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## The Symbolic Economy of the Nobel Prize: Its Role in the Making of World Literature

Gisèle Sapiro

### Abstract

According to Bourdieu's theory, literary prizes are those specific authorities which contribute in the long run to the conversion of symbolic capital into economic capital. The Nobel Prize played a major role in the unification of a relatively autonomous international literary space, as described by Casanova. It helped create a new canon of world literature, as the Nobel prize winners were widely translated. But whereas Casanova places the emphasis on autonomy, this paper underscores the relative heteronomy that this award conveys. Literary authorities negotiate between autonomous and heteronomous criteria, be they ideological or economic. This paper examines how the symbolic capital of the Nobel Prize has served to reinforce modes of domination. The intersectional and Western domination which biased the selection of laureates slowly evolved into more diversity and inclusiveness. Concentrating on the three last decades, which correspond to the globalization era, we observe however that despite the growing inclusion of non-Western authors, it is the dominant Western cultural intermediaries (publishers and literary agents) who mostly capitalize the symbolic and economic profit of the prize. These observations are based on a quantitative analysis of the publishers of the 33 laureates since 1990 in three languages, English, German and French.

**Keywords:** Literary agents, Cultural intermediaries, Heteronomy, Literary field, Literary prizes, Publishing, Sociology of literature, Transnational fields.

### 1. Introduction

According to Bourdieu's theory, literary prizes are those specific authorities which contribute to the conversion of symbolic capital into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996). Bourdieu contrasts this relatively autonomous logic of the slow accumulation of symbolic capital through peer recognition of a work's aesthetic value, which characterizes what he calls the pole of small-scale production of the literary (and publishing) fields, with the commercial logic which prevails at the pole of large-scale production, where success is measured by quick sales. This opposition is not purely theoretical: it structures the agents' vision of the world in the book industry. Bourdieu himself elaborated it through his discussions with his publisher, Jérôme Lindon of Éditions de Minuit, who at the time—that is, in the 1970s—led a struggle by literary publishers to defend their interests in the face of increasing commercial constraints (this campaign succeeded

in securing the introduction of fixed book prices in 1981). In interviews I conducted with editors, rights managers, and literary agents, they spontaneously use categories such as "commercial"—and even "very commercial"—in contrast to "upmarket." The books classified in these categories do not circulate in the same circuits: the upmarket books are sold in bookstores whereas the commercial ones also circulate through the mass market.

However, this opposition describes a continuum (hence the term "poles") and can be transposed within different segments (or sub-fields), including the pole of small-scale production itself, where some works may have a higher commercial potential than others that are more hermetic or difficult. Some derive their commercial potential from the symbolic capital of the author, which converts, in the long term, into sales (as in the case of classics). These authors compose the "backlist," as opposed to the "frontlist" of new authors. As an editor with a prestigious American publishing house—which has become an imprint within a group but retains its list of Nobel Prize winners and authors who have attained the status of "classics"—told me: "ultimately, our profits come from the backlist, from books that people come to again and again and again" (interview October 2007).

Prizes play a role in this magical conversion of symbolic into economic value (English, 2009). Publishers understood this principle as soon as literary prizes, which historically had been associated with academies, became more visible in the media at the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, the Goncourt Prize—established by the private estate of the brothers Goncourt, two writers who wanted to promote literary autonomy, and first awarded in 1903—in the interwar period became a commercial trophy for publishers, who realized that the prize might translate into large sales. Since the Second World War, the prize has been largely monopolized by three publishers: Gallimard, Grasset, and Le Seuil—the so-called "Galligraseuil" trio.

Extending field theory to the international level, Pascale Casanova rightly argues that the Nobel Prize contributed to unifying a world literary space which is relatively autonomous from economic and political constraints, especially nationalism (Casanova 1999/2004). The Nobel prize participated in the construction of the modern canon of world literature, since the Nobel prize winners were widely translated, as I showed for the case of the French publishing industry in the interwar period (Sapiro 2019). The same has been demonstrated for the German laureates (see Richter et al. in this issue). However, translation into central languages (French, English, and German) has also been a condition for receiving the award in the first place. This means that, as at the national level, transnational recognition depends on the book market. The symbolic capital of the publisher also matters. As we will see in this article, Gallimard and Le Seuil also concentrate the highest number of Nobel laureates in the French publishing industry. These two large

publishing houses have accumulated a great amount of symbolic capital that they are able to convert into economic capital. Still, in his article "A conservative revolution in publishing" (1999/2017), Bourdieu argued that these large prestigious literary publishers, especially Gallimard, now tend more and more to manage assets, which means that they rely on the profits generated by their backlist and by authors whose reputation is already established rather than taking the risk of investing in new and experimental works. Nobel Prize winners thus arouse the interest of cultural intermediaries—specifically, publishers and literary agents—who want to maintain their symbolic reputation while making a profit.

Whereas Casanova places the emphasis on autonomy, in this paper, I shall underscore the relative heteronomy conveyed by the Nobel Prize, or at least the limits to the autonomy of such a prize. Literary authorities negotiate between external and internal constraints (Viala, 1989). They may retranslate these constraints, be they ideological or economic, within the literary field, in a more or less autonomous manner, as the cases of the Académie française or the Goncourt Prize during the German Occupation illustrate (Sapiro, 2003, 1999/2014). Although prizes can be classified according to the degree of their autonomy, the most important prizes are those which have both a symbolic and an economic impact. The Goncourt jury, for instance, includes the sales of a book in its non-official criteria, to make sure the prize will enhance these sales. The symbolic and economic value of the prize depends upon its resonance in the media. This is why scandals were a mode of existence for the Goncourt Academy, even during the German Occupation (Sapiro, 1999/2014). James English has also shown the positive impact of scandals for the visibility of cultural prizes (English, 2009). The economic pressure on literary prizes has kept growing since the Second World War. Their impact on the bestseller lists has diminished, especially in the American book market, but is still considerable in France, with Germany somewhere in between (Verboord, 2011).

Access to international literary recognition is unevenly distributed among writers. The selection process depends not only on the intrinsic qualities of the work—on its originality or its timeliness—but also on a set of external factors which reflect the power relations between social groups and the social conditions of the circulation of literary works (Sapiro 2016a). These factors are related to the unequal distribution of symbolic capital between languages, cultural intermediaries, and authors. The first set of factors derives from the language in which the original work is written—a work written in a central language is more likely to get attention and be translated than a work written in a peripheral language (Heilbron, 2019)—and the languages into which it is translated (again, central vs. peripheral). The second set of factors combines the symbolic capital of the cultural intermediaries (agents, publishers) involved in the publication of the work in

the original and the host language. The third set of factors comprises the symbolic capital accumulated by the authors themselves (literary awards, fellowships) as well as other properties of the authors such as gender, race and nationality (female authors, minorities, migrants, and authors from the Global South have smaller chances than male white Western writers), and their social capital (on gender in the book-market, see Verboord, 2012; on gender and translation, Sapiro, 2015; on gender and prizes, Childress et al.). A fourth factor is genre: the novel has become the dominant genre since the end of the nineteenth century, marginalizing poetry and drama in the book market for translations (Moretti, 2000; Sapiro, 2019).

The Nobel Prize has played a positive role in diversifying the world literature canon in terms of gender and nationality, and in extending its geographical scope to the Global South. However, in this paper, I shall examine how the symbolic capital of the Nobel Prize is appropriated and used by cultural intermediaries to reinforce modes of domination.

## 2. Hypotheses, data and survey

Until the last decade of the XXth Century, the Nobel awardees have by a large majority been white, male, 'Western' authors. Whether this results from conscious action or not, this observation reveals that heteronomous social criteria influenced and biased the jury's choices, as if a woman or a person of color was as such not or less worthy of the prize. One of the scandals associated with the Goncourt arose was when it was awarded to the black writer René Maran for his novel *Batouala* in 1921; and no female author won it until 1945 (Sapiro, 1999/2014). Analyzing the list of Nobel laureates since 1901 in terms of gender, language, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship, I shall first show how this intersectional domination slowly changed towards a growing diversity and inclusiveness.

I will then concentrate on the last three decades, which correspond to the era of globalization. My main hypothesis was that although the awardees are more diverse than in the past, especially since 1990, it is the dominant 'Western' intermediaries who capitalize the symbolic and economic profit of the prize. The publishing field was transformed, since the 1970s, by concentration through merger and acquisition and by the rise of literary agents (Thompson 2010). These changes reinforced the domination of the Anglo-American cultural intermediaries (publishers and agents) on this market. The Booker Prize became a prominent award in the transnational literary field. I first demonstrate the positive effect of the Booker Prize and of literary agents on an author's chances of winning the Nobel. I then turn to the publishers of the laureates in the three central languages: English, French, and German. The choice of languages was based

on the assumption that being translated into at least two of these central languages is a precondition of winning the prize. This also means that the publishers in these languages will capitalize the symbolic and economic benefits of prize, even if they publish the author in translation. Moreover, the prize may favor the concentration of symbolic and economic capital around certain cultural intermediaries. It is thus interesting to trace as closely as possible the publishing trajectories of the laureates in these three languages.

The main hypothesis about the capitalization was confirmed by a quantitative analysis of a database of the agents and publishers in these three languages of the 33 laureates from 1990 to 2022. For each author, a series of variables were coded: birth date, gender, nationality (at the time of the award), main genre, Booker Prize award, main publisher in the three languages, other publishers in these languages, cities where these publishers are based, groups to which the latter belong (if applicable), literary agents (before and after the prize as far as it was possible to know), agent's city.<sup>1</sup> These data have been collected from and qualitatively complemented with information from the trade press and, in some cases, the general media. I was also able to check systematically when the authors entered the catalogue of Gallimard, thanks to a database of the firm's catalogue until 2010.<sup>2</sup> I also occasionally rely on interviews conducted in the course of previous research on translation (Sapiro 2010, 2015) and a current project on literary agents, as well as on archival materials.

### **3. The new literary canon established by the Nobel: towards diversity?**

For a long time, the canon of world literature was mainly composed of white, male, 'Western' authors. The group portrait of the Nobel awardees reflects this bias, which started being corrected in the 1960s, but was not fully addressed until the 1990s. Regarding gender, female authors account only for 13.5 per cent of all Nobel awardees until 2021. Their share has significantly grown in the past three decades. Before 1990, only six female authors had won the Nobel Prize (7 per cent): Selma Lagerlöf (1909), Grazia Deledda (1926), Sigrid Undset (1928), Pearl Buck (1938), Gabriela Mistral (1948), Nelly Sachs (1966; with Shai Agnon). Since 1990, there have been 11 awardees, that is to say 33 per cent: Nadine Gordimer (1991), Toni Morrison (1993), Wisława Szymborska (1996), Elfriede Jelinek (2004), Doris Lessing (2007), Herta Müller (2009),

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Quentin Fondu for helping me to collect the data. Thanks also go to Joe Paul Kroll for proofreading this paper and offering some helpful remarks.

<sup>2</sup> I was given access to this unpublished database by Gallimard when the firm asked me to write a chapter of its centenary catalogue on "Gallimard à l'international" (an expanded version appeared in English: Sapiro, 2015b).

Alice Munro (2013), Svetlana Alexievich (2015), Olga Tokarczuk (2018), Louise Glück (2020), and Annie Ernaux (2022). The Nobel has thus come closer to the Booker Prize, where 30.7 per cent of all winners until 2006 (and 36.6 per cent of all shortlisted authors) have been female (Norris 2006: 149, n. 19). One can make the hypothesis that the feminization of literary awards results from an influence of the Anglo-American literary field on the transnational one.

Regarding the North-South divide, despite their growing visibility, authors originating from the Global South still account for 10 per cent of all awardees (and fewer still live there). Up to the end the 1920s, the geographical scope of the prize was restricted to European literature, with one single exception: the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, the laureate of 1913. In the 1930s, it was won by three American authors: Sinclair Lewis (1930), Eugene O'Neill (1936), and Pearl S. Buck (1938). These awards contributed to the new international visibility of American literature, which was to grow after the war, with William Faulkner (laureate in 1949), Ernest Hemingway (1954), John Steinbeck (1962), Saul Bellow (1976), and Isaac Bashevis Singer (1978), although the latter is of Polish origin and generally regarded as a Jewish rather than an American author. (But should he be counted as Polish, as he fled from Poland to the United States in the 1930s and wrote in Yiddish and English? His 'cultural appropriation' as a Polish author has been hotly debated.<sup>3</sup>)

After the war, however, the transnational book market started to open to so-called 'non-Western' cultures, thanks to a scheme set up by UNESCO for promoting translations of Latin American and Asian literature (Sapiro, 2020). In the 1960s and 1970s, Asian and Latin American authors began to achieve international recognition. After Gabriela Mistral (Chile) in 1948, the Nobel was awarded to Miguel Ángel Asturias (Guatemala) in 1967, to Yasunari Kawabata (Japan) in 1968, to Pablo Neruda (Chile) in 1971, and to Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia) in 1982. Despite a rich literature in arabic, the only Arab writer who has won it to date is the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz in 1988. Recognition took even longer to achieve for postcolonial authors, who had to develop specific strategies for attracting attention (Huggan 2001; Brouillette 2007; Moudileno). It was not until the 1980s that African authors became visible on the international literary scene, a process marked by the award to the Wole Soyinka of Nigeria in 1986. This evolution followed a trend of interest in postcolonial authors triggered by the Anglo-American literary field, and inaugurated by the Booker Prize, which had been awarded to Salman Rushdie in 1981 (Todd 1996). In 1983 the Académie française called the Senegalese writer and politician Léopold Sédar Senghor to one of its forty chairs —shortly after the first woman, Marguerite

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<sup>3</sup> See Asaf Shalev, "How Wikipedia warriors made 'Polish writer' Isaac Bashevis Singer Jewish again," *The Times of Israel*, June 9, 2021.

Yourcenar in 1980 (on the recognition of Francophone Subsaharian writers in the 1980s, see Ducournau 2017 and Bedecarré 2020).

In line with this trend, the list of Nobel laureates has become much more diverse since 1990. One awardee in four comes from the Global South and/or from 'non-Western' cultures: two are from China (Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan), one from Japan (Kenzaburō Ōe), one from Mexico (Octavio Paz), one from Saint Lucia (Derek Walcott), one from Turkey (Orhan Pamuk), two from South Africa (Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee). Minorities and migrants, who were previously neglected or marginalized compared to white nationals, for whom it was easier to access the literary career, also came to the fore. 8 out of 33 laureates since 1990 either belong to a minority or are migrants (or exiles): Derek Walcott (1992), Toni Morrison (1993), Gao Xingjian (2000), V.S. Naipaul (2001), J.M.G. Le Clézio (2008), Herta Müller (2009), Kazuo Ishiguro (2017), and Abdulrazak Gurnah (2021). However, they all live in central countries (the UK, the US, France, and Germany) and write in a central language (5 in English, 2 in French, 1 in German). The English language is the one which has most contributed to diversity.

If we look at languages, it appears that the share of laureates writing in English has almost doubled, from 21 per cent before 1990 to 39 per cent since then (13 out of 33; see table 1). English is the only central language whose share has significantly increased. The relative share of German slightly rose from 11.4 to 12 per cent, but that of French decreased (from 13.6 to 9 per cent). Spanish also declined (from 10.3 to 6 per cent), as did Italian and Russian (both from 5.7 to 3 per cent), whereas Polish increased from 4 to 6 per cent. The share of Swedish, a language overrepresented (relative to its share in literary translation flows) because it is the idiom of the Academy's members, also declined from 6.8 to 3 per cent.

**Table 1: Laureates by language (1901-2021)**

Language	No. of Laureates		
	1901-2021	1901-1989	1990-2021
English	31	18	13
French	14	12	3
German	14	10	4
Spanish	11	9	2
Swedish	7	6	1
Italian	6	5	1
Russian	6	5	1
Polish	5	3	2
Norwegian	3	3	0



Danish	3	3	0
Greek	2	2	0
Japanese	2	1	1
Chinese	2	0	2
Arabic	1	1	0
Bengali	1	1	0
Finnish	1	1	0
Hebrew	1	1	0
Hungarian	1	0	1
Islandic	1	1	0
Provençal	1	1	0
Portuguese	1	0	1
Serbo-Croatian	1	1	0
Czech	1	1	0
Turkish	1	0	1
Yiddish	1	1	0
Total	118	86	33

The rise of English at the expense of French is representative of the shifting balance of power in the “world republic of letters,” from France to the United States and the United Kingdom. Since 1990, one laureate in four has been a citizen either of the US (3) or the UK (5). While some European languages, especially those of Scandinavia, disappeared (except for Swedish, represented by Tomas Tranströmer), new languages such as Chinese (Mo Yan, and Gao who writes in both Chinese and French) and Turkish (Orhan Pamuk) have joined the list. This evolution confirms the relative marginalization of European literature in the emergent new world literary canon in the making. It can be interpreted as a correction of a bias in favor of European writers, corresponding to the evolution of the world literary field, under the influence of the feminist and civil rights movements in the US, towards greater inclusiveness of female, minority, and Global South authors. But the larger share of English-language laureates and of awardees from the US and the UK indicates that other forces may be at play, which are related to transformations in the publishing industry. Before we turn to these transformations, let us consider the question of genre.

20 of the 33 laureates have established their literary reputation as novelists, the dominant genre in the literary marketplace. Out of the 13 laureates who are not novelists, 6 are poets (the Mexican Octavio Paz, the Irish Seamus Heaney, the Saint Lucian Derek Walcott, the Pole Wisława Szymborska, the Swede Tomas Tranströmer, and the American Louise Glück), 2 are playwrights (Dario Fo from Italy and Harold Pinter from the United Kingdom), two write literary non-fiction (Alexievitch, author of testimonial writing, and Annie Ernaux, who has turned, after three novels,

to autosociobiographical writing), and one (the Canadian Alice Munro) is best known for her short stories. The choice of Bob Dylan "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition" stands apart, because of its transgression of the traditional genre hierarchy between poetry and song lyrics, which sparked a harsh debate in the literary field. There is no need to recapitulate this debate here—one which puzzled the singer himself—though it is worth noting that Allen Ginsberg had once called Dylan the greatest poet of the second half of the twentieth century.

Although more diverse regarding gender and ethnicity since 1990, the awardees appear to be more Anglophone. These evolutions are related: they reflect the increased domination of the Anglo-American cultural intermediaries.

#### **4. The dominance of English in the globalization era: the Booker prize effect and the role of literary agents**

Since the 1980s, the publishing industry has become increasingly concentrated through mergers and acquisitions. André Schiffrin (2001) and other publishers have decried the dangerous consequences of this trend for the industry's upmarket segment. Small and medium-sized publishers are bought by large companies which form big transnational conglomerates, and these groups put pressure on their imprints to be profitable. While in traditional publishing there was a notion, as described by Bourdieu (1999/2007), of a balance between bestsellers and riskier projects that might become long sellers, the conglomerates tend to demand that their imprints make a profit with every book. Analyzing the transformations of the Anglo-American publishing field, John Thompson (2010) attributes this evolution in part to the rise of literary agents who negotiate very high advances on royalties. A study we conducted showed that literary agents contributed to the growing share of English in the global translation market (from 45 per cent in the 1980s to 59 per cent in the 1990s and 2000s), especially in the conquest of Eastern European countries after the fall of communism, where English soon replaced Russian as a central language (Russian fell from 12.5 per cent of worldwide translations to 2.5 per cent in the 1990s; Sapiro and Leperlier, 2021).

The Nobel Prize has tried to resist this growing domination of English. It acts as a counterbalance to the formation of a world literature in English. The Booker Prize has become the principal literary authority of the English-speaking literary space (or subfield of the transnational literary field). The Booker's orientation has been growingly market-oriented: Todd (1996) speaks of a "kind of commercial canon"; and Norris (2006: 155) analyzed the Booker's "conflation of literary merit and sales potential." Winning the Booker Prize enhances significantly one's chance

of being translated into other languages, at least since the beginning of the 1980s (Pickford, 2011). The Booker Prize, which became the Man Booker in 2002, created another prize in 2005 that includes translations, the International Man Booker Prize, but one of the conditions for winning it is to be translated into English. Considering that translations account for less than 3 per cent of the UK and the US book production in terms of titles (Heilbron, 1999; Allen, 2007), the chances for a non-Anglophone author to win it are more than scarce.

For the Nobel Prize, translation is also a (tacit) condition – for instance Ernaux was translated in 42 languages before she won the award –, but being translated into English is not an explicit requirement. Based on the past state of the literary marketplace, a plausible hypothesis might be that the opportunity for an author to win the award increases when their work is translated into one of the central languages (English, French and/or German), and/or into Swedish: not only because it allows the Swedish jury to read the work, but also because being translated in a central language is an indicator of consecration (Casanova 2002/2010; Sapiro 2020). The share (and the number) of translations being larger in French and in German, those authors whose books are translated into these languages have higher chances of winning the Nobel than the International Booker. Yet while this may sound plausible in theory, in practice, there has been no case of a Nobel laureate who had not been translated in English before receiving the prize, although some were, as we shall see, at the margins of the Anglophone publishing field.

If we now consider former literary awards, which are a precondition for winning the Nobel prize, one can observe that some have more impact on the chance to get it, especially those which have a transnational reach. Such used to be the case of instance of the French Prix du Meilleur livre étranger, which has distinguished nine future Nobel laureates: Asturias in 1950, Böll in 1955, Kawabata in 1961, Singer in 1962, Grass in 1964, Solzhenitsyn in 1968, Marquez in 1969, Vargas Losa in 1980, Pamuk in 2002. After the Prix de la Découverte européenne which revealed him in 1988 to the European audience, the French consecration played an important role in Pamuk's international consecration (he won both Prix du Meilleur Livre étranger in 2002 and Prix Médicis étranger in 2005, one year before the Nobel), but he had also gained recognition in the UK and the US in the 1990s (Duclos 2017). And if these French prizes for foreign literature may have counted in his case, Pamuk and Losa are the only two laureates since 1990 who won the Prix du Meilleur Livre étranger, vs. 7 in the three former decades. Pamuk and Doris Lessing are the only Médicis étranger awardees to have won the Nobel, and there is no correlation at all between the list of the Femina étranger and the Nobel. These data show that the French consecrating power described by Casanova (1999/2004) has declined.

By contrast, our hypothesis that having been awarded or shortlisted for the Booker Prize increases one's chances of being awarded the Nobel was corroborated: 4 of the 33 laureates since 1990 had first won the Booker Prize (Gordimer, Naipaul, Coetzee—twice—and Ishiguro), and 2 the International Booker (Munro and Tokarczuk): in all, nearly 20 per cent of laureates. And Doris Lessing was shortlisted 3 times, Gurnah once (and once longlisted), and Annie Ernaux once (on the effects of being shortlisted for the Booker, especially the rise in translations, since the mid-1980s, see Pickford 2011).

Of course, other prizes in specific languages or countries also count, such as the Cervantes prize which seems to increase the chance for Spanish language author to get the Nobel (both Octavio Paz and Vargas Losa won it, respectively in 1981 and in 1994); America Award in literature (won by Pinter in 1995 and Saramago in 2004<sup>4</sup>); the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, awarded to Louise Glück in 1993 for *The Wild Iris*; the prestigious German Goethe and Herder Prizes with which Szymborska was honored in 1991 and 1995 (one year before the Nobel) respectively; and the French Goncourt, awarded to Modiano in 1978 (who also won in 2010, like Vargas Losa two year before, the World Prize Cino-del-Duca which rewards a literary or scientific work which conveys a message of humanism).

Moreover, those who won the Booker also won other prizes, since literary consecration builds up through a "Matthew effect" (the more an author is rewarded, the more s/he is rewarded; Merton: 1968). But the correlation with the Booker is strong enough to suggest that this international prize has had a specific impact in the two past decades, like the Prix du Meilleur Livre étranger before. Authors writing in English thus have an advantage from the start, as they compete among themselves for the Booker, while all other languages compete for the International Booker.

The impact of the Booker Prize is acknowledged by cultural intermediaries. For instance, interviewed at the Frankfurt book fair after Ernaux was awarded the Nobel, the rights manager of Gallimard, the laureate's publisher, explained that Ernaux had been translated into Spanish since her first novel in 1974, but that the international interest in her work was triggered by the Renaudot Prize she won for *La Place* in 1984, and although she started being translated in many languages in the 1990s, the nomination by the Man Booker International Prize in 2019 for *The Years* "significantly amplified" her international visibility, even though she didn't win it<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Llosa won it in 2020, ten year after the Nobel.

<sup>5</sup> Katja Petrovic, interview with Judith Rosenzweig, BIEF, <https://www.bief.org/Publication-3993-Article/Annie-Ernaux-traduite-dans-plus-de-40-langues.html>

The case of Tokarczuk merits closer examination, as the probability of her winning the Booker was initially very low. How did a female author writing in a semi-peripheral language manage to win the International Booker Prize? The promotion of her work on the international scene was first the work of her Polish editor, Beata Stasinska, co-founder of the publishing house Wydawnictwo W.A.B. Stasinska was trying to counter the domination of English by introducing in Poland authors from other languages, such as the Hungarian future Nobel winner Imre Kertész, as she explained to me in an interview.<sup>6</sup> But selling Polish rights abroad proved even more difficult at the time.<sup>7</sup> To the great surprise of her colleagues, she nevertheless managed to promote some of them, including Tokarczuk. However, by the time the author of *Flights* won the International Man Booker Prize in 2018, and the Nobel for the same year (awarded in 2019), the Polish writer was represented by Rogers, Coleridge & White (RCW) in the UK. This example illustrates the dynamics by which Anglo-American agents attract authors in peripheral and semi-peripheral languages as soon as they start receiving international attention.

Indeed, beyond the domination of the English language, one has to understand the strategies of literary agents who specialize in converting symbolic into economic capital. Some of them, such as Andrew Wylie and Andrew Nurnberg, distinguish themselves from the traditional large British corporate agencies by their international strategy, which includes representing non-Anglophone authors and specializing in translation rights. Wylie, who gained for himself the reputation of a "widow hunter," is the one who has accumulated the largest amount of transnational literary capital that can easily be converted into economic capital by representing for all languages the estates of authors of world literature who have become modern classics. For instance, Wylie represents the estates of five Nobel prize winners in different languages: Camus, Kawabata, Saramago, Naipaul, and now García Marquez, having in 2014 merged his agency with Carmen Balcells, the famous Spanish agent who promoted Latin-American literature on the international scene in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> This fast accumulation of symbolic capital has established his world literary reputation, and makes his agency attractive to consecrated living writers, for whom he immediately (re)negotiates contracts. Wylie also represents among the living Nobel winners Kenzaburō Ōe, Orhan Pamuk, Mo Yan, Louise Glück, and, thanks to the merger with Balcells,

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, May 14, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Her experience is confirmed by Ioana Popa's study on the importation of Eastern European literatures in France before and after 1989: the interest in these literatures, which was significant during the Cold War, declined after the end of the communist regimes (Popa 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The Spanish publishing consultant Javier Celaya told *Publishing Perspectives* that: "The impact of the merger will be to empower the top authors, who will need powerful representation to maintain their status with the increasingly powerful global companies that influence publishing and bookselling decisions." Cited by Edward Nawotka, *Publishing Perspectives*, May 30, 2014. On the role of Carmen Balcells in the promotion of Garcia Marquez, see Santana-Acuña (2020).

Vargas Llosa. In 2009, he poached V.S. Naipaul from Gillon Aitken, his British agent of 30 years, and in 2014, four years after his death, Saramago's estate from Literary Agency Mertin, also the Portuguese author's foreign rights agent of 28 years, since his first translation contract in German in 1986.

Wylie's aggressive commercial strategies and demands are well-known among literary publishers who share their experience (for instance, huge advances which are disproportionate with an author's sales, according to the publishers, as some told me in interviews). His strategy consists not in building the symbolic capital of the author but in collecting the fruits of others' work: for instance, he became Mo Yan's agent very shortly before the Chinese writer was awarded the Nobel Prize and this announcement provoked a big scandal in the publishing world, with his previous representatives, Dijkstra Literary Agency, contesting Wylie's monopolization of Mo Yan's rights. Mo Yan had been translated into English first by Viking press, who released *Red Sorghum* (1993) and *Republic of Wine* (2000), but the latter did not do well in the American market. His following books were translated by a small publishing house, Arcade, founded by Richard Seaver, and bought by Skyhorse Publishing upon Seaver's death in 2009. One novel was also published by Seagull Books, an Indian publisher that tries to counter the domination of British and American firms. After the prize, Wylie negotiated that Penguin reprint 15,000 copies of *Red Sorghum* (initially published in 1994).<sup>9</sup> Other books by Mo Yan have been published with Penguin after the prize (*Frog* and *Radish* in 2015, and *My*).

Aside from literary estates and the cases of Naipaul and Mo Yan, the data collected does not indicate at which point of the career an author moved to a dominant agent. It seems clear that in most cases, agents represented the authors before they won the prize and contributed to it by helping enhance their reputation and visibility on the international scene. At least 6 of the 33 laureates considered here had an American agent based in New York at the moment they won the prize: Wylie (4), Amanda Urban, partner of ICM (Toni Morrison), and Peter Lampack (who represented Coetzee for US rights and translations, while David Higham was in charge of UK and film rights). At least 7 others have a British agent based in London, among which RCW (Ishiguro, Tokarczuk and Gurnah), United Agents (Gordimer), Jonathan Claves (Lessing), Aitken (Naipaul), and the drama agency Judy Daish (Pinter). One (Aleksievich) has an agent specializing in Russian and Bielorrussian writings, Galina Dursthoff, based in Cologne (Germany).

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Weinman, "Mo Yan Wins Nobel," *Publisher's lunch*, October 11, 2012; Jonathan Landreth, "Will Mo Yan's Nobel Prize Finally Mean Better Book Sales Abroad?" *China File*, October 11, 2012.

This means that American and British agents based in New York and London represented, before they won the prize, at least 13 of 33 laureates (14 if we include Carmen Balcells, who merged with Wylie), and 16 after the award (half of them). They thus capitalize a large part of the economic profits related to the Nobel Prize—even more if we consider the estates. These agents tend to work with large publishing firms, to whom they sell rights for huge advances to ensure large-scale promotion. Only 2 of the 14 authors represented by an Anglo-American agent are published by an independent publisher in English (Pinter and Öe, both with Grove/Atlantic). Note that of the 14, 9 write in English, and most of those who do not are represented by Wylie (4) or Balcells (Vargas Llosa); Tokarcuk is the only non-Anglophone writer to have a different Anglo-American agent (RCW).

### **5. Publishers and groups: who capitalizes the symbolic and economic profits of the prize?**

Let us now focus on the publishers of the Nobel laureates in the three central languages of English, French, and German. The study shows that the majority of Nobel laureates are published with firms endowed with high symbolic capital, geographically concentrated in the cultural capitals, and increasingly concentrated in groups. As said above, the Nobel prize helps convert symbolic capital into economic capital. The prize has an immediate impact on sales for the whole work of a laureate. Interviewed in the media after Modiano was awarded the 2014 Nobel Prize, the sales director of his publisher, Gallimard, explained that the impact of the Nobel was different and more important than the Goncourt because the latter concerned mainly the book on which the award was bestowed, whereas the former reflected on all the laureate's titles.<sup>10</sup> As evidence, he cited the sales of the novel Modiano released just before the award, *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier*, which had already sold 360,000 copies by January 2015 and was reprinted seven or eight times within three months of the announcement, whereas a new book by Modiano would usually be expected to sell around 80,000 copies. An omnibus edition of ten of his novels, published in 2013, had sold only 8,500 copies, but rose to 50,000 after the prize. His "classic" titles, *Dora Bruder* or *Place de l'Etoile*, which would usually sell 3,000 copies per year, were reprinted up to 100,000 copies after the award.

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<sup>10</sup> Maxime Mainguet, "Le lauréat du Nobel de Littérature quadruple ses ventes," *Ouest-France*, January 12, 2015; <https://www.ouest-france.fr/culture/livres/modiano-le-laureat-du-nobel-de-litterature-quadruple-ses-ventes-3109979>. On the conditions and effects of Modiano's award, see Lévy (2020).

The prize of course also triggers sales in foreign languages. After Octavio Paz won the award, Siegfried Unseld, head of Suhrkamp, his German publisher, writes to him: "It is a pity that you are not in Germany in these days. Where ever I go, at all places there are in all bookstores special window displays 'Octavio Paz. Nobelpreis 1990.' And in all these windows displays you find the thirteen book of you that we have published<sup>11</sup>." And while exposing to Unseld the publication plan following the award, Paz's editor at Suhrkamp, Jürgen Dormagen, writes to Unseld: "There is no question that the presence of the Nobel Prize winner in Germany will stimulate sales. We should take advantage of the news<sup>12</sup>." Paperback or pocket format reprints are frequent. Sometimes a volume of collected works may be edited (a rare phenomenon for translated literature, and even for national authors), as Actes Sud did with Aleksievich at the very moment she won the award in 2015.

The prize also triggers new translations. The rights manager of Gallimard declared that immediately after the award was announced, at the Frankfurt book fair, she received many new offers for renewing translation contracts for Ernaux's books or acquiring the rights for her last one, *Le Jeune Homme* (2020), and that the prize sparked interest for her work in new (more peripheral in global market for translations) languages such as Hindi, Malayalam, Bengali, Tamil, Kazakh, Azeri, Mongolian, and Thai. Consequently, she expected that the number of languages in which she is translated would probably soon raise from 42 to 45 or 50<sup>13</sup>.

Although the database includes information about their first publishers in English, French, and German, it was not possible in the cases of English and German to ascertain precisely when the authors moved to these big publishers, whether it was before or after their award, so that the data presented here reflects the situation after the prize, but the publishing trajectory of some of the authors will serve to refine the results in qualitative terms, and the French case, although specific, offer a more precise picture. While being published, whether in their original language or in translation, with a large and well-established publisher in one of these countries seems a precondition to get the award, these qualitative case studies show that after the award, these publishers immediately try to acquire translation rights for the laureates if they are not already on their list, and thus to capitalize on the prize relying on the assets of a symbolic capital built by others (generally small independent publishers).

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<sup>11</sup> Letter from Siegfried Unseld to Octavia Paz, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1990, Marbach Archive.

<sup>12</sup> Lettre from Jürgen Dormagen to Siegfried Unseld, October 29, 1990, Marbach Archive (translated by DeepL).

<sup>13</sup> Katja Petrovic, cited interview with Judith Rosenzweig.



*Anglo-American publishers*

In English, the first observation concerns the geographical concentration of the laureates' publishers, especially after they won the prize: 21 are located in New York, 9 in London, 2 in Boston. Before they were awarded the distinction, there was a larger diversity of cities: Coetzee published his first book, *Dusklands* (1974), in South Africa, and it was after he won the 1977 CNA Prize (South Africa's principal literary award at the time) that he was published in Great Britain and the United States; in 1983 he was awarded the Booker Prize for *The Life & Times of Michael K*, and won it again in 1999 for *Disgrace* (making him the only author discussed here to have won it twice).

The New York-based American publisher who concentrates the largest number of laureates is Farrar, Straus & Giroux (5: Gordimer, Walcott, Llosa, Handke, Glück), followed by Harcourt (3: Szymborska, Saramago, Grass), New Directions (Paz, Tranströmer) and Grove Press (Öe, Pinter); several others have one awardee in their list. Most of these firms published these authors before they won the prize, and their association with these prestigious publishers certainly fostered their international recognition. FSG and Harcourt are old prestigious literary publishers, but their policy became increasingly guided by commercial concerns when they merged into conglomerates. Drenka Willen, Harcourt's senior editor, who had emigrated from Serbia to the US in 1956 and started as a translator, discovered Günter Grass, José Saramago, and Wisława Szymborska, publishing all of them before they won the prize. In 2008, she was laid off as a result of company restructuring. Günter Grass organized an international protest leading to her reinstatement.<sup>14</sup> However, as she was 80 years old, she soon retired. Editors with such an international profile are no longer replaced in these firms.

The two awardees published in Boston are the French authors J.M.G. Le Clézio and Patrick Modiano, whose books were translated by David Godine, a small independent publisher—like Grove, New Directions, and Seven Stories (which translated Jelinek in English). David Godine founded his publishing house in 1970 and published translations of works by Le Clézio and Modiano long before they were awarded the Nobel Prize; he also has on his list Georges Perec, Jean Echenoz and Sylvie Germain. In an interview, he told me that he prefers to publish, at a lower cost, a foreign author who is internationally recognized, rather than the debut of a "mediocre" young American debut writer whose agent demands a disproportionate advance.<sup>15</sup> However, such an investment requires specific resources: linguistic skills, knowledge of the European scene

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<sup>14</sup> Leon Neyfakh, "Drenka Willen Returns! Günter Grass' Editor Hauled Back to HMH," *The Observer*, June 1, 2009. Interview with Drenka Willen, March 4, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> See also the interview David Godine gave to Motoko Rich, "Translation Is Foreign to U.S. Publishers," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2008.

(authors and publishers), building a network of relationships. For these publishers, the specialization in translation is a strategy of distinction in the book market, where they occupy a "niche" (Sapiro 2010, 2015a).

In Calcutta, Seagull Books, another small independent publisher, doubly marginalized by its location on the postcolonial periphery, has managed to become a global player by building an international list of world literature and commissioning new translations into English. The winning strategy of this publisher for accumulating symbolic capital was to include in its list famous past and present authors in translation (70 percent of a backlist of 300 titles), with Nobel laureates among them. For instance, the firm had a title by Mo Yan before the prize, and is publishing Elfriede Jelinek's plays (drama being a marginal genre on the market for translation) as well as works by Peter Handke. In a press interview, Naveen Kishore explained:

Independent publishers often have half a dozen could-be Nobel winners on their list. We, for example, have Cees Nooteboom, Yves Bonnefoy, Peter Handke, Pascal Quignard and so many more who are of that stature. One invests in writers who may one day win prizes – but not only because one hopes and prays that they will. One invests in writers because one finds that their writing, their content, is remarkable.<sup>16</sup>

But independent publishers account for only 10 of the 33 prize winners' main publishers in English—less than one third.<sup>17</sup> Two large conglomerates, Holtzbrinck (10) and Bertelsmann/Random House (8, of which 4 with Penguin, which the group acquired in 2013), concentrate half of them, whether in the US or the UK (see table 2).<sup>18</sup> Compared to the conglomerates, the independent publishers are those who ensure the highest linguistic diversity: 7 languages other than English (1 author: Pinter, Grove) are represented: German (Jelinek, Serpent's Tail and, since the prize, Seven Stories in the US, Seagull Books in Calcutta for her plays), French (Modiano and Le Clezio, Godine; Annie Ernaux, Seven Stories in the US (now distributed by Penguin), and since 2014 Fitzcarraldo in the UK), Italian (Fo, Methuen), Spanish (Paz, New Directions), Hungarian (Kertész, Seven Stories), Japanese (Ōe, Grove), and Swedish (Tranströmer, New Directions). The Education Media group also publishes three non-Anglophone authors (writing in German, Polish, and Portuguese) thanks to the merger between Harcourt and Houghton

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<sup>16</sup> "How a six-person company from Calcutta publishes literary prizewinners from around the world," *Scroll-in*, March 28, 2015. <https://scroll.in/article/716679/how-a-six-person-company-from-calcutta-publishes-literary-prizewinners-from-around-the-world>.

<sup>17</sup> On the transformations of the British book industry and the increasing commercial constraints since the 1970s, see Squires, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> The dominance of German groups in the Anglo-American publishing is due to the fact that Anglo-American conglomerates are not interested in the book industry, which is not profitable enough, whereas Holtzbrinck and Bertelsmann both specialize in media and publishing.

Mifflin in 2007. In the Holtzbrinck group, 3 languages are represented apart from English (6): German (2), Spanish (1) and Turkish (1). In the Bertelsmann group, English is dominant (5), with 1 Polish (Tokarczuk), 1 Russian (Aleksievitch), and 1 Chinese (Mo Yan, since the prize) author.

**Table 2: Independent publishers vs Groups (English)**

Independent vs. Group	Publishers	No. of laureates
Independent	New Directions (2), Grove (2), Godine (2), Melville (1), Serpent’s tail//Seven Stories (1) Methuen (1), Seven Stories (1)	10
Holtzbrinck	FSG (5), Holt (1), Faber (1)	10
Bertelsmann	Penguin (4), Simon & Schuster, Knopf, Harvill	8
Education Media	Harcourt (3)	3
News Corp	4 <sup>th</sup> Estate (1), HarperCollins (1)	2

### *French publishers*

The geographical concentration of the publishing industry in French around the city of Paris is even higher than in the Anglophone area, which is dominated by the duopoly of New York and London: 28 out of 33 prize winners are published by Parisian publishers.

14 are published by Gallimard. This prestigious firm holds the highest number of Nobel Prize winners—either in French or in translation—in its catalogue: 43 according to its website (a number which includes two contemporary authors not counted here as Gallimard authors: Naipaul, whose first books were published by Gallimard before he moved to other publishers, such as Christian Bourgois, and Tranströmer, by whom Gallimard published one title; see box 1). It is consequently the most attractive French publisher for a foreign author. Its foreign literature series “Du monde entier,” which in the 1960s and 70s already counted authors from 38 countries writing in 24 languages, became even more diverse in the 1980s and 90s, reaching about 57 countries and 40 languages, with English as the single largest – albeit underrepresented in relation to the market, as it accounts for one third of the series while two thirds of all translations into French are from English (Sapiro, 2008, 2010).

#### **Box 1. Gallimard’s list of Nobel laureates**

**1913** — Rabindranath Tagore; **1933** — Ivan Bounine; **1934** — Luigi Pirandello; **1937** — Roger Martin du Gard; **1945** — Gabriela Mistral; **1947** — André Gide; **1948** — T.S. Eliot; **1949** — William Faulkner; **1950** — Bertrand Russell; **1954** — Ernest Hemingway; **1955** — Halldor Laxness; **1957** — Albert Camus; **1958** — Boris Pasternak; **1960** — Saint-John Perse; **1962** — John Steinbeck; **1964** — Jean-Paul Sartre [refused]; **1965** — Mikhaïl Chokhlov; **1967** — Miguel

Angel Asturias; **1971** — Pablo Neruda; **1973** — Patrick White; **1974** — Eyvind Johnson; **1975** — Eugenio Montale; **1976** — Saul Bellow; **1977** — Vicente Aleixandre; **1980** — Czeslaw Milosz; **1981** — Elias Canetti; **1983** — William Golding; **1987** — Joseph Brodsky; **1989** — Camilo José Cela; **1990** — Octavio Paz; **1994** — Kenzaburô Ôé; **1995** — Seamus Heaney; **2001** — V.S. Naipaul; **2005** — Harold Pinter; **2006** — Orhan Pamuk; **2008** — J.-M.G. Le Clézio; **2009** — Herta Müller; **2010** — Mario Vargas Llosa; **2011** — Tomas Tranströmer; **2014** — Patrick Modiano; **2017** — Kazuo Ishiguro; **2019** — Peter Handke; **2020** — Louise Glück

Source: Gallimard website. <https://www.gallimard.fr/Selections/Prix-Nobel>

Being published with Gallimard certainly increases an author's chances of winning the Nobel Prize (Sapiro 2015b). The three French laureates, Le Clézio, Modiano and Ernaux, are Gallimard authors. And 7 of the 10 translated laureates of the 33 under study were published by Gallimard before the award (Vargas Llosa, Handke, Heaney, Pinter, Pamuk, Paz, Ôé; not counting Naipaul). Ishiguro had been first translated by other publishers (Presses de la Renaissance, Calmann-Lévy) and entered Gallimard's list through the 'Folio' pocket format, where these translations were reissued starting in 2008, and thus the author could appear as belonging to Gallimard's list, but the prestigious publisher had not invested in a new translation before the Nobel Prize which confirms Bourdieu's analysis that this firm tends to rely on assets rather than take risks with (foreign) authors whose reputation may be more difficult to build. At the same time, it shows that the firm is indeed eager to continue concentrating Nobel Prize winners and capitalizing on the symbolic capital of their prize, as illustrated by the two other cases.

It is telling that these are two female authors, one of which belongs to a minority and the second writing in a minor genre, poetry, a genre in which Gallimard stopped investing for new authors in the 1970s, concentrating only on those whose reputation is already established to reissue their work in pocket format (Sapiro 2015b). These two examples thus also show how the Nobel contributed to diversify (in terms of gender, identity, and genre) this prestigious publisher's list. It was only after she started being published in Berlin, in 1986, that Herta Müller was first translated into French, by a small publisher, named after its founder, Maren Sell (a woman), who was particularly interested in German literature. The book, *L'Homme est un grand faisan sur terre* (1988), was reissued in pocket format in Gallimard's "Folio" series in 1990. And it was not until 1997 that Müller's next title in French was released, this time with Le Seuil, and was reissued in Le Seuil's pocket-format series "Points." The third title that appeared in French before the award, *La Convocation* (2001), was published by Métailié, an independent small publisher specializing in foreign literature, especially South-American. In 2010, soon after the award, the book was reissued in pocket format by Le Seuil (who had in the meanwhile been acquired by the group La Martinière, which also acquired Métailié), but Gallimard bought the rights for her other titles. By the same

token, immediately after she was awarded the prize in 2020, the poet Louise Glück, whose books had not previously been translated into French, was invited to publish a collection with the prestigious publisher. In 2018, Gallimard also reprinted, in its pocket poetry series "Poésie," a collection of poems by Szymborska that had appeared with Fayard in 1997, one year after she won the Nobel.

In 1992, Gallimard founded its own holding company, Madrigall, which specializes in publishing. This group owns literary imprints endowed with symbolic capital and which play a significant role in the promotion of new writers, notably Mercure de France, Denoël, and POL. In 2012 Gallimard—or rather, Groupe Madrigall—acquired Flammarion, another major publisher. One of these imprints, Denoël, now also has a Nobel laureate on its list with Abdulrazak Gurnah. His case is revealing with regard to the publishing strategies which involve commercial calculations: a French translation of *Paradise* (1994) appeared in 1997 with Denoël, a historical literary imprint (it was Céline's publisher before WWII) belonging to Madrigall, before being reprinted in pocket format with Le Rocher, but sales were modest and Denoël had stopped investing in this author. In an informal conversation, Bernard Magnier, the editor of the series "Lettres africaines" at the independent publisher Actes Sud (see below), told me that he wanted to publish him in his collection, but the company's management refused. Gurnah was then taken over by a small publisher, Galaade, which in 2006 released a translation of *By the Sea* (2001). In an interview to the Agence France Press, the head of Galaade, Emmanuelle Colas, explained that she had discovered the novel at the Frankfurt Book Fair, on the table of a literary agent.<sup>19</sup> She bought the rights, and in 2009 published a second novel by him, *Desertion* (translated as *Adieu Zanzibar*), which won the "Témoignage du monde" prize of Radio France Internationale. But Galaade ran into financial difficulties, and Emmanuelle Colas had to start a new business under her own name. As a consequence, she lost the rights to the two titles by Gurnah, which were acquired and reissued by Denoël who, in the meanwhile, had also reprinted in haste *Paradis* when the Nobel award was announced.

6 Nobel laureates—Saramago, Gao Xingjian, Coetzee, Jelinek, and Mo Yan—are published in French by Le Seuil. This firm accumulated symbolic capital after the war by translating non-anglophone authors, especially the German authors associated with Group 47, notably Heinrich Böll, who won the Nobel in 1972, and Günter Grass, who won it in 1999 (Serry 2002). In the 1980s and 90s, Le Seuil continued to invest in a diverse catalog of authors writing in about 20 languages. Coetzee and Saramago have been published by Le Seuil since 1987/88. After having been

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<sup>19</sup> Hugues Honoré, "Le Nobel Abdulrazak Gurnah peu traduit en français pour l'instant," AFP, October 7, 2022.

introduced to France by a very small publisher, Alinéa, Mo Yan was translated by another small publisher specializing in East Asian literature, Philippe Picquier, and also started to publish in 1995 with Le Seuil, which became his sole publisher after the award. Jelinek was first published by a small independent publisher, Jacqueline Chambon, before she moved to Le Seuil in 2003, one year before she was awarded the Nobel Prize. Gao was also introduced by a small publisher, les éditions de l'Aube, who published three of his books, and was signed by Le Seuil after the Nobel. In 2004 Le Seuil was bought by La Martinière, which in 2017 was bought by the conglomerate Média-Participations, an acquisition that worried the intellectual world in France, but the impact of which is not yet clearly visible.

4 laureates are published outside Paris, in the French provinces. Imre Kertész and Svetlana Alexievich are published in Arles by Actes Sud, founded in 1979 by the Belgian Hubert Nyssen, who settled in this Southern city in order to combat Parisian domination and who accumulated symbolic and economic capital through translations (in the 1990s, Actes Sud's catalogue included translations from more than 36 languages), and who contributed to value accorded to translations by putting the name of the translator on the cover as well as by founding *Les Assises de la traduction*, an annual festival in Arles devoted to literary translation. Translations benefited from subsidies from the French government or the authors' countries of origin. The appearance of this competitor in the subfield of literary translations contributed to the diversification of languages in the prestigious foreign literature series of Gallimard ("Du monde entier") and Le Seuil ("Cadre vert") (Sapiro, 2008: 188-197).

Two poets, Tomas Tranströmer and Derek Walcott, are published by small publishers established in the French province. Tranströmer is published by Castor Astral, a small firm in Bordeaux, while Circé, based in Belval, near the border with Belgium, signed Walcott in 1992, the year he won the Nobel Prize. Walcott's first book to appear in French was a collection of poems, *Le Royaume du fruit-étoile*, followed in 1993 by a bilingual edition of another collection, *The Fortunate Traveller (Heureux le voyageur)*. In 1997, Circé also released a French translation of his play *Ti-Jean and his brothers*. While Circé continued to publish his poetry in bilingual editions with *The Light of the World* (2006), Walcott's verse autobiography *Another Life* (1973) appeared with Gallimard in 2002.

Olga Tokarczuk is published by Noir sur Blanc, a small independent publisher founded in 1987 in Montricher (Switzerland) before moving to Lausanne and Paris, and which specializes in Eastern European literature (Popa 2008). Initially, the founders, Vera and Jan Michalski, wanted to establish connections between France and Poland beyond the Iron Curtain as well as introducing new Russian literature.

The only other Nobel Prize winner whose first translations into French appeared outside of France is the Canadian author Alice Munro, probably thanks to the program subsidizing translations between English and French in Canada. But certain of her books were retranslated and published in France, first by Albin Michel in 1992 and then by Payot & Rivages. In 2009, however, a collaboration started between Éditions de l’Olivier (affiliated with Le Seuil) and Éditions du Boréal in Montreal to co-publish her work.

Thus, for the French language, while small publishers play an important role in discovering and translating new foreign authors, the Nobel laureates are concentrated around Gallimard and Le Seuil, two large firms with high symbolic capital, but which tend to invest in literary authors that also have a commercial potential—mostly novelists. While Le Seuil has been bought by a conglomerate, Gallimard has built one of its own.

**Table 3. Independent publishers vs. Groups (French)**

Group vs. Independent	Publisher	No. of laureates
Madrigall	Gallimard (12), Denoël (1)	14
Média-Participations	Seuil (6)	6
Editis	Plon (2), 10/18 (1)	3
Hachette /Lagardère	Fayard	2
Independent	Actes Sud (2), Payot et Rivages (1 ; acquired by Actes sud in 2013), Albin Michel (1), Circé (1), Le Castor astral (1), Noir sur Blanc (1), L’Arche (1)	8

### *German publishers*

The German publishing industry is geographically less concentrated than those of the French- and English-speaking worlds. However, it has four centers where the major literary publishers or imprints are based. In Munich, one finds Hanser, which publishes 7 of the 33 Nobel laureates discussed here: Pamuk, Herta Müller, Mo Yan, Walcott, Modiano, Alexievich, and Heaney. Hanser has a total of twenty Nobel laureates on its list (see box 2). In Frankfurt we find S. Fischer, which also publishes 7 of the laureates since 1990: 4 of them translated from English (Gordimer, Coetzee, Naipaul, and Munro) and 3 from other languages (Kenzaburō Ōe, Gao and Tranströmer). Based in Hamburg, Rowohlt publishes 5 of them: Toni Morrison, Kertész, Pinter, Saramago, and Jelinek. However, in 2010 Rowohlt refused to publish Saramago’s blog in printed form, and as a result Saramago left and his books were taken over by Hoffman und Campe (which

belongs to the Ganske Publishing Group)<sup>20</sup>. Berlin started becoming a publishing center only after the reunification of the two Germanies; many publishers moved there, including, in 2010, the prestigious Suhrkamp (formerly of Frankfurt), publisher of the Austrian writer and playwright Peter Handke (Nobel laureate in 2019), as well as, in German translation, Paz, Szymborska, and Vargas Llosa. It was this publisher which introduced Szymborska on the international scene (he published her since 1973). This is also true of Rowohlt for Kertész (Royer 2017). Eastern European, especially Polish, Czech, and Hungarian authors, indeed often depend on the German translation to access international visibility, as a Hungarian writer whom I interviewed (October 12, 2018) told me — but French remains the gateway language for Romanian authors.

**Box 2. Hanser’s list of Nobel laureates**

**1960**—Saint John Perse; **1961**—Ivo Andrić; **1968**—Yasunari Kawabata; **1975**—Eugenio Montale; **1978**—Isaac Bashevis Singer; **1980**—Czeslaw Milosz; 1981—Elias Canetti; 1987—Joseph Brodsky; **1992**—Derek Walcott; **1995**—Seamus Heaney; **2006**—Orhan Pamuk; **2008**—J.-M.G. Le Clézio; **2009**—Herta Müller; **2011**—Tomas Tranströmer; **2012**—Mo Yan; **2014**—Patrick Modiano; **2015**—Svetlana Alexievich

Six of the thirteen publishers are affiliated with a large conglomerate (see table 4), and publish half of the laureates (16). Although smaller than in the English-speaking world, this share is still significant. Holtzbrinck, which owns Fischer, Rowohlt, and Kiepenheuer & Witsch, concentrates the highest number of laureates, 12, half of them translated from English. Bertelsmann and its imprints also publish a variety of Anglophone authors: Ishiguro by Blessing, Glück by Luchterhand, and Gurnah, whose novel *Paradise* was released in haste just before the Nobel reception by Penguin Verlag in Munich. 3 other imprints belong to other groups.

**Table 4. Independent publishers vs Groups (German)**

Independent vs. Group	Publishers	No. of laureates
<b>Holtzbrinck</b>	S. Fischer (7), Rowohlt (5), Kiepenheuer & Witsch (1)	<b>13</b>
<b>Bertelsmann</b>	Luchterhand (1), Blessing (1), Penguin Verlag (1)	<b>3</b>
<b>Independent</b>	Hanser (7), Suhrkamp (5), Delius Klasing (1), Hoffmann & Campe (1), Kampa Verlag (1), Rotbuch (1), Steidl (1)	<b>17</b>

<sup>20</sup> Siobhan O’Leary, “Saramago Dumps German Publisher Over Disputed Blog,” *Publishing Perspectives*, April 26, 2010. <https://publishingperspectives.com/tag/rowohlt-verlag/>



Apart from the case of Gurnah, who is published by Penguin Random House (which belongs to Bertelsmann) in English and in German, no correlation was found between being published in a group in English on the one hand and in German on the other: only two other authors have publishers in the two languages affiliated with the same group, Holtzbrinck. This is an indicator of the relative autonomy of imprints in these groups, which are more organized in a horizontal rather than vertical manner, and which compete with one another.

Note that the two Austrian authors (Jelinek and Handke) in the group are published by German firms, attesting to the geographical concentration of symbolic capital within the German-speaking area in Germany. The only author whose German translations were released by a publisher based outside Germany is Olga Tokarczuk, who began to be published by Kampa Verlag in Zürich in 2018, one year after she won the award—the year in which Daniel Kampa founded his own publishing house. Born in Luxembourg to Polish parents, Kampa, a former editor (at the Swiss publisher Diogenes and later at Hoffmann und Campe), had always had an interest for Polish literature, as he explained in an interview with *Publishing Perspectives*. Tokarczuk had been published in Germany by several publishers but the books were out of print. "When I founded my company, I thought, 'she is the female voice of Polish literature.' If you're crazy enough to found a publishing company you're crazy enough to buy a 1,200-page book," said Kampa, referring to *The Books of Jacob*, which he started out at 3,000 copies (the translation had cost 30,000 euros), but of which he printed another 15,000 after the Nobel award<sup>21</sup>. By that time, however, he also acquired the rights for *Flights*, which won the Man Booker International in 2018. After the Nobel, three more of her novels were brought forward in November 2019, to be released before the reception. Asked whether he had expected the Nobel, he answered:

"Of course, I thought she deserved it, but you can never speculate on a prize. You can't even speculate on success. If you're a small publisher, you publish books that you love, and even if they don't sell, they're still great books and you love them."<sup>22</sup>

The independent publishers are those who ensure the highest linguistic diversity: in addition to works in German (3) and translations from English (3), they have released translations of 11 Nobel Prize-winning authors writing in 9 languages, whereas Bertelsmann's imprints published

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<sup>21</sup> Cited by Olivia Snakije, "Swiss Independent Publisher, Kampa Verlag, Happily Surprised by Olga Tokarczuk's Nobel Prize," *Publishing Perspectives*, 17 October 2019. <https://publishingperspectives.com/2019/10/one-year-old-indie-publisher-kampa-verlag-happily-surprised-by-olga-tokarczucs-nobel-prize/>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

only Anglophone laureates (3). The Holtzbrinck group is situated in between, with 6 authors translated from 6 languages other than English (6), in addition to one laureate writing in German.

This section has showed different types of editorial trajectory of a Nobel laureate, according to whether an author writes in a central or peripheral language, but in all cases, s/he has to have published with a dominant publisher in a central language, and to be translated in the two other central languages (the only who was not – in German – was Gurnah). In many cases, the translated authors from peripheral countries more and more often start with small independent publishers, and move to a central publisher, either just before the prize (like Mo Yan), or soon after (but they need to have at least one large publisher in one of these three languages). Consequently, the benefits of the prize go to these large publishers.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Despite its universal ambition and its proclaimed intention to enact autonomous aesthetic judgements at an international scale, the Nobel Academy has not avoided reproducing modes of domination in its literary choices. Until the 1990s, its list of laureates was mostly male, white, and 'Western.' At that time, the publishing industry (under the influence of the United States which achieved by then cultural hegemony) became aware of the underrepresentation of women, minorities, and migrants. While criticizing nationalism (for reasons both good and bad), the promoters of globalization also increased the pressure to widen the path to literary recognition to authors from the Global South. This opening, which started in the 1960s—thanks among others to the UNESCO program for translation and the strategy deployed by the Spanish agent Carmen Balcells, but also due to Cold War issues at stake—has been reinforced since 1990 by the inclusion of China and Turkey, but is still limited.

However, as this study has shown, despite greater diversity in the geographical and ethnic origins of laureates, it is the dominant Northern cultural intermediaries based in the central cities that continue to profit from the symbolic and economic benefits of the prize. This finding tallies with my earlier analysis of power relations within the global market for translations as well as with Alain Quemin's findings about the global market for contemporary art, meaning that this pattern is not specific to cultural industries, but concerns all markets of symbolic goods (Quemin 2006; Sapiro 2010, 2016). In the book market, processes of concentration within the publishing industry and the growing role of literary agents contributed to reinforcing the dominant position of the centers. The dominant agents usually prefer to work with imprints in large conglomerates because they have the means to pay for high advances and to circulate the work widely both in the domestic

market and abroad. The novel is the privileged genre because it is more profitable than poetry and drama. Yet the Nobel is still awarded to authors working in other genres, especially poetry, and Louise Glück offers an example of how the prize triggered the inclusion of poetry in the catalogue of Gallimard's foreign literature series "Du monde entier," where this genre is under-represented.

These concentrations reinforce the dominance of English, even though the most important conglomerates in this sector are German (Bertelsmann and Holtzbrinck). This is because books published in English by these conglomerates are more profitable, and the firms have more sophisticated (or aggressive) means of selling their products in the large English-speaking market as well as in translation. Against this trend, the Nobel promotes linguistic diversity by honoring a writer working in a different language each year, but we can also observe that linguistic diversity is best ensured by independent publishers, who are also often those who first discovered and introduced foreign authors from peripheral languages, whereas the increased representation of the English language among laureates reflects the direct and indirect pressures of the book industry on the Swedish Academy. From an American standpoint, the Nobel Prize is often mocked, as in this quote by the American journalist Adam Gopnik on NPR: "Every other year, it seems, the Nobel Prize in literature goes to an obscure European writer, full of hard consonants and solemn purposes, whom we all agree to honor for a day and forget all about right after"<sup>23</sup> (this quote was an introduction to his praise of Szyborska, who in his eyes stood as an exception to this "rule").

These findings probably reflect a transition from the old model of publishing to the new rationalized mode of production of books. In an interview, Olivier Bétourné, a former CEO of Le Seuil, described how "world publishing" changed from the mid-1980s, when it was still dominated by a distinguished group of international publishers who were meeting at the famous Hanser dinner at the Frankfurt Book Fair, to the present-day dominance of literary agents: "Basically, the catalogues of world publishing were an ideal association of publishers. Nowadays, it's the catalogue of Andrew Wylie. No, but that's true! [*laughs*]" (interview, July 2, 2018; my translation). This transformation is more advanced in the English-speaking world and less so in the French, where the publishers partly resist these changes, the German publishing industry being situated in between.

It is of course not in the mission of the Nobel to correct the tendencies of the book market. But still, an awareness of the mechanism that allow access to international visibility may help the Swedish Academy correct biases, as it has already started to do with regard to diversity, and resist

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<sup>23</sup> Adam Gopnik, "Szyborska's 'View': Small Truths Sharply Etched," NPR, June 5, 2007. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10721773&t=1652017667326>

the dominant stream by supporting (at least occasionally) small independent publishers or Global South cultural intermediaries.

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