

CENSORING POETICS THROUGH TRANSLATION: THE FILTERED RECEPTION OF SYLVIA PLATH IN FRANCO'S SPAIN

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ABSTRACT: In this article I analyze Sylvia Plath's reception in Spain during the Francoist dictatorship. Considering the feminist features that the author and her *oeuvre* present, I examine the conclusions drawn by the Censorship Board when the Spanish publishing houses requested to issue Plath's works in translation. The censorship and import files stored at the General Archive of the Administration in Madrid confirm that several publishers repeatedly applied for permission to translate her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, into Spanish and Catalan from 1967 to 1982; a Spanish compilation of her poems in 1974; and to import her famous poetry collection, *Ariel*, in 1968. Nevertheless, the censors' notes and verdicts reveal that her literary depth was neither admired nor understood by the ones who authorized, censored, or rejected the different editions of her work.

KEYWORDS: Literary Translation, Censorship, Francoism, Sylvia Plath, Archival Research

1. Introduction

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) is a controversial and widely recognized writer who was posthumously turned into a feminist icon, becoming "one of the leading figures in twentieth-century literature and culture" (Gill, 2008, p. ix). According to most critics, her life and *oeuvre* are closely linked. In A. Alvarez's words: "[Plath made] poetry and death inseparable. The one could not exist without the other" ("Sylvia Plath"). Her only novel, *The Bell Jar* (first published in 1963), is a semiautobiographical work that narrates the experiences of a young female writer in a world in which it is hard for the protagonist to belong and reach a fulfilling personal life and career. Through her protagonist, Sylvia Plath reveals a strong aversion to the customary mid-twentieth-century women's role and explores other controversial topics related to personal liberation and female sexuality. Similar themes can also be found in her poetry, which usually reflect her deepest worries, thoughts, and traumas. David Holbrook (1998) has argued how the author's inner struggles gave birth to a very intimate and complex confessional poetry, in which Plath's own bipolar disorder assumes an important poetic role, making her works extremely unique.¹ Arguably her most popular piece, *Ariel* (1965) was published two years after her death and turned her into a feminist icon of twentieth-century English literature.

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¹ From a psychological approach, David Holbrook (1988, p. 55, emphasis in the original) points out in *Sylvia Plath: Poetry and Existence* that: "From everything her poetry tells of the experience of mental illness and conventional psychiatry, one gains a disturbing sense that 'treatment', based as it is felt to be on *doing* and *impingement* itself, is felt to be based on *hate*". He also explains that "Sylvia Plath's poems are a combination of vision and nightmare ... Plath often manages to combine both dreams and nightmare in her poems ..." (Holbrook, p. 123). For a deeper biographical understanding of Sylvia Plath, also see Anne Stevenson (1989) and Paul Alexander (1991).

Some years after Susan Bassnett's and André Lefevere's ground-breaking volume *Translation, History and Culture* (1990) marked the "cultural turn" in Translation Studies, the first author – a famous name in Translation Studies – published *Sylvia Plath, an Introduction to the Poetry* (2005). Although academically these are certainly two very different pieces, they share a common denominator within this paper. Talking about Sylvia Plath is to talk about language and the translation of the self.² What happens then when we add the layer of a foreign language and a foreign culture to Plath's literary pieces? I believe that in light of the controversial reception that Plath had worldwide, it is interesting to study how her works were received and translated in Spain during the Francoist dictatorship (1939-1975). The reception of her *oeuvre*, which Bassnett (2005, p. 1) describes as being focused on the struggle to live up to the "impossible ideals of womanliness [and] conform to social expectations", will provide an insight into the content that the Francoist censors viewed as appropriate for consumption by Spain's readership and, possibly, their own ideals of womanliness and the social expectations that follow.

Thus, taking as a starting point the notably feminist stance of Sylvia Plath's texts, I will study the reception of her translated works in Francoist Spain with the purpose of determining whether they were affected, expurgated, or remained unaltered by the official printing law.³ Two possible scenarios were anticipated prior to the archival analysis. The first was that Plath's works would not have been welcomed by the Spanish censorial institution: she was already regarded as a consummate proto-feminist writer worldwide by the time the Spanish and Catalan attempts to publish her works were submitted for approval at the censorship board in Madrid. Considering that the censorship measures enforced during the dictatorship were notoriously severe on works perceived to be attacking public morals, the Church or the regime, we might expect that Plath's works would have been expurgated or even rejected outright for publication. The second conceivable scenario was that Plath's works could have been authorized in spite of their characteristics, particularly when one takes into account the increasing flexibility of the system in the sixties due to the passing of the Press Law in 1966, which aimed to liberalize the country (Cornellà-Detrell, 2013, p. 132).

The study of censorship and its effects on translation sheds light on the historical context in which the rewriting was carried out and, by extension, on the culture and ideology of the period. For that reason, the case of Spain during Franco's dictatorship is presented as an ideal context in which to investigate issues such as the manipulation of literature through censorship and patronage, since the cultural production of the country was contingent upon the institutions of the regime. In order to delve deeper into the reception of Sylvia Plath in Spain during the last stage of Franco's regime and determine whether her works were censored or not, I will analyze the archival materials related to the

² As Bassnett (2005, p. 25) puts it, "the feeling [in her works] is very much that of an authentic voice; not because she wrote about her life in the narrow sense, certainly not because she structured her experience, but because she was writing within her life, as part of it."

³ The *Ley de Prensa e Imprenta* was passed in 1966 and remained in force until the end of the dictatorship.

author. The files, stored in the *Fondo de cultura, expedientes de censura de libros/expedientes de importación de libros* [Collection of culture, censorship files for books/importation files for books] at Archivo General de la Administración [General Archive of the Administration] in Madrid, are organized by catalogue number and consist of the official application filed by the publishing houses that applied to publish or import a book, the corresponding comments of the “readers” in charge of determining whether the book represented a danger under the codes of the regime, and the final report where censors authorized or rejected the work. For comparative purposes, I also study the catalogue of the Spanish National Library as a record of all the books that were imported into Spain or printed locally between 1960 and 1980. Hence, in this paper I will address how the censors judged Sylvia Plath’s novel and poems, and whether they allowed any translation of her writings to circulate in Spain.

2. Censorship under Franco

Compelling research by Francesca Billiani (2007), Teresa Seruya and Maria Lin Moniz (2008), Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and David Parris (2009), Catherine O’Leary and Alberto Lázaro (2011), and Pilar Godayol and Annarita Taronna (2018), reveals the outreach of censorship in different countries, cultures, and times. As far as the Francoist regime is concerned, these predominantly targeted topics related to political standards, that is to say “obligatory respect for the system and the ideological principles of Francoism”, and Catholic dogma: “the subjection to a conservative Catholic moral code” (Godayol, 2018, p. 104). Hence, the following set of questions would be used to determine whether literary texts should be expurgated or banned for publication entirely:

– Does [the work] attack Catholic dogma? – Morals? – The Church and its Ministers? – The Regime and its Institutions? – The persons who have collaborated with it? – Do the censurable passages designate the whole content of the book? – Other observations. (Lázaro, 2004, p. 27, my translation)

Consequently, many literary works had to wait until the downfall of the regime to be published in Spain, and the translations that did circulate were, to some extent, self-censored.⁴ For that reason, approaching this historical period through the lens of literary translation and reception studies has become, according to Jordi Cornellà-Detrell (2013, p. 129), a “growing area of study that during the last three decades has offered valuable insights into the regime’s determination to oversee and control publishing practices”. Like Cornellà-Detrell, Pintado and Castillos (2019, p. 7) have emphasized that “research into this aspect of Spanish culture, which is taking place at the intersection of the young disciplines of translation, conflict, and memory studies, is still relatively scant”. Indeed, a quick visit to the archives reveals that there is a large volume of censorship files awaiting examination,

⁴ Although the studies that analyze the reception and censorship of foreign authors in Spain under Franco are varied, this trend can be observed in the majority of them. See, for instance, Rabadán (2000), Lázaro (2004), Gómez (2006), Seruya and Moniz (2008), Morales (2010), Godayol and Taronna (2018), and Monzón (2020).

and many questions to be asked regarding the circulation of literature via translation in Spain under Franco.

Franco's dictatorship started when General Francisco Franco was proclaimed "Head of the Spanish Government and the Highest General of the Spanish Armed Forces" (Rioja, 2010, p. 2, my translation) on 29 September 1936, and concluded with his death on 20 November, 1975. As regards the ideological basis of the system, Franco's dictatorship was founded on strong anti-communist and anti-liberal policies, national Catholicism, traditionalism, and militarism (Rioja, p. 3). Although a form of censorship had already been instituted before the end of the civil war that brought Franco to power, the Press Law that solidified censorship policies and was to take charge of spreading the doctrine of the Movement was formally promulgated on 22 April, 1938 (Lázaro, 2004, pp. 22-24). Eduardo Ruiz Bautista (2008) identifies three phases of literary censorship during the Francoist dictatorship: First Francoism (1936-1945), Second Francoism (1945-1966), and Third Francoism (1966-1976). The Third Francoism, which coincides with the initial reception of Sylvia Plath's work in Spain, is known as the *apertura* (opening-up) period, when the regime attempted to embrace certain openness in terms of policy, economy, and culture. Cornellà-Detrell (2013, p. 132) describes how the literary and translation systems were being shaped in relation to the previous stages of the regime: "(...) there were no numerous originals awaiting publication, and this explains why the cultural awakening relied heavily on imported texts (...) The paradox (...) is that this could only be achieved by adapting massive amounts of foreign works".

According to Marta Rioja (2010), this ultimate need for flexibility was equally reflected in the censorship system: the establishment of a new law, *Ley de prensa e imprenta*, passed on 18 March 1966 (see BOE-19-III-66)⁵ by Manuel Fraga Iribarne, the new minister of Information and Tourism. The passing of this law was a turning point in the dictatorship, given that it introduced significant reforms regarding rights such as "freedom of expression by means of forms", "freedom of companies", and one related to "publishing houses" (Press Law, art. 1, 16, 50). Consequently, the amount of translated and imported literature increased during the final years of the dictatorship. In addition, the so-called "prior permission" requirement, previously mandatory, that was established during the first years of Francoism for any book to be published, mutated into a process known as *consulta voluntaria* (voluntary application).⁶ However, this measure was contradictory, since publishing houses "were required to deposit all titles with the censors prior to

⁵ BOE, Boletín Oficial del Estado [Official State Gazette], is the official publication of the Spanish government.

⁶ The first official board, established to deal with censorship, was *Delegación de Estado para Prensa y Propaganda*, founded on 14th January 1937. During the "prior permission" phase, publishing houses sent the book in question to the department. Once there, the descriptive data of the book was included in a file together with a censor's report judging the content. Then a final resolution was attached and ultimately sent back to the publishing house. Afterwards, in January 1938, the National Propaganda Service was created and led by Dionisio Ridruejo, being in charge of all media with the exception of the press. The group of censors was constituted by "sometimes renowned writers ... sometimes intellectual scholars ... some well-known ecclesiastical censors ... or basically civil servants, who were often members of FET-JONS" (Andrés, 2012, p. 18, my translation).

distribution”, and the dynamic remained practically the same: readers examined the book in question and determined whether it could be published or not. What is more, these new guidelines meant that books that had not been presented for voluntary application could be sequestered by the censors which, on occasion, resulted in “administrative silence” (Linder, 2004, p. 159). Thus, a measure that was supposedly designed to open up the Spanish cultural panorama actually made publishers, editors, and censors “far more rigorous than ever before, censoring what they would have approved in previous years” (Pegenaute, 1999, p. 90). This perhaps forced translators to perform a less subtle form of self-censorship.

3. From *the Bell Jar* to *La Campana de Cristal*

The Bell Jar (*TBJ* henceforth) was first published by William Heinemann Limited in London, in 1963, under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas. Middlebrook explains how after her tragic death, Plath’s novel:

(...) was marketable on both sides of the Atlantic. As a consequence of this flurry, Plath’s British publisher, Faber, brought out a new edition of *The Bell Jar* in September 1966, identifying the author as Sylvia Plath for the first time; between 1966 and 1977, Faber sold over 140,000 copies of *The Bell Jar* in hardback and paperback editions. (cited in Gill, 2008, p. 74)

TBJ is Plath’s sole novel, although in terms of prose, her *oeuvre* also includes several short stories and her own journal. After her death, the novel was published in the United States in 1971 (edited by Harper & Row), where it became a resounding success, immediately selling eighty thousand copies and turning Plath into a feminist icon.⁷ For many critics, *TBJ* presents a clear “relationship between Plath’s own life and experience – specifically her time as an intern at *Mademoiselle* magazine in the summer of 1953, her suicide attempt and her hospitalisation – and the plot of the novel” (Gill, 2008, p. 75). Due to the many parallelisms between the story and Plath’s own life, the novel can be read as a semiautobiographical work in which Esther Greenwood becomes Plath’s *alter ego*, and goes to New York City for a one-month internship in an important magazine after having being awarded a grant before attending university.

Briefly explained, *TBJ* narrates how arduous it is for a young woman with uncommon values and goals to fulfil the feminine role and ideals imposed by a patriarchal society in Cold War America.⁸ Throughout the novel, there are innuendos related to sexual liberation and sexual repression. Correspondingly, the novel depicts the protagonist’s obsession with losing her virginity, her pursuit of a female identity and social acceptance, attempted rape,

⁷ It was not until after her death in 1963, that Plath started to gradually gain “an almost mythical status, inspiring dozens of biographies, critical studies, memories, performances and even, by 2003, a Hollywood film about her life” (Bassnett, 2005, p. 1).

⁸ “Esther seems separated from the world around her, separated from others (again and again, she returns to her difference from the other guest editors, other college girls, other family members, other mental patients), and crucially, separated from herself” (Gill, 2008, p. 78).

the presence of a lesbian character, the promiscuous fellow she admires, and the recurring image of a traditional ex-boyfriend represented as a ghost from which she cannot escape. Soon Esther becomes conscious that her enormous ambition to succeed as a writer is abandoning her, and discovers, through the metaphor of the fig and the tree, the uncomfortable dilemma of being a renowned poet while balancing a family and a personal life.⁹ After leaving New York disappointed and depressed, she returns to her town, where, within days, she unsuccessfully tries to kill herself. On her mother's insistence, Esther is confined to a mental institution because of a manic-depression disorder.

Before presenting all the dates and information pertaining to the reception of *TBJ* in mid-twentieth-century Spain, we should explain the difference between the material collected at the General Archive of the Administration in Madrid: censorship files and import files. Under Francoism, censorship files contained information about the publishers' requests to translate, edit, and print a book in national territory. In contrast, the so-called import files recorded applications by Spanish publishers to import books that had been published elsewhere (usually with the aim of translating them into either Spanish or Catalan). In the case of imported works already translated into Spanish in the Americas, the censors determined whether such works needed further censorship or were ready to be circulated as they were. In the case of *TBJ*, both kinds of requests were made simultaneously by several publishing houses.

The first indication of the reception of *TBJ* in Spain can be traced back to 1967, a year after the novel's publication in London under Sylvia Plath's name. On 16 October, the publishing house Aguilar requested permission to import three copies of the Faber & Faber edition of 1966. This application was authorized on 20 October, 1967 (File 1315-67, no. 66/06485). According to the censorship files on *TBJ* located in the archive, the first attempt to publish a translation of the novel took place on 1 July, 1968 – almost a year after the original novel had been imported – when publisher Seix Barral applied for permission to publish the book in Spanish under the tentative title of *La campana de cristal* (File 5741-68, no. 21/19007). This file contained several reports that had been submitted prior to the final decision. Yet, as there were no fixed criteria for the censors to follow in the process of judging whether a book should be published or not (save the set of questions outlined in the first stage of the regime), the reports filed by the various censors show very different approaches to the novel. For instance, in Report I (6 July, 1968), Reader 35 agrees to the novel being published: "We have found no inconvenience, but we consider that page 174 should be erased due to obvious reasons. Once this suppression is made, the novel may be published" (File 5741-68).¹⁰ However, in Report II (9 July, 1968), Reader 21 writes a somewhat less sympathetic review:

⁹ In *TBJ*, the fig metaphor "represents Esther's paralysis when faced with a multitude of unreachable and indistinguishable opportunities ... [and] plays a crucial role in the narrative" (Gill, 2008, p. 76).

¹⁰ All quotations of the information taken from the import and censorship files presented in this article are my translation.

Despite the character of the editorial and the sexual adventures of the main character in New York, the novel does not present any objection to be taken into consideration. The allusion to the adventures mentioned is brief enough or has no importance. The only thing that may deserve to be suppressed or softened is the comparison to the Pope and the judgement of catholic priests among the selected passages (p. 174), although such sentences are not really important. (File 5741-68)

With regards to the content, both censors seemed determined to erase the mysterious page 174 of the original text from the future Spanish version of the novel. This contained the following passage crossed-out in red ink:

Lately I had considered going into the Catholic Church myself. I knew that Catholics thought killing yourself was an awful sin. But perhaps, if this was so, they might have a good way to persuade me out of it. Of course, I didn't believe in life after death or the virgin birth or the Inquisition or the infallibility of that little monkey-faced Pope or anything, but I didn't have to let the priest see this, I could just concentrate on my sin, and he would help me repent. (Plath, 1966, p. 174)

In addition to the different approaches the censors took to the novel, the reports also point out that the reviews were often rather poor and misleading, as is the case of the summary given by the Reader 21 in Report II, where he/she confuses the period of the internship that the main character is undertaking in the novel, which in fact takes place over a summer:

The novel does not say much. The theme or situation is very hackneyed: the emotional shock experienced by a countrywoman in the big city, and its consequences. In this case, the novel narrates the story of a girl writer who wins an award *for a year-long position in a national journal in New York*. The psychological shock occurs, and she needs to go to a psychiatrist clinic... (File 5741-68, emphasis added)

Finally, Seix Barral was informed on 13 July, 1968, that the novel would be rejected outright for publication in Spanish, unless the problematic passage was deleted: "The presentation of the translated text may be advisable in order to proceed with, if deemed necessary, the opportune amendments" (File 5741-68). There is no evidence in the files of any further application from Seix Barral involving a draft of the translation with the requested amendments. This may either be a case of administrative silence, or may indicate that the publishing house was unwilling to carry out a translation with the mandatory deletions. In any case, no Spanish-made translation of Plath's novel was published in the sixties, and only three copies of the original work managed to make it into the country unscathed.

The next request was presented on February 3, 1972, by the publishing house Nova Terra, in an attempt to publish the novel in Catalan, under the tentative title: *Toc de campana* [File 10-72, no. 73/07928]. However, the application was firmly rejected on grounds of immorality, which is very curious considering that four years had passed since the first application by Seix Barral (which had not been so severely judged), and that the novel was already becoming a big success in the United States and worldwide. As with the

previous application, the two reports on Nova Terra's request are contradictory. In Report I, the censor writes: "in my opinion, having erased what has been crossed out in page 241, the book may be thoroughly authorized." The excerpt highlighted by the censor narrates the scene in which the protagonist is having sexual intercourse for the first time, and describes her reaction after such an event: "A warm liquid was seeping out between my legs. Tentatively, I reached down and touched it. When I held my hand up to the light streaming in from the bathroom, my fingertips looked black" (Plath, 1966, p. 241). Report II, however, takes a more severe attitude:

Simply deplorable. The scenes, without touching pornography, are really hard. The scene about losing virginity (page 236 and followings) and the subsequent haemorrhage is described in detail. But worst of all is the moral aspect. In this sense the book cannot be more pernicious. It is proposed for rejection (File 10-72).

As a result, the Catalan translation was dropped.

Only two months later, on 14 April 1972, the publishers Atheneum and Seix Barral requested permission to again import the original novel (File 434-72, no. 66/06532). In that year, Atheneum imported sixty-seven copies, and all of them were authorized. Months later, Seix Barral – the publishing house that in 1968 had unsuccessfully applied for authorization to translate *TBJ* into Spanish before any other South American publisher had translated it – obtained permission to import one thousand copies of a Spanish translation by Miryam McGee, first published by the Argentinian publishing house Tiempo Nuevo in 1972 under the title *La campana de cristal* (File 1180-72, no. 66/06537).

Interestingly enough, the title of McGee's translation of the novel coincides with the prospective title under which Seix Barral wanted to publish the "Spanish-made" translation four years earlier. In any case, the fact that no translation was ever submitted to the board after the censors ordered the deletions – combined with the fact that no further details are available about that translation, such as the name of the translator(s) – leads me to wonder if, by having seen a more fruitful path in importing books rather than translating and issuing them locally, the Spanish publishers may have come to an arrangement with the South American publishing house, or even given the translation rights to them. This might explain the inclination for choosing exactly the same words for the title.

Two other imports were made from the Argentinian edition of McGee's translation, *La campana de cristal*. The first one was by Nuevas Estructuras in November 1973, in which twenty-five copies were authorized (File 1768-73, no. 66/06552). The other one was managed by Rodas in January 1974, and was for fifteen copies (File 63-74, no. 66/06555). Subsequently, all imports of the English version of *TBJ* and the first Spanish, Argentinian-made translation, *La campana de cristal*, successfully passed the filter of the Spanish censorship. This, however, did not mean that the Spanish publishers had given the green light to issue, edit, or translate the imported books during the years of the dictatorship. For that, we would have to wait until 1982, when the final application for publishing a "Spanish-made" edition of the novel was submitted by publisher Edhasa, exactly seven years after

the regime's downfall. In this case, the novel was translated by Elena Rius, who, once again, gave it the title: *La campana de cristal*.¹¹ Rius' translation finally contained all the passages that the censors had criticized and tried to erase in the previous attempts to circulate it in the 60s and the 70s.

After having examined the files regarding Sylvia Plath's novel from 1967 to 1982, I conclude that *TBJ* (1963) was repeatedly censored and rejected for publication, since censors encountered some allegedly pernicious passages relating to both sexual content and the Church, which would have had to be erased in order for the novel to be published. All the imports of the English version (1966) and the Spanish translation carried out in Argentina by Miryam McGee, *La campana de cristal* (1972), were completely successful, which makes a stark contrast when comparing it with the efforts to translate the novel in Spanish and Catalan by national publishers. This may indicate that the Argentinian edition was self-censored by the translator and/or the publisher to such an extent that it was able to successfully pass the censors' filters. Alternatively, it may reflect the fact that the censors' standards for imported books (which generally involved low numbers so as not to stoke fears of mass circulation) were much more permissive than they were for applications to translate and circulate the book in Spain.

4. Sylvia Plath's poetic works

As a poet, Sylvia Plath is one of the most prolific 20th century authors writing in English, notwithstanding her premature death; indeed, according to Susan Bassnett (2005, p. 1), "her fame has eclipsed even that of great, world-famous female poets". *The Boston Herald* published her first poem in 1940 when she was only eight years old, and she continued writing poetry until her last days, composing more than one hundred and fifty poems. Most of these are gathered in her two major works, *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) and *Ariel* (1965), though she also published several other collections, such as *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees* (both from 1971), *The Colossus, Poems by Sylvia Plath* was first published by William Heinemann in London on 30 October, 1960, before being reprinted in 1962 by Knopf in New York and then again by Faber & Faber Limited in 1967. Some critics accused her of imitating her husband Ted Hughes' style, while others have claimed that she was "overshadowed" by his powerful poetry (Bassnett, 2005, p. 1). Jesús Pardo (2003, p. 33) points out in his translated edition of her poems that "[*The Colossus* shows] the

¹¹ To my surprise, after inquiring about the translator who carried out the first Spanish-made translation of *TBJ*, I found out that Elena Rius is merely a pen name, as other scholars have claimed: "According to her professional file with Publisher Trama (2017), Elena Rius is the pseudonym for María Antonia de Miquel, a Spanish scholar, translator, and writer; author of two writing handbooks: *Cómo escribir una novela histórica* (2013) [How To Write a Historical Novel], and *Leer mejor para escribir mejor* (2016) [Reading Better To Writing Better]. Among her translations using Elena Rius's pen name, there is *La campana de Cristal* (2007) [Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*], *Alexias de Atenas: una juventud en la Grecia clásica* (1992), *Las doce moradas al viento* (1985) among others. In addition to being in charge of Publisher Ehdasa, she teaches at Escuela de Escritura del Ateneo Barcelonés and writes on her blog, *Notas para lectores curiosos*, still using a pen name" (Reynoso-Rodríguez, p. 5, my translation). This matter is, however, subject for a new research project in which the two translations (McGee's and Rius') can be compared and contrasted.

culmination of her poetic learning and without it, the triumph of *Ariel* would not have been possible” (my translation). The poem, which gives its name to the title of the book, talks about a deceased figure represented as a large man in black through which she desires to restore the trauma of her father’s loss. The collection includes other famous poems in which maternity and female sensibility are notable themes.

In 1965, two years after her suicide, Faber & Faber (London) published her *magnum opus*, *Ariel*, considered to be her most complex and challenging work. In 1966 the book was also published in New York by Harper & Row, selling almost forty thousand copies that year. It has been said that all American women noticed the work’s reception of *Ariel* and that many of them identified with Plath. Hence, we might wonder if Plath’s poetic reception would have had a similar impact on Spanish women.

With respect to the censorship and import files related to Sylvia Plath’s poetic works, there exists a difference in the number of applications to publish her poetry in relation to the novel. Despite the success *Ariel* had achieved from the very beginning of its publication in 1965, the Spanish publishers did not seem to be very interested in Plath’s poems. According to the book import catalogue, the publishing house Aguilar requested permission to import *Ariel* in Faber & Faber’s 1968 edition (File 1183-68, no. 66/06494), but the application was rejected on religious grounds:

Having considered your petition on 27 July, 1968, and having examined the corresponding works, this Directorate General rejects the import of *Ariel* by Sylvia Plath. This book must be returned to the country of origin due to a commentary against the Vatican on page 46.

The lines the censors refer to belong to the poem “Medusa”, which reads as follows: “Ghastly Vatican. / I am sick to death of hot salt. / Green as eunuchs, / your wishes / Hiss at my sins. / Off, off, eely tentacle!” (Plath, *Ariel*, p. 46).

Plath’s poetry was first introduced into Spain in 1974 in a bilingual compilation published by Plaza y Janés under the title *Sylvia Plath: Antología texto bilingüe. Selección de poesía universal*. This collection, translated by Jesús Pardo, gathers some poems from *The Colossus*, *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees*. Plaza y Janés obtained full permission to publish a print run of three thousand copies of the poetry book without any opposition from the censorship board, as shown on the censor’s report: “the content of her poems does not present any objection” (File 5390-74, no. 73/04088). Unlike the files concerning *TBJ*, this file consists of Plaza y Janés’ voluntary application and a single report from one reader.

The fact that the censor authorized the compilation in 1974, after having previously banned Sylvia Plath’s novel in 1968 and 1972, probably shows that the Francoist regime was openly coming to an end and that ideological censorship had softened since then. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that, for some critics, Sylvia Plath has often been branded as a “difficult poet” to read, perhaps because she:

(...) wrote in a highly individualistic way, developing her own private mythology through the use of keywords and symbols, weaving together themes and images in ways that are not always immediately obvious to the reader. (Bassnett, 2005, p. 2)

Bearing in mind these characteristics of her poetry as opposed to the direct and autobiographical tone that *TBJ* exudes, it is likely that the censors did not take such a critical stand against the translation of her selected poems as they did when judging the novel.

In addition to this, the TRACEp¹² (1939-1978) catalogue shows that the last ten years of the dictatorship experienced an increase in poetry publications, particularly bilingual editions (Lobejón, 2007, p. 7). This might also explain the motivations behind accepting a compilation of Plath's poems in translation (the edition included poems from *Colossus*, *Crossing the Water* and *Winter Trees* – that is to say, most of her poems except for those pertaining to the previously rejected *Ariel*). Nevertheless, what is notable is the lack of insistence on the part of publishers in bringing out a Spanish or Catalan translation of *Ariel*, which, since in the late sixties, was one of the most acclaimed poetry collections worldwide, as well as being one of her most complex and challenging works. A quick look at the Spanish literary canon of the time indicates that, generally speaking, poetry “was generally little read by the censors and the audience” (Hierro, 1998, p. 14, my translation); consequently, it occupied a peripheral position in the editorial market and was not widely disseminated.

The censorship processes clearly operated in a quite different way with regard to Sylvia Plath's poetic works in relation to her novel. *TBJ* was twice banned because it contained immoral fragments and pernicious commentaries about the Pope and was not printed until the arrival of democracy, while the only application to publish a translation of Plath's poetry emerged unscathed from the censorship system in 1974. On the other hand, the import files tell the opposite story. Though all requests to import *TBJ* (the English original and an Argentinian translated version) were accepted unproblematically from 1967 to 1974, the import of *Ariel*, which dates back to 1968, was not authorized due to its critical comments about the Vatican. This inconsistency, despite the fact that both her poetry and *TBJ* dealt with many of the same controversial themes considered as targets for censorship, displays how arbitrary the entire censorship system was during the dictatorship.

5. Final notes

Thanks to the material preserved in the General Archive of the Administration concerning the decisions made by the censorship board throughout the almost forty years of the dictatorship in Spain, it has been possible to study Sylvia Plath's reception during that period (1939-1975). After having examined the relevant files from 1968 to 1982, I conclude that the two scenarios outlined at the outset of this research were both partly correct, despite being contradictory: the final results show that the Spanish and Catalan translations of Plath's famous novel, *TBJ* (1963), were repeatedly censored and rejected until its

¹² Acronym for Poetry Censored Translations.

publication in 1982, whereas a collection of some of her poems, *Sylvia Plath: Antología Texto Bilingüe. Selecciones de poesía universal*, was authorized and published in 1974.

I have shown how the various requests to publish *TBJ* in Spain were rejected due to the presence of allegedly pernicious passages relating to sexual matters or to the Church, passages which would have had to be erased before the novel could be published. However, an inconsistency has been found when examining the import files, since the censorship board did not present any objection to either the English original or the Argentinian translation. This may indicate either self-censorship on the part of Argentine translator or publisher, or a less stringent application of censorship standards towards books imported in relatively low numbers.

Concerning Plath's poetic works, her first collection of poems appeared in a bilingual edition translated and edited by Jesús Pardo. The censors did not raise any objections and so it was published by Plaza y Janés in 1974. The reasons for this may be linked to the regime's attempts to modernize the cultural panorama of the country, as there is evidence of a steady increase in the number of translations produced every year, with as many as 1642 literary translations published in 1975 (of a total of 3870 translations) as opposed to only 61 (of 101) in 1948 (Pegenaute, 1999, p. 93). Surprisingly enough, the archive does not hold any censorship files related to Plath's most renowned work *Ariel*, although in 1968 the publisher Aguilar tried to unsuccessfully import it. One could argue that this might have occurred because poetry had something of a marginal status in the publishing market. It therefore made sense that the censors should give more attention to novels: the general demand was greater, the subject matter more accessible, the readership base larger, and, thus, the consequences of mass circulation would have been much more threatening. This fact, alongside the possibility that poetry may not have been as readily understood or interpreted by the censors, can explain the discrepancy between the reception of Plath's novel and her poetry.

Nonetheless, the literature concerning censorship during the Franco era suggests that the inconsistencies of translating and publishing Sylvia Plath's works in Spain were not unusual. Scholars such as Cisquilla (2002) and Morales (2010) agree that the Spanish censors often displayed such contradictory attitudes that their decisions seemed to verge on arbitrariness. This was reflected in the reports of *TBJ*'s rejected voluntary application. The two censorship files contained four quite different viewpoints regarding whether the work complied with the codes of the regime. These inconsistencies, the fact that imported versions were allowed to circulate relatively unaltered, and the consideration that her poetry and novel dealt with largely the same controversial topics and yet were treated differently, underscore just how erratic and arbitrary the Spanish censorship system was.

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