de textos clásicos españoles (Conde de Villamediana, Diego de San Pedro) y de autores modernos (Ángel Crespo, Jenaro Talens y Andrés Sánchez Robayna, entre otros), hasta la Teoría de la Literatura, la Historia de la Traducción y la Literatura Comparada. Es autor, asimismo de la Antología Cátedra de Poesía de las Letras Hispánicas (1998, 9ª ed.: 2012). Como ensayista, ha publicado: Aproximación a una Historia de la traducción en España (2000), El vuelo del cuervo: Lecturas de literatura española (2002), De Poesía y Traducción (2005), Anthologos: Poética de la antología poética (2007) y Dos cuestiones de Literatura Comparada: Traducción y Poesía. Exilio y Traducción (2011).

Doctor in Hispanic Philology (University of Barcelona, 1993) and Professor of Spanish Literature and History of Translation at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) since 1997. His fields of study range from the edition of classic Spanish texts (Count of Villamediana, Diego de San Pedro) and modern authors (Ángel Crespo, Jenaro Talens and Andrés Sánchez Robayna, among others) to the Theory of Literature, History of Translation and Comparative Literature. He is also the author of the Antología Cátedra de Poesía de las Letras Hispánicas (1998, 9th ed.: 2012). As an essayist, he has published: Aproximación a una Historia de la traducción en España (2000), El vuelo del cuervo: Lecturas de literatura española (2002), De Poesía y Traducción (2005), Anthologos: Poética de la antología poética (2007) and Dos cuestiones de Literatura Comparada: Traducción y Poesía. Exilio y Traducción (2011).