

The Destabilization of Symbolic Boundaries in the Consumption of Translated Fiction

Duygu Tekgöl

Volume 9, numéro 1, automne 2017

Le traducteur et ses lecteurs
Translators and their Readers

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1043126ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1043126ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec

ISSN

1920-602X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Tekgöl, D. (2017). The Destabilization of Symbolic Boundaries in the Consumption of Translated Fiction. *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1043126ar>

Résumé de l'article

Au cours des dernières décennies, deux normes positives, le cosmopolitisme et l'omnivoreté, ont dominé la consommation culturelle en Grande-Bretagne. Dans cet article, nous examinons l'incidence de ces affinités interreliées sur la réception populaire des oeuvres de fiction en traduction. Notre analyse repose sur des données ethnographiques collectées, en majorité, par l'observation des activités de clubs de lecture au Royaume-Uni. Les commentaires de lecteurs et de lectrices servent ainsi de base pour illustrer la manière dont la lecture d'oeuvres traduites et la discussion qui s'ensuit encouragent ceux-ci à mobiliser leur capital culturel international, ainsi que la façon dont les frontières horizontales et verticales entre les genres littéraires en viennent à s'estomper. En conséquence, les traductions sont « revalorisées » ou « dévalorisées » sur le plan esthétique, notamment en fonction de leur commercialisation pour un nouveau lectorat.

Tous droits réservés © Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec, 2017



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

THE DESTABILIZATION OF SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES IN THE CONSUMPTION OF TRANSLATED FICTION

Duygu TEKGÜL

University of the Free State, Bloemfontein
Yeditepe University

ABSTRACT

For several decades, the positive norms of cosmopolitanism and omnivorousness have dominated cultural consumption in Britain. This paper will discuss the implications of these interrelated affinities in the popular reception of fiction in translation. Ethnographic data for the study has been collected mostly through participant observation with book club members in the UK. Through an analysis of statements made by readers, the article will illustrate how reading and discussing fiction in translation encourages readers to mobilize their international cultural capital and how horizontal and vertical boundaries between genres become blurred. Consequently, individual translations may become “upgraded” or “downgraded” in aesthetic terms, especially in the ways these books have been packaged and marketed to readers.

RÉSUMÉ

Au cours des dernières décennies, deux normes positives, le cosmopolitisme et l’omnivorité, ont dominé la consommation culturelle en Grande-Bretagne. Dans cet article, nous examinons l’incidence de ces affinités interreliées sur la réception populaire des œuvres de fiction en traduction. Notre analyse repose sur des données ethnographiques collectées, en majorité, par l’observation des activités de clubs de lecture au Royaume-Uni. Les commentaires de lecteurs et de lectrices servent ainsi de base pour illustrer la manière dont la lecture d’œuvres traduites et la discussion qui s’ensuit encouragent ceux-ci à mobiliser leur capital culturel international, ainsi que la façon dont les frontières horizontales et verticales entre les genres littéraires en viennent à s’estomper. En conséquence, les traductions sont « revalorisées » ou « dévalorisées » sur le plan esthétique, notamment en fonction de leur commercialisation pour un nouveau lectorat.

Introduction

This paper seeks to investigate the destabilization of symbolic boundaries in the popular reception of translated fiction. Examining excerpts from book club meetings and interviews with individual readers in Britain, the study will reveal how readers are encouraged to bridge horizontal and vertical boundaries in their discussion of international cultural products, which implies that such symbolic borders are likely to dissolve in their minds as well. The study links these outcomes to contextual factors: the positive norms of omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism in the UK in general, and, to a lesser degree, promotion strategies by publishers.

The underlying premise of the study is the fact that classification in art is culture-bound. According to Paul DiMaggio, “Genres represent socially constructed organizing principles that imbue artworks with significance beyond their thematic content and are, in turn, responsive to structurally generated demand for cultural information and affiliation.”¹ Therefore, status is ascribed to works of literature by the agents involved in the literary network—publishers, translators, reviewers, and, to a certain extent, lay readers—through an assessment of the relevance of the book in the value system of the literary culture.² Values change over time, and also across socio-cultural contexts. Robert Alter discusses the shifting nature of the canon, considering literary output almost as a plastic resource shaped by societal forces. He points out the importance of popular perceptions:

To think of any piece of writing as literature, it has been argued, is to attribute special value to it without in the end being able to specify the nature of the class of textual objects to which it has been attached. The act of classification, then, has to be a reflection of cultural or political values, not intrinsic to the writing.³

In other words, artistic categories such as high-, mid- and low-brow are eventually bound up with malleable society-specific evaluations. This applies to literature in translation as well, perhaps more so than to literature originally written in the readers’ first language. It is well established that translated texts adopt new positions, contexts or statuses as they cross cultural borders.⁴ The

text's new position is, in Gideon Toury's terms, determined "first and foremost by considerations originating in the culture which hosts [it]."⁵ As will be demonstrated below, the implications of this for the reading of translated fiction are manifold.

In what follows, I will explore how, as fiction crosses linguistic borders, the symbolic boundaries marking horizontal categories of art become obfuscated through intertextual and inter-genre connections established by readers, and how vertical aesthetic hierarchies may also be entangled. After a brief note on methodology, the concepts of omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism will be introduced, followed by a discussion on the blurring of symbolic boundaries, corroborated by reader comments from book group discussions in the UK. Finally, we will turn to the publishers for an overview of their take on cosmopolitanism and literary quality.

Methodology

The study draws from the PhD fieldwork that I conducted between 2009 and 2011 with book club members: most of the ethnographic data was collected through participant observation with reading groups and individual readers in London, Devon, Shropshire, Dorset, Staffordshire, Oxfordshire and Yorkshire in the UK. Many of these groups convened in public libraries and bookshops; however, I also visited several meetings in private homes. I supplemented my primary data with face-to-face (and in one case, online) interviews.⁶ The book club meetings (32 in total), the semi-structured focus group discussions (four) and interviews (14) were recorded with a voice recorder, relevant sections to be subsequently transcribed. In these meetings, which brought together between five and 20 members, women outnumbered men by about five to one. The discussions on the texts themselves lasted for about an hour, followed by another half hour's informal chat, whereas the duration of the focus group discussions and interviews ranged between 30 minutes and a full hour. In all of my fieldwork, I only met three individuals who came from an ethnic background other than white,⁷ and the majority of my respondents were presumably middle class and either in employment or retired. The book groups I got in touch with read few books in translation (about one in ten books) although I visited some groups only when they did discuss a text in translation.

The study is ultimately based on the assumption that reader comments reflect reception patterns. For this reason, it is worth bearing in mind that the destabilization of symbolic boundaries might be partly accounted for by group dynamics in cultural consumption: since book group meetings have a strong social dimension, many members have a vested interest in appearing to be establishing clever connections and casually throwing in interesting remarks. Peplow et al. delineate the ways in which reading group talk is discursively constructed, calling it “a distinctive readerly act.”⁸ The findings of this study are best understood in the context of reading groups, although considerable overlap with wider reading practices is to be expected.

Omnivorousness and Cosmopolitanism

Traditionally, products of high culture have conferred distinctive status upon middle class consumers, in line with Bourdieu’s⁹ framework; however, in the past several decades, omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism have emerged as distinctive practices in Western European and North American societies. Omnivorousness is defined as cultural engagement from a wider aesthetic spectrum, reflecting tolerance as a value. It is the antithesis of snobbery, which is marked by symbolic exclusivity in taste. Omnivorous dispositions embrace what is different, eclectic and “trendy.”¹⁰

According to John Frow, this change in the regime of value has dissipated feelings of illegitimacy or cultural inferiority among consumers of popular culture.¹¹ Although reading as a cultural activity played a limited role in the development of the omnivore trend,¹² there are clear signs that consumers in Britain embrace such tendencies in their reading habits. In their study on cultural consumption in Britain; Warde, Wright and Gayo-Cal identify three dimensions in omnivorousness: taste, knowledge and participation.¹³ The authors claim that this pattern of consumption is highest among the educated, white, middle-aged individuals in Britain. Omnivorousness represents openness to alternatives, but it does not imply indifference to distinctions; since it is embraced by higher status individuals, it does have implications for symbolic capital. This trend comes across as a new means of establishing cultural distinction, rather than the dissolution thereof. Therefore,

achievement of breadth seems to have replaced a narrowly defined notion of high culture that stands out in Bourdieu's¹⁴ theory of cultural consumption.

Consequently, in book group meetings, engaged readers usually avoid the image of someone consuming only high forms of art since extensive aesthetic engagement is now considered a marker of good taste,¹⁵ which makes such an orientation socially profitable. Actually, the commitment to omnivorousness may even be overstated. According to Elizabeth Long's study with all-women book clubs in Houston, USA, for example, it appears that readers' genre preferences might be less varied than their declared omnivorousness suggests:

When questioned about their reading, most members say initially, "We'll read anything." But groups usually do not deal with either end of the spectrum: most do not read poetry, plays, or difficult postmodernist novels, and if they do, they will mention it proudly. At the other end, groups rarely even consider genre books to be part of the relevant literary universe.¹⁶

This might be partly explained by the relatively conservative preferences of book clubs: concerns over taste usually dictate book selection by groups, which was often the case with my respondents as well. Although horizontal and vertical categories in art have become fused with the advent of postmodernism, as the above excerpt indicates, readers still attribute distinctive characteristics to what they believe to be relatively highbrow and lowbrow literature.¹⁷

Cosmopolitanism is characterized by an openness to international cultural experiences. Ulf Hannerz defines it as

an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity. To become more acquainted with more cultures is to turn into an aficionado, to view them as artworks. At the same time, however, cosmopolitanism can be a matter of competence, and competence of both a generalized and a more specialized kind. There is the

aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting.¹⁸

As Hannerz points out, cosmopolitanism is expressed in cultural capital. The aesthetic attitudes of omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism are intimately related. Fridman and Ollivier see these as common features of postmodern societies, where eclecticism and an “ostentatious” openness to diversity are valorized.¹⁹ Similarly, Bryson's study on consumption in the USA indicates that taste in art is associated to positions on racism and democratic liberalism: consumers exhibit correlating dispositions on political tolerance and art tolerance.²⁰ The implications of omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism for the consumption of translated fiction are significant: they emerge as cultural affinities of engaged, middle class British readers who find pleasure and distinction in reading translated fiction.

Translations at the Intersection of Omnivorousness and Cosmopolitanism

Among British individuals today, cultural forms demanding linguistic competence—music, cinema, and literature—are skewed towards Anglophone referents.²¹ Beyond the Anglophone world, the first point of contact is Western Europe: from tourism to food and to art; France, Italy and Spain claim the majority of international cultural consumption.

As translated literature is a rarefied field in the UK,²² reading a translated book can be seen as a form of cultural distinction, signalling membership to a cultivated group and possession of a distinctive taste. In literary cultures that are relatively more resistant to translation, such as Western European societies,²³ for those texts that make it to the target book market, the new position is often marked by rarity and perceived inaccessibility, which would constitute their distinctive value.²⁴ In Kraaykamp and Dijkstra's empirical research on book classifications in the Netherlands, for example, translated literary novels come second in complexity, after popular science, in a list of 23 subgenres of books in descending order.²⁵ With fiction in translation, this complexity might arise from the fact that the plot is set in an unfamiliar place, peppered with foreign proper names, including those of characters, making it

comparatively more difficult to follow the storyline. Moreover, different narration styles shaped by different literary conventions might also prove to be a challenge for readers, as will be illustrated below. Even though UK publishers have been known to domesticate translated texts to a degree that Lawrence Venuti²⁶ finds ethnocentric, fiction in translation still figures as “demanding reading” for the average reader in Britain. On the other hand, the perceived complexity of translated literature²⁷ might attract readers with high literary capital, since dealing with this complexity will give them aesthetic pleasure. Against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan norm, the reading experience is then accompanied by a sense of discovery, and distinction in taste. On the other hand, when translated novels are packaged and promoted as exotica,²⁸ they might be relegated to middle brow literature even though their position in the aesthetic scale of the source literary culture is higher. It might be argued then, that translated novels are subject to a reshuffling of positions in the aesthetic hierarchy, with symbolic boundaries becoming fuzzy. A general blurring of aesthetic demarcations is discernible in contemporary cultural consumption in the UK, but at the book groups that I visited for my fieldwork, this seemed to be a prominent aspect of discussions on fiction in translation, which is attributable to a loss of context in linguistic transference. The next sections will explore the permeability of horizontal and vertical boundaries in the consumption of translated fiction, as inflected by the norms of omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism.

Collapsing Horizontal Boundaries: Intertextual Connections

Many literary texts involve some degree of intertextuality; however, reading fiction in translation particularly encourages readers to mobilize their international literary capital. For heavy readers, exchanging opinions on a translated novel might turn into an exercise of establishing intertextual connections. For example, during a discussion on Nikolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls*²⁹ with heavy readers in a London library, someone found the novel almost “Dickensian.” This could be understood as an attempt to contextualize something “foreign” by establishing an analogy with something familiar, which, in book-related discussions, takes the form of intertextuality. Another agreed, explaining that she detected two tones in the novel, one comic and one socio-critical. In the same meeting, where Bulgakov’s *Master*

and *Margarita*³⁰ was being discussed in conjunction, a reader disagreed with the publisher's description of the plot as “Faustian.” She pointed to a Faust figure, Margarita, who sells her soul to the devil; however, in her opinion there was “no moral come-uppance” as required by the original Faust story.

Avid readers’ intertextual interpretations often transcend boundaries between art forms, providing further evidence of their eclectic cultural capital. The discussion on Haruki Murakami’s *After Dark*³¹ at the same London library indicated this pattern:

A: I thought the whole thing was very cinematic and it reminded me of the angels in *Wings of Desire*—movie by Wenders. While hovering above, they can’t affect the action, but they comment on it, see what’s going on. I think [the author] was very aware of all the cinema references: *Alphaville*, *Love Story* referenced. There are certainly references to other movies.

[...]

B: [In Murakami’s novel] there are constant references to particular pieces of music being played and I didn’t know any of them—so totally meaningless—apart from Scarlatti. [...]

[...]

C: He had a jazz café, or he had a kind of rock bar or something before, or, before he started writing I guess. All [his] novels are full of these unknown songs, which I always thought about going and finding but I never would.

As the readers point out, there are references to other works of art—film and music—in the book, and they all have a function in the plot: the author has carefully inserted selected pieces for background music in relevant scenes. Knowing at least some of these films, or songs, is essential for unpacking the multilayered aesthetic assemblage that the author has put together for readers. *Wings of Desire* is a 1987 German romantic fantasy film directed by Wim Wenders. Note that reader C recognizes that these are rare pieces, testifying to the author’s professional engagement with music. Her comment implies that she’s trying to justify why she does not know—or why us readers should not be expected to know—all of these references.

Reader B later compared the novel to Edward Hopper's iconic *Nighthawks* (1942), extending aesthetic references to painting. Thinking about one piece of international art seems to activate memories of previous omnivorous and cosmopolitan consumption. This is not surprising, considering the fact that cross-linguistic cultural products are seen as more profitable in terms of their status implications than in terms of their intrinsic qualities in the largely monolingual literary culture of Britain.

Likewise, one reader at a meeting of a private reading group in Devon established a connection between José Eduardo Agualusa's novel *Rainy Season*³² and the art of installation artist Marina Abramović. *Rainy Season* is set in Angola and mixes elements of humour and violence in an unusual plot, with quite a fluid narration style. Abramović is a New York-based Serbian performance artist who appeared at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art at the time. The reader learned about her as she was reading a copy of *The New Yorker*, and thought the fact that Abramović uses her own body as part of her installations, including elements like nakedness and self-inflicted pain, could be discussed in combination with the book, which includes scenes of physical torture. So we may infer that in this reader's mind, reading a book by this Angolan writer is associated with seeing the work of this avant-garde Serbian artist. Discussing fiction in translation thus prompts readers to re-process their international cultural capital.

Collapsing Vertical Boundaries: Aesthetic Hierarchy

My fieldwork observations have lead me to believe that by virtue of their rarity, translated novels are often upgraded, in engaged British reader's minds, to positions higher than they are placed in their source literary hierarchy. The role played by publishers in this upgrade will be discussed in a later section. In many cases, translated literature is a convenient source of distinction for readers with highbrow aspirations because even mid-brow translated literature carries cultural prestige.

Value judgements by the reader I interviewed from an Oxfordshire private reading group illustrate the fuzzy symbolic boundaries of international fiction. This reader implied that he had considerable literary capital: he'd studied English at Oxford University, where he read "gallons and gallons of stuff,

mainly the classics.” For the last six years he had been part of a book group that defined itself with highbrow taste. The list of books that the group chose included many canonical authors of international fame. During our interview, it struck me that he discussed Alaa al Aswany’s *The Yacoubian Building*³³ in the same breath as two of the world classics he had read for the book club. Alaa al Aswany is known as a popular author in Egypt, but the criticisms to be levelled against this particular book include characters lacking depth, the reliance on coincidence in the plot and one apartment building representing the whole Egyptian society in a rather simplistic way. The way the themes of homosexuality and corruption are addressed in the novel are hardly redeeming qualities, as one reviewer describes the author as “prejudiced” and “culturally as well as sexually conservative”³⁴ while another compares the book to a “soap opera.”³⁵ The Oxfordshire reader indicated that their book group is mainly interested in the subject matter of the novels they read, so the unfamiliar themes of *The Yacoubian Building* seem to take precedence for them over what might be regarded as the relatively weak technical construction of the novel. The status conferred to this title by cosmopolitanism seems to have lifted the book up in the literary hierarchy next to the world classics the group had previously read.

Another example comes from the Yorkshire reader I interviewed by e-mail about Orhan Pamuk’s *My Name is Red*.³⁶ He called the novel “one part *The Name of the Rose*, one part *Cabaret*, and one part *Reservoir Dogs*, with a dash of *1001 Nights* and *The Perfumed Garden*.” This list contains three translations: *The Name of the Rose*,³⁷ *1001 Nights*³⁸ and *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delight*.³⁹ Additionally, *Cabaret* (1972, Bob Fosse) has international content. The reader placed the Turkish novel right next to Umberto Eco’s, which suggests that he accords high value to it. *Cabaret* the musical is also known as a highbrow form; moreover, it embraces a cosmopolitan stance by inviting viewers to denounce Nazi fascism. It might be noted that the works of art were listed roughly in descending order of aesthetic status, actually: after the novel and the musical comes *Reservoir Dogs* (1992, Quentin Tarantino), which is an independent film, but classified as crime, and has had great box office success. *1001 Nights* and *The Perfumed Garden* are probably juxtaposed because they are both from Arabic literature, which perhaps served as a source of inspiration for the Orientalist themes of *My Name is Red* while the latter symbolizes the lowbrow in this comparison, as it is a work of erotic literature.

My Name is Red is essentially a crime novel set against a historical and exotic background. In his justification of why he compared the book to those particular works of art, the reader recognized the author's technique of using multiple narrators, but was also aware that this is not entirely an innovation. *My Name is Red* can be defined as a whodunit, a genre whose prime examples have been given by Agatha Christie in Britain. Exemplars of the historical novel in palace settings abound in this literary culture too, recently by Philippa Gregory, for instance. These are usually considered to be popular texts, and the crime and history aspects of *My Name is Red* could have led this reader to place it in a mid-brow context based on his familiarity with these genres. However, he only implicitly acknowledged this aspect of the novel by including *Reservoir Dogs* into the analogy. Due to the element of foreignness, an appreciation of the novel's technical qualities, and perhaps a familiarity with the author's international standing—confirmed by his receipt of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006—the reader ascribed it a status similar to that of Eco. The above examples show how these cultural products display great mobility in the aesthetic spectrum of readers' valorization.

Many engaged readers are aware of the various norms and conventions governing different literary cultures. In some cases, they can make evaluations as to where particular translated novels would fit into their own literary system. With a library reading group in Devon, we were discussing Xinran's *Key Burial*.⁴⁰ Readers said they found the account "light," "simplistic" and "contrived." "You would want more depth I thought." Then one reader suggested this might be due to the fact that the book was written by a Chinese author: "I wonder if it's anything to do with the Chinese aspect of it because in my head I was always hearing this Chinese voice, which to me is, [...] an absolutely amazing ability to keep on going in the face of adversities." It appears that the reader would readily accept the perceived foreignness of the account as legitimate on the level of content, but less so on the level of narration.

However, not all readers know what to make of the different structure and narration, and the result is confusion, which hinders the pleasure to be derived from reading. Members of the same book club found Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*⁴¹ a difficult read. The text has a cyclical

narrative style, which did not agree with some of the readers: “I got very confused instantly about all these people and places and [...] how one sentence started in the present and ended in the past—I had trouble keeping all those in my mind at the same time.” The reader then explained how she went on to Wikipedia because she “did not want to struggle anymore.” She “needed to find out why this was such a famous book” and read that the book was about the circularity of time, and people and places, so things started to make sense for her. This example suggests that readers might not think highly of novels translated from other languages when they are not familiar with the technical novelties they bring to the source, or for that matter, target literary culture.

The Producers’ Perspective

Translated novels are associated with rarity and a distinctive taste from the point of view of publishers as well. Nevertheless, due to the commercial imperative, exclusivity in taste is an attribute that producers would like to be more associated with than omnivorousness. According to Pete Ayrton of *Serpent’s Tail*, an independent publisher in the UK,

People who appreciate and read Proust don’t read Stephen King. I don’t think when we select translations we are following in the footsteps of Stephen King. It’s probably readers with a different kind of expectation, different literary tastes, that are attracted to fiction in translation.⁴²

Ayrton assumes a clear-cut line between popular and literary fiction, which doesn’t come across as strongly with some readers, but the publisher’s view may be taken as an indicator of his willingness to be identified with artistically sophisticated genres. In a similar vein, Bill Swainson from the independent Bloomsbury explains how he selects books:

So I’m looking for writers who I think can stand alongside [...] Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, John Irving, later on Richard Ford, Donna Tartt. [...] And Javier Cercas was a good and lucky find, and that gave me an idea of the kind of calibre you could go for and also a bit of an idea of how you might publish because there was a non-

fiction subject matter to the book. About the same time I discovered the Dutch writer Tim Krabbé and a Norwegian writer called Gunnar Kopperud.⁴³

The editor's use of the words "good and lucky find" and "discover" to refer to international authors who are presumably well-established figures in their home countries belies the contextual vacuum characterizing linguistic transference. Swainson seems to invest high symbolic value in his titles, as the "calibre" metaphor indicates.

Cosmopolitanism is evidently embraced by publishers too, whether independent or conglomerate. Having authors from around the world on their list is something to highlight in the catalogue and their promotional information—a source of symbolic value. Publishing houses and other institutions promoting international literature employ the vocabulary of cosmopolitanism: marketing material often contains analogies with windows, doors and bridges. Random House, one of the largest publishing houses in the UK, boasts a wide array of international authors:

Our authors are diverse, and they range from Scandinavian thriller and crime writers such as Jo Nesbø and Henning Mankell, through to prize-winning European writers such as Geert Mark, Javier Marias, Jonathan Littel and Umberto Eco. In addition we publish Japanese and Chinese writers such as Haruki Murakami, Xiaolu Guo, Xinran and Yoko Ogawa. [...] So, we are a diverse publisher, committed to publishing a wide range of literature in translation. The only rule is quality.⁴⁴

The commitment to cosmopolitanism at Random House spans continents; however, it's also matched by a strong emphasis on literary distinction. A parallel focus in marketing is likely to have a bearing on readers' perceptions; it might actually cause aesthetic balances to be tipped for readers who are not certain of the positioning of the author in the source culture. As the comment above reveals, prizes are crucial signs of distinction, effectively employed by publishers as a marketing tool.⁴⁵ Mention of a literary prize on a front cover or on promotional material could convince potential consumers of the book's literary merit and help make up for the "journalistic capital"⁴⁶ that translated authors often lack in the target context. Forewords by established literary

figures in the target culture also improve the image of the author.⁴⁷ Thus, promotional strategies employed by publishers are likely to be instrumental in the “highbrowing” of fiction in translation by readers. Given that some readers are prone to dismantling genre categories when it comes to international cultural consumption, publishers’ championing of cosmopolitanism might contribute to the destabilization of horizontal boundaries as well.

Conclusion

This study looked into genre demarcations from the perspective of readers consuming translated fiction. An outline of the omnivorous and cosmopolitan trends laid the ground for a discussion on symbolic boundaries in art. The primary material incorporated into the analysis indicated that British readers tend to consume translated fiction within the context of intertextual connections and that they are likely to “upgrade” or “downgrade” literary texts in translation. Translated novels, in effect, straddle both vertical and horizontal axes in hierarchies. The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the omnivorousness norm might be more conducive to de-emphasizing vertical boundaries while cosmopolitan endorsements might occasion horizontal connections between genres and aesthetic categories. The article contributes to debates on reading translations as it brings in the readers’ perspective, highlighting the need for ethnographic research with “real readers in natural reading environments.”⁴⁸ It also depicts a holistic picture by relating patterns of consumption back to producers’ strategies.

On a theoretical level, the destabilization of boundaries might ultimately have implications for the notion of alterity that is inherent in translation—as a process and as a product. Fuzzy symbolic boundaries might encourage us to rethink the categories of translated and non-translated, which are often taken for granted in translation research. The insights gained about readers’ reception could also have policy implications for publishers, whose textual selection and promotion strategies have been known to be in tune with market demands. Publishers’ interest in reaching out to reading groups is evident in their provision of “discussion questions” at the end of books or in companion websites. If the discussion patterns in these reading communities are replicated in other platforms that publishing houses are able to monitor

(e.g. literary festivals and online forums), this could lead them to select material that is amenable for cosmopolitan and omnivorous consumption, and make their packaging and marketing decisions accordingly.

This study has been limited to one socio-cultural context, namely contemporary Britain. Although efforts have been made to achieve representativeness of the sample in terms of geographical location, the respondents mainly came from book groups, whose reading and discussion patterns form a somewhat distinct literary culture, as mentioned previously. The research has not operationalized issues of class and gender either, as the particular sample has not presented opportunities for a contrastive analysis. Therefore, this line of research could be further advanced by other empirical work conducted in different contexts.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

Duygu Tekgül obtained her BA degree in Translation and Interpreting Studies at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, then completed an MA in Publishing and Language at Oxford Brookes University, and a PhD in Sociology at Exeter University. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein.

Notes

I would like to thank Matthias Zick Varul, Şule Demirkol-Ertürk and Carmen Delgado Luchner for their assistance during the various stages of writing this article. I am also grateful to the anonymous readers who took part in my study.

¹ Paul DiMaggio, “Classification in Art,” *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 4 (1987): 441.

² Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 21–23.

³ Robert Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 28.

⁴ See Itamar Even-Zohar, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem,” *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 46.

⁵ Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995), 26.

⁶ For reasons of ethics, information regarding readers, including names and reading groups, has been anonymized.

⁷ All of the individuals whose comments I incorporated into this specific article were white.

⁸ David Peplow, Joan Swann, Paola Trimarco and Sara Whitely, *The Discourse of Reading Groups: Integrating Cognitive and Sociocultural Perspectives* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 91.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984).

¹⁰ Richard A. Peterson, “Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore,” *Poetics* 21, no. 4 (1992): 243–58. For a brief historical outline, see also Richard A. Peterson and Roger M. Kern, “Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 904–6.

¹¹ John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 25.

¹² David Wright, “Cultural Capital and the Literary Field,” *Cultural Trends* 15, no. 2/3 (2006): 125.

¹³ Alan Warde, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal, “Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, the Myth of the Cultural Omnivore,” *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2007): 143–64.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984).

¹⁵ See Alan Warde, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal, “Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, the Myth of the Cultural Omnivore,” *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2007): 143–64.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 119.

¹⁷ Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 25–26.

¹⁸ Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 103.

¹⁹ Viviana Fridman and Michèle Ollivier, “Ouverture ostentatoire à la diversité et cosmopolitisme: vers une nouvelle configuration discursive?” *Sociologie et Sociétés* 36, no. 1

(2004): 105–26.

²⁰ Bethany Bryson, “‘Anything but Heavy Metal’: Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes,” *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 5 (1996): 884–9.

²¹ Mike Savage, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal, “Cosmopolitan Nationalism and the Cultural Reach of the White British,” *Nations and Nationalism* 16, no. 4 (2010): 598–615.

²² See Jasmine Donahaye, “Three Percent? Publishing Data and Statistics on Translated Literature in the United Kingdom and Ireland,” *Literature Across Frontiers* (2013), http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Three-Percent-Publishing-Data-and-Statistics-on-Translated-Literature-in-the-UK-and-Ireland_FINAL.pdf

²³ Itamar Even-Zohar, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem,” *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 50. See also Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12–21.

²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), 229.

²⁵ Gerbert Kraaykamp and Katinka Dijkstra, “Preferences in Leisure Time Book Reading: A Study on the Social Differentiation in Book Reading for the Netherlands,” *Poetics* 26 (1999): 206.

²⁶ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008 [1995]), 16.

²⁷ Gerbert Kraaykamp and Katinka Dijkstra, “Preferences in Leisure Time Book Reading: A Study on the Social Differentiation in Book Reading for the Netherlands,” *Poetics* 26 (1999): 206.

²⁸ Duygu Tekgül, “Marketing the Other: Exoticism in the Promotion of Literature from the Middle East and Asia,” in *Beyond Boundaries: East & West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, ed. Michelle Ying Ling Huang (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 230–48.

²⁹ Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, 1936).

³⁰ Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master and Margarita*, trans. Michael Glenny (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1967).

³¹ Haruki Murakami, *After Dark*, trans. Jay Rubin (London: Vintage, 2008).

³² José Eduardo Agualusa, *Rainy Season*, trans. Daniel Hahn (London: Arcadia, 2009).

³³ Alaa al Aswany, *The Yacoubian Building*, trans. Humphrey Davies (London and New York: Harper Perennial, 2007).

³⁴ Alev Adil, “The Yacoubian Building, by Alaa al Aswany, trans Humphrey Davies,” *The Independent* (February 16, 2007), <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-yacoubian-building-by-alaa-al-aswany-trans-humphrey-davies-436484.html>.

³⁵ John Freeman, “The Yacoubian Building, By Alaa al Aswany, Translated by Humphrey Davies,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 13, 2006), <http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/A-window-into-rich-life-of-Cairo-apartments-2514615.php>. These evaluations from the literary establishment do not have to be taken for objective points of reference but could help provide some perspective on the reader’s uncritical appraisal of the novel.

³⁶ Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, trans. Erdağ Göknar (London: Faber and Faber) 2002.

³⁷ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1984).

³⁸ Andrew Lang, ed., *Arabian Nights* (London: Longmans, Green, 1960).

³⁹ Umar ibn Muhammad Nafzawi, *The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi*, trans. Richard F. Burton (London: Guild Publishing, 1982).

⁴⁰ Xinran, *Sky Burial*, trans. Julia Lovell and Esther Tyldesley (London: Vintage, 2005).

⁴¹ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London: Cape, 1970).

⁴² Pete Ayrton, interview with the author, London, December 14, 2009.

⁴³ Bill Swainson, contribution to the discussion at the panel titled “The Art of Translation: A Closer Look,” Festival of Ibero-American Literature, London, November 14, 2009.

⁴⁴ Roger Bratchell, “Marketing Literature in Translation,” presentation at the London Book Fair panel titled “The Marketing of Literature in Translation: UK & China,” London, April 22, 2009.

⁴⁵ Claire Squires, “A Common Ground? Book Prize Culture in Europe,” *The Public* 11, no. 4 (2004): 37–48. Claire Squires, “Book Marketing and the Booker Prize,” in *Judging a Book by its Cover*, ed. Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 71–82. Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 97–101.

⁴⁶ James English, “Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards and the Rules of Art,” *New Literary History* 33, no. 1 (2002): 109–35.

⁴⁷ Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar, “Agency in Allographic Prefaces to Translated Books: An Initial Exploration of the Turkish Context,” in *Authorial and Editorial Voices in Translation 2 – Editorial and Publishing Practices*, ed. Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener (Montréal: Éditions québécoises de l’oeuvre, 2014), 89–108.

⁴⁸ David Peplow, Joan Swann, Paola Trimarco, and Sara Whitely, *The Discourse of Reading Groups: Integrating Cognitive and Sociocultural Perspectives* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 6.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Agualusa, José Eduardo. *Rainy Season*. Translated by Daniel Hahn. London: Arcadia, 2009.

Aswany, Alaa al. *The Yacoubian Building*. Translated by Humphrey Davies. London and New York: Harper Perennial, 2007.

Ayrton, Pete. Interview with the author. London, December 14, 2009.

Bratchell, Roger. "Marketing Literature in Translation." Presentation at the London Book Fair panel titled "The Marketing of Literature in Translation: UK & China." London, April 22, 2009.

Bulgakov, Mikhail. *Master and Margarita*. Translated by Michael Glenny. London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1967.

Eco, Umberto. *The Name of the Rose*. Translated by William Weaver. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1984.

Gogol, Nikolai. *Dead Souls*. Translated by Constance Garnett. New York: The Modern Library, 1936.

Lang, Andrew, ed. *Arabian Nights*. London: Longmans, Green, 1960.

Márquez, Gabriel García. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Translated by Gregory Rabassa. London: Cape, 1970.

Murakami, Haruki. *After Dark*. Translated by Jay Rubin. London: Vintage, 2008.

Nafzawi, Umar ibn Muhammad. *The Perfumed Garden of the Shaykh Nefzawi*. Translated by Richard F. Burton. London: Guild Publishing, 1982.

Pamuk, Orhan. *My Name is Red*. Translated by Erdağ Göknar. London: Faber and Faber, 2002.

Swainson, Bill. Contribution to the discussion at the panel titled “The Art of Translation: A Closer Look.” Festival of Ibero-American Literature. London, November 14, 2009.

Xinran. *Sky Burial*. Translated by Julia Lovell and Esther Tyldesley. London: Vintage, 2005.

Secondary Sources

Adil, Alev. “The Yacoubian Building, by Alaa al Aswany, trans Humphrey Davies.” *The Independent* (February 16, 2007). <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-yacoubian-building-by-alaa-al-aswany-trans-humphrey-davies-436484.html>.

Alter, Robert. *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age*. New York: Touchstone, 1989.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge, 1984.

Bryson, Bethany. “‘Anything but Heavy Metal’: Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes.” *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 5 (1996): 884–9.

Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Translated by M. B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2004.

DiMaggio, Paul. “Classification in Art.” *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 4 (1987): 440–5.

Donahaye, Jasmine. “Three Percent? Publishing Data and Statistics on Translated Literature in the United Kingdom and Ireland.” *Literature Across Frontiers* (2013) http://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Three-Percent-Publishing-Data-and-Statistics-on-Translated-Literature-in-the-UK-and-Ireland_FINAL.pdf.

English, James. “Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards and the Rules of Art.” *New Literary History* 33, no. 1 (2002): 109–35.

Even-Zohar, Itamar. “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem.” *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 45–51.

Freeman, John. “The Yacoubian Building, By Alaa al Aswany, Translated by Humphrey Davies.” *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 13, 2006). <http://www.sfgate.com/books/article/A-window-into-rich-life-of-Cairo-apartments-2514615.php>.

Fridman, Viviana and Ollivier, Michèle. “Ouverture ostentatoire à la diversité et cosmopolitisme: vers une nouvelle configuration discursive?” *Sociologie et Sociétés* 36, no. 1 (2004): 105–26.

Frow, John. *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*. Clarendon: Oxford, 1995.

Fuller, Danielle and Rehberg Sedo, DeNel. *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.

Hannerz, Ulf. *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Kraaykamp, Gerbert and Dijkstra, Katinka. “Preferences in Leisure Time Book Reading: A Study on the Social Differentiation in Book Reading for the Netherlands.” *Poetics* 26 (1999): 203–34.

Long, Elizabeth. *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Peplow, David; Swann, Joan; Trimarco, Paola and Whitely, Sara. *The Discourse of Reading Groups: Integrating Cognitive and Sociocultural Perspectives*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

Peterson, Richard A. “Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore.” *Poetics* 21, no. 4 (1992): 243–58.

Peterson, Richard A. and Kern, Roger M. “Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore.” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 900–907.

Savage, Mike; Wright, David and Gayo-Cal, Modesto. “Cosmopolitan Nationalism and the Cultural Reach of the White British.” *Nations and Nationalism* 16, no. 4 (2010): 598–615.

Squires, Claire. “A Common Ground? Book Prize Culture in Europe.” *The Public* 11, no. 4 (2004): 37–48.

———. “Book Marketing and the Booker Prize.” In *Judging a Book by its Cover*, edited by Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody, 71–82. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

———. *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Tahir Gürçağlar, Şehnaz. “Agency in Allographic Prefaces to Translated Books: An Initial Exploration of the Turkish Context.” In *Authorial and Editorial Voices in Translation 2 – Editorial and Publishing Practices*, edited by Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener, 89–108. Montréal: Éditions québécoises de l’oeuvre, 2014.

Tekgöl, Duygu. "Marketing the Other: Exoticism in the Promotion of Literature from the Middle East and Asia." In *Beyond Boundaries: East & West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, edited by Michelle Ying Ling Huang, 230–48. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

Toury, Gideon. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995.

Warde, Alan; Wright, David, and Gayo-Cal, Modesto. "Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, the Myth of the Cultural Omnivore." *Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2007): 143–64.

Wright, David. "Cultural Capital and the Literary Field." *Cultural Trends* 15, no. 2/3 (2006): 123–39.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (2nd ed.). London and New York: Routledge, 2008.