

# Activism, growth of small independent publishers leading to 'profound change' for translated fiction, research shows

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Activism, new networks and the growth of small independent presses is leading to profound change in the way translated fiction is published, a new study shows.

The research also shows the extent to which books written by male writers have dominated prestigious award longlists for the past two decades, with an even greater gender gap for translated fiction.

Dr. Richard Mansell, from the University of Exeter, examined data from the 272 titles longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize (2016-2019) and its predecessor the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (2001-2015) for translated fiction, and the 292 titles longlisted for the (Man) Booker Prize between 2001 and 2019.

The data shows the largest publishers' dominance on the longlists has waned for translated fiction. Whereas between 2001 and 2005 the "big five" published 55% of the titles longlisted for translated fiction, this fell to 47% between 2006 and 2010 and just 36% between 2016 and 2019.

Random House (later Penguin Random House) dominates these figures, mostly through the imprint The Harvill Press / Harvill Secker, but in recent years there has been a movement away from titles from the big five. This favours small independent publishers created post-2001 such as Peirene and Fitzcarraldo, as well as others with a longer history such

as Saqi, Arcadia, Granta, Pushkin and Profile and larger independent presses such as Canongate, Faber & Faber and Bloomsbury.

This trend is not in evidence in non-translated fiction. Among the longlisted titles for the Booker Prize between 2001 and 2019 the percentage of longlisted titles from big five publishers is not only consistently higher, but there is no discernible trend away from them either.

Dr. Mansell said: "This data indicates more prestige is still amassed by the big five publishers in non-translated fiction, but it shows change is happening right now in translated fiction. Positions of power of publishers are not as stable as they were. On the one hand, this has provoked changing practices amongst some of the big five, such as HarperCollins's decision to launch Harper Via, an imprint dedicated to translated fiction. On the other, it demonstrates that translated fiction is a more fertile ground for success for small independent publishers."

The study says an important reason why small independent publishers are growing is because of the way they discover and promote authors and titles thanks to networks of writers and translators, and the riskier choices they take. The prestige and profile of the reformulated Man Booker International Prize has brought translated fiction to a wider audience, both within and outside the UK, and this also raises the profile of translators.

Dr. Mansell said: "Translated fiction is not beholden to the same market logic as non-translated fiction, and activism is helping translators and publishers change the status quo. This has created instability in publishing translated fiction, so their work has more opportunity of securing lasting change. This is a vital task, since as this research demonstrates, there is a lot more to be done to achieve greater equality and diversity."

Data analysed by Dr. Mansell shows that, apart from 2018 and 2019, the longlists for the translated fiction prizes have been dominated by men. Between 2001 and 2017 books translated or written by male authors made up from 63% (2006) to 94% (2003). In 2018 this fell to 53%, and 2019 has been the only year with more titles authored by women (62% for women, 38 for men). The gender gap is lower in almost every year for non-translated books—between 2001 and 2012 the %age by male authors was between 57% and 77%. Between 2013 (the first year with more women than men) and 2019 it varied from 38% to 77%, with more women in five out of the seven years.

The research also shows in the past two decades most books on the awards longlists have been translated from French, German and Spanish, with European fiction making up between 70% (2001-2005) and 56% of titles (2016-2019). There has been some growth in the number of Norwegian and Swedish titles, thanks to the popularity of Scandi noir fiction, and also Polish titles thanks to initiatives such as the market focus at London book Fair, as well as the rising profile of Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk. Despite perceptions of an increase in Latin American titles, numbers have remained constant. Texts from Africa make up just five% over the whole period, and Asia has seen the greatest rise from fifteen% (2001-2005) to twenty-nine% (2016-2019).

Provided by University of Exeter

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