

# The Earliest Translations of Joyce's *Ulysses*

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## *Abstract*

The article explores Joyce's interest and active participation in the earliest translations of *Ulysses* into German, French, Spanish, Russian, Czech, Polish, Japanese, Danish, Italian, Hungarian and Portuguese, as documented in Sylvia Beach's business letters, now part of the "James Joyce Collection" in the *Poetry Collection* at the University of the State of NY at Buffalo, and in the *James Joyce-Paul Leon Papers* at the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

**Keywords:** *Ulysses*, early translations, Sylvia Beach's letters, James Joyce-Paul Leon Papers.

Sylvia Beach's decision to publish *Ulysses* in her bookshop "Shakespeare and Company" in 1922 came as a direct consequence of the censorship pressure met by the novel. This pressure and its eventual ban, both in the United States and in

United Kingdom, did not quell the interest in the literary world to read Joyce's *Ulysses*; furthermore it attracted the attention of people who wanted to read it in languages other than English and consequently of publishers and translators from different countries. The first legal ban of *Ulysses* took place in the United States in 1921, when it was still being periodically published in *The Little Review*; the ban was finally lifted by Judge John Woolsey's resolution in 1933. In the United Kingdom, the ban and prosecution was personally carried out by the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP); here too its distribution and publication was finally allowed in 1936, which was followed by the lifting of the ban in the rest of the English speaking world, where it had also been prohibited, except in Ireland where *Ulysses* was not banned.<sup>2</sup> Nor had *Ulysses* been included in the Vatican's list of Prohibited Books, the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.

As publisher of *Ulysses*, Beach became the main referent to would-be publishers from other languages and countries to all matters related to the possible translation of the book. According to the stipulations stated in the contract signed between Joyce and Beach on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, 1922, Joyce agreed that Beach would retain the exclusive worldwide printing and selling rights for *Ulysses*. Subsequently, Beach agreed in three further stipulations also included in the contract that she would pay Joyce twenty-five percent of the published price of all copies sold.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Sylvia Beach was to receive the majority of the correspondence from different publishers interested in translating *Ulysses* into different languages during the years that followed its publication. Fortunately, she kept a record of this correspondence that allows us to analyze the diverse documents related to this topic; one has to admire her accurate and detailed compilation of everything related to her bookshop business and to *Ulysses* in particular.<sup>4</sup>

During the years that followed its publication, *Ulysses* was first to be translated into German in 1927, a language Joyce said his mother wanted him to study. He did indeed study German when in Dublin to be able to translate Ibsen's disciple Gerhart Hauptmann in 1901, and also when he was in Poland in 1904, where it was the official language. Joyce wanted to be deeply involved in the translation of *Ulysses* before it was published, but he was unable to do so. He had the opportunity to meet the translator, Georg Goyet, in Paris, yet they revised only eighty-eight pages of the entire typescript. A new meeting was set, but never took place. As a consequence, in a letter to H. S. Weaver on 8 November 1926, Joyce criticized this would-be first German translation, writing that the publishing firm, Rhein-Verlag, was too eager to print it and that they would not allow the translator to meet him before its final publication. He added that he had told the publisher he would openly repudiate this edition for this reason.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, after the first German edition of *Ulysses* was published in three volumes, a new revised edition of this translation commenced and was published in 1930.

The German translation was followed by the publication of one into French in 1929. Joyce put much personal interest in this venture and was going to follow with interest the development of the editorial negotiations to translate it and the resulting editions. The different translators into French started to work on it four years before the German edition. In 1923 Valery Larbaud undertook the translation of certain sections at Joyce's request, but it was discarded by Joyce, who said that he [Larbaud] would make of *Ulysses* a "motilé de guerre" ("a disabled serviceman").<sup>6</sup>

In the French translation, there is Joyce's direct input, as well as that of other well-known Joycean scholars such as Stuart Gilbert and Larbaud, even if the main task was performed by Auguste Morel. Before it appeared in book form, some fragments were published in a review, *Commerce*. In the meantime, there were disagreements among those behind the

translation, including editors and translators. The collaborators in the French translation were stated in the title: *Ulysse. Traduit de l'anglais par M. Auguste Morel, assisté par M. Stuart Gilbert. Traduction entièrement revue par M. Valery Larbaud avec la collaboration de l'auteur.* It was first published in February 1929 by Adrienne Monnier, six years after the first mentioned attempt by Larbaud. In a letter to H.S. Weaver, 18 March 1930, Joyce informed her about the second German and French editions,<sup>7</sup> and in the same letter he added with enthusiasm that “the Polish and Czech translations have been arranged” (349).

We can appreciate in Joyce's letter to Weaver the interest shown in the Czech and Polish translations of *Ulysses* in those first years after its publication. We know that the negotiations to publish it in those languages were advancing satisfactorily. In the Poetry Collection at SUNY Buffalo, in Section XVIII,<sup>8</sup> Miscellaneous Material Related to Joyce's Works, Folder 45, there is a handwritten note by Beach stating the different quantities paid by the Polish and Czech (“Tchechoslovaque” in the text) publishers. According to this note, the total amount paid from April 12, 1928, up to June 5, 1931, was 14,669.90 francs. In other Sections, XII and XIII, different letters belonging to the correspondence maintained between Sylvia Beach and Vaclav Petr in Prague, Czechoslovakia can be read on this same subject,

Chronologically, the next nation that expressed interest in translating *Ulysses* was Spain. But before we refer to the correspondence to obtain the translation rights, let us mention a first attempt to translate by two relevant Spanish writers and critics, Jorge Luis Borges and Antonio de Marichalar. Both published passages from *Ulysses* into Spanish as early as 1924. The best known is Borges, who claimed that he was the first Hispanic to have translated into Spanish part of Joyce's *Ulysses* with his translation of the last page of “Penelope” – a claim that has to be rightly endorsed to Marichalar, a pioneer of

the reception of Joyce's novel in Spain with his seminal article, "James Joyce en su laberinto."<sup>9</sup> In another official language in Spain, Galician, spoken in that Celtic northwest region of the country, there was also an early translation of several passages of *Ulysses* by Ramón Otero Pedrayo, which were published in 1926 in the Galician journal *Nos*.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the rights to translate into Spanish the entire novel, the first recognized letter we have found is dated on 16th April 1931; it was sent from Madrid to Sylvia Beach by Antonio de Marichalar on a page headed with his name and personal address. After referring to other topics, Marichalar states in the letter, which is written in French, that he had spoken with the possible translator of the novel, Señora Ocampo, who he said was just going to take the decision to carry out its translation; then he exclaimed, "J'amarais tant l'avoir en espagnol!" The letter ends offering his best wishes and friendship to Adrienne and Sylvia.<sup>11</sup>

Some time later, after this first reference to a possible translation into Spanish of *Ulysses*, at the end of 1932 on 27th December, the Editorial Zeus of Madrid sent a letter written in Spanish to the Odyssey Press of Paris asking for the translation rights to publish *Ulysses* in Spanish. On 2 January 1933, the Secretary of the Odyssey Press sent this letter together with its translation to James Joyce because, as is explained in a short note accompanying it, they do not hold Spanish translation rights for *Ulysses*. Shortly afterwards on 11th and 20th January 1933, there were two more letters sent from Madrid by Olga Bauer asking about the translation rights for *Ulysses*. These letters are now deposited in the "James Joyce Paul Leon Papers" at the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.<sup>12</sup> Paul Leon answered her in French, and in his letter he addresses her as "Olga Alexandrovna." He wrote that he had no experience with Spanish editors but, he added, he mistrusted them because ("j'en entends dire") the books printed there are also sent to the South American market where they are terribly plagiarized. Therefore he suggested that she establish an amount and fix a

date of payment (Leon also offers Olga five percent of the whole amount paid). In her answer Olga recommends the publishing firm "Editions Zeus" and mentions the possibility of making an edition of three thousands books. Furthermore, she proposed as a possible translator one of the members of its editorial board, and then she added that it was possible to get Dámaso Alonso as a translator, as he had already translated *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. However, in spite of the interest shown by both parties in a Spanish translation of *Ulysses*, it was not accomplished at that time.

Before it was first published in 1945,<sup>13</sup> there were two further attempts to translate *Ulysses* into Spanish. One was on October 27th 1936, when Paul Leon made a suggestion to translate *Ulysses* to a publishing house in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which had already translated other books by Joyce; Leon even offered ideas to carry it out, but once more there were no positive results. The final endeavour to translate into Spanish in those early years occurred two years later when, between May and October 1938, several letters were sent to Paul Leon by a literary agency in Paris, J. Stork, Storkama, on behalf of a Spanish editor. After eight letters were exchanged during these new negotiations to obtain the translation rights to publish *Ulysses* in Spanish, they did not reach a final agreement; the reason was the disagreement over the total amount to be paid for the translation rights.<sup>14</sup>

An interesting attempt was the one made to translate *Ulysses* into Russian carried out by the well-known writer Vladimir Nabokov. In the James Joyce and Paul Leon Papers in the National Library of Ireland, there are three letters addressed to Joyce and Paul Leon by Nabokov. Sent between 9 November 1933 and 6 January 1934, they are written in English and in Russian. In his first letter he wrote that he has been invited to translate "your *Ulysses*" into Russian and he wanted to have Joyce's backing before accepting its translation; then Nabokov added "I am a great admirer of your

work and thus should be happy to undertake this translation ... the Russian language can be made to convey in a most subtle way the musical peculiarities and intricacies of the original.”

Definitely, this is a fine description of the novel by an important contemporary novelist who some years later dedicated a chapter of his book *Lectures on Literature* to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Here he also remarked that the Russian language was relatively poor on abstract terms.

A completely different situation was the problem posed by the Japanese translation of *Ulysses*. The first Japanese pirated<sup>15</sup> edition was published in February 1932. There is much information about this pirated edition, both in the Sylvia Beach collection at SUNY Buffalo<sup>16</sup> and in The James Joyce Paul Leon Papers at Dublin, which include more than twenty letters with attachments from 1932 till 1934. At Buffalo we can see business cards and envelopes from the Japanese translators and different Japanese people, which have notations in Beach's hand. The three Japanese translators agreed after much pressure to pay two 200 yen, (about 5 francs, according to Sylvia Beach), even though Joyce demanded a higher amount. In fact, they sent Beach a cheque for the above amount and asked her for authorization to continue the translation of a new volume of *Ulysses*. Joyce and his friends were outraged and sent letters to several Japanese people they knew, to different legal advisers, and to the British Consul in Tokyo to ask for a lawyer to defend Joyce's rights there and start negotiations to settle the situation.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps a short reference for a better understanding of the legal situation is to refer to just two of those letters. One was sent, 21 May 1932, to Sylvia Beach by Yoshisaburo Okakura, a friend in Tokyo. He informed Beach that according to Japanese law, the publication of translated books was free after a period of ten years had passed since the original had first been published. In her answer to this letter, she stated that Japan signed the Berne Convention (BC) and was therefore legally bound to grant the same rights to all the authors of the

signatory countries. She also clarified that the ten year time period in Japanese law relating to the BC applied only to books published in United Kingdom, and *Ulysses* was published in France. The second letter to be referred to is the one sent by

Joyce's legal adviser in Tokyo, John Gadsby, Barrister at Law, who in a letter-report to Paul Leon, 30 December 1933, informed him that "I feel bound to tell you that in my opinion the Japanese Court would not award substantial damages and that in Japan litigants have to pay their own costs however successful they may be." He suggested accepting the amount of 500 yen, including the 200 already sent to Beach on the part of the three translators, or to refuse on the grounds that Joyce considered it prejudicial to his dignity. The lawyer added that if the decision to pursue the matter was to be taken, then "I must ask you to place the matter in the hands of another lawyer ... In my opinion, it will not result in any profit to anyone except the lawyer who takes them." He closes the correspondence by asking for money: "For my services, 100 yen in spite of the time spent on this matter."<sup>18</sup>

The translation into Danish was a failure due to the high amount asked for copyright permission. Joyce himself, when visiting Copenhagen, first suggested to Johanne Kastor Hansen to consider its translation into Danish. The negotiation started in a letter sent by Hansen to Paul Leon on 25 August 1936. Reading the letters, fourteen in total, one may appreciate how the language of the correspondence was deferential and polite on the part of the Danish, compared with Leon's somewhat brusque businesslike language approach. The first amount offered by Paul Leon to grant permission for its translation was two hundred pounds sterling; Leon added that film and dramatization rights were excluded as usual. After negotiation the Danish agreed to pay one hundred and fifty dollars, the amount they thought was proposed by Leon, who in a new letter told them that the offer was one hundred and fifty pounds, not one hundred and fifty dollars. The final letter from



Denmark by E. Winther, 31 December 1936, was to inform Leon that they had given up the idea of the translation: “a certain small loss might be lived down but a certain big one nobody is justified in undertaking with their eyes open, not even for *Ulysses*.”

To finish, let us turn to a few references to other attempts made during those earliest years to translate *Ulysses* into different European languages. Chronologically, among the correspondence documented in the James Joyce-Paul Leon Papers, there is a short reference to Augusto Foa from Milan, to whom Paul Leon sends a copy of the novel to translate into Italian on 23 January 1933. There is another letter from Budapest sent to Joyce by Nova, who wanted the rights to translate *Ulysses* into Hungarian. Finally, there is also a handwritten letter, dated 4 April 1938, sent from Lisbon to Joyce by A. Salema, asking permission to translate *Ulysses* into Portuguese; he proposed to publish it first periodically in a journal and afterwards in a volume.

Regarding recent translations, it is worth referring to the two translations of *Ulysses* into Chinese because of its difficulty and the problems connected with authorship. One translation is by Wen Jieruo and his wife Xiao Qian, and the other by Jin Di. These translations provoked a well-known charge of plagiarism by the author of the second version against the author of the first, which has been echoed in different journals.<sup>19</sup> Finally, to know more about the most recent translations into the European languages of Albanian, Bulgarian, Catalan, French, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian and Spanish, a special issue of *Papers on Joyce* dedicated to these translations has been published.<sup>20</sup> In the issue the authors of these translations write about their experience when translating *Ulysses* into their respective languages and a personal point of view is used when they comment on their difficulties and satisfactions.

Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I'll document the earliest approaches to translating it. Among the manuscripts I have studied are Sylvia Beach's business letters related to the earliest translations of *Ulysses*, now part of the "James Joyce Collection" in the *Poetry Collection* at the University of the State of NY at Buffalo, and the *James Joyce Paul Leon Papers* at the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> In Ireland there was at the time a *Register of Prohibited Publication* and regulation: *Censorship of Publications Act, 1929*, "An Act to make provision for the prohibition of the sale and distribution of unwholesome literature and for that purpose to provide for the establishment of a censorship of books and periodical publications." [16<sup>th</sup> July, 1929.]

<sup>3</sup> *The Poetry Collection*, SUNY at Buffalo. "James Joyce Collection." Section XVIII. Miscellaneous Material Related to Joyce's Works. E2. Folder 44. Contract for *Ulysses*.

<sup>4</sup> See Sylvia Beach at the *Poetic Collection* at SUNY, Buffalo.

<sup>5</sup> "The Rheinverlag want to rush out next month with a translation of which I verified 88 pages. They decline to let the translator to come here. I informed them that the German Literary press would be circularised with a disclaimer if they did. Now [I] am waiting." Stuart Gilbert, ed., *Letters of James Joyce* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957) 246-247.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: OUP, 1982) 562.

<sup>7</sup> "The second German edition of *Ulysses* came out and the third is to come out in June. The second French edition came out and the publisher appears to be quite happy about it". R. Ellmann, ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) 348.

<sup>8</sup> The manuscripts in the James Joyce Catalog in the Poetry Collection at Sunny Buffalo, are arranged in XXII different sections.

<sup>9</sup> See Gayle Rogers "James Joyce in his Labyrinth" *PMLA* 124.3 (2009): 926-938.

<sup>10</sup> "James Joyce, Fragmentos do *Ulises*," Trad. de Ramón Otero Pedrayo, *Nós* 32 (A Coruña, 15-agosto-1926): 3-11. See also De Toro Santos, Antonio Raúl, "La huella de Joyce en Galicia," in *Joyce en España I*, eds. Francisco García Tortosa and Antonio Raúl de Toro Santos (A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, 1994) 31-37.

<sup>11</sup> University at Buffalo. "James Joyce Collection." XIII Correspondence to Beach and Shakespeare and Company: From Antonio

Marichalar to Beach and Antonio Marichalar and Carmen Yebes to Beach. Madrid 16-4-31.

<sup>12</sup> This collection includes manuscripts compiled from 1930 till 1941. It is a period of great activity of Joyce. These documents were personally given by Paul Leon to the Irish Ambassador in Paris, Count O' Kelly, with the recommendation that if something were to happen to him or Joyce, they were to be given to the National Library of Ireland. He added the condition that in the event of their deaths, the documents should remain closed during the subsequent 50 years.

<sup>13</sup> The three existing Spanish translations in the market are the ones by José Sala Subirat, published in Argentina in 1945, and two others published in Spain by José María Valverde, 1976, and Francisco García Tortosa and Maria Luisa Venegas, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> See "Business correspondence," James Joyce-Paul Leon Papers in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>15</sup> Not related to translation but with the piracy of *Ulysses*, in the United States we have the case of Samuel Roth, and the well known protest signed by 167 authors in Paris, 2 February 1927.

<sup>16</sup> In the James Joyce Sylvia Beach Collections we can find information on this subject in Sections XI, XII, XIII. Folder 38C.

<sup>17</sup> Copies of these letters can be seen in *The James Joyce Paul Leon Collection* at National Library of Ireland, Dublin, and in the James Joyce Collection at SUNY at Buffalo.

<sup>18</sup> Business correspondence. The "James Joyce-Paul Leon Papers" at National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>19</sup> See *Time Magazine*, August 19, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> *Paper on Joyce* 14 (2008) published by the Spanish James Joyce Society. See also in the same issue by Ruth Frehner, "From *Aulas* to *Yurishiisu: Ulysses* in translation at the Zürich Joyce Foundation," 137-149, who offers an exhaustive bibliography of translations into different languages of the world.