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Prestigious publishing in the semi-periphery: Swedish publishing of African Nobel laureates in literature after 1970

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ABSTRACT

The Nobel Prize in literature can be used as a tool for selecting high prestige literature, i.e., consecrated and canonised literature. This paper examines the Swedish publishing of six Nobel Prize in Literature laureates 1970–2016 that have a connection to an African country: John Maxwell Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, Doris Lessing, Naguib Mahfouz, and Wole Soyinka. By examining all Swedish editions of the laureates, their respective publishing trajectories can be explored, which enables the study of publishing practices of high prestige literature in the Swedish semi-peripheral language space. The publishing trajectory of Wole Soyinka is interesting, since he was introduced in Swedish by the independent publishing house Cavefors förlag. Cavefors was important as a publisher of African literature in Sweden, and was invested in ‘the African question’. Cavefors was able to stabilise their financial situation thanks to the Swedish state financial subsidy for translated and literary valuable fiction, introduced in 1975. All these aspects play an important part in understanding the mechanisms activated by the Nobel Prize and its consequences for the publishing of translated high prestige literature in the Swedish context.

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Examining cultural transfer via literary prizes

Literary prizes and awards have increasingly become an important part of the book market and literary world.¹ They help guide readers through an overwhelming supply of books, and they direct the attention to one specific writer or book for a limited period, which is crucial in our attention economy-based book market, where attention in itself is a form of currency (Franck, 2009). In the Swedish book market, although the number of translations published is quite high, books written in Swedish hold a dominant position.² Prizes can therefore help draw the readers’ attention to translated fiction. The Nobel Prize in literature, as the most prestigious literary prize, can be used as a selection criterion for high prestige literature, and, through it, the publishing practices of translated high prestige literature in a semi-peripheral language space can be examined.

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This paper focuses on six Nobel Prize laureates 1970–2016 with a connection to an African country, and on their published works in Swedish translations: John Maxwell Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio, Doris Lessing, Naguib Mahfouz, and Wole Soyinka. The purpose is to examine the impact of the Nobel Prize on the publishing trajectories of these writers in the Swedish literary market, and to determine what actors have been important for the writers in a Swedish context.

The Swedish language has been assessed as semi-peripheral in the world system of translations, and the Swedish book market has a special relationship to the Nobel Prize, since it is the Swedish Academy, which yearly decides which writer is going to be awarded the Prize. The common interest in the Prize is therefore great in a Swedish context. Pascale Casanova has argued that the Nobel Prize is the reason for the large number of translations in the Swedish book market (Casanova, 2004 [1999], p. 168). This has been refuted, in light of the fact that the number of translations had a larger share of the book market during the decades before the Prize was instituted (Svedjedal, 2012; p. 44.).

The selection process of the Nobel Prize laureate is covered by a shroud of mystique, which makes it hard to investigate. It is not possible to study the nominations, evaluations, or discussions of the Nobel committee for the selected laureates, since these documents are under 50 years of confidentiality (Espmark, 2001; p. 12.).

The Swedish Academy has the possibility to commission translations and special reports on specific candidates, which explains why it is not entirely true that the Academy is confined to commercial translations produced by the book market for its evaluation processes. The chances of a Nobel Prize for a specific writer does not automatically increase if the writer in question has been translated to Swedish (Espmark, 2001; p. 157. Cf. Casanova, 2004 [1999], p. 168; Beecroft, 2015, p. 257 f.; Kern, 2017/2018; p. 14.).

Due to the mentioned aspects, the Nobel Prize is especially interesting to study in the Swedish book market context.

Questions that have guided the study are: How have the writers' publishing trajectory been affected by the Nobel Prize and what differences are there before respectively after the Prize?

What actors, e.g., publishers or publishing houses, have been important for the laureates in a Swedish semi-peripheral context? In what ways has Wole Soyinka's publishing trajectory in a Swedish context been impacted by state financial subsidy and specific actors?

Materials and method

The questions mentioned above will be discussed using statistical methodology, based on a dataset covering all printed editions published by the six laureates in Swedish up to 2016. All published Swedish editions by the laureates have been collected, including books published before 1970, using the Swedish National Bibliography. By collecting all editions, two important aspects can be studied. Firstly, the publishers' speculations on the demand for the laureates' books can be assessed, especially in relation to the Nobel Prize. Secondly, one can distinguish the writers' publishing trajectories in the Swedish book market by collecting all editions, and examining when, and sometimes even why, the writers change publishing houses.

For the sake of comparability, I have not included anthologies, or newspaper and magazine publications. The dataset consists of 267 editions, published between 1951 and 2016.

The starting point 1970 has been chosen because this year, dramatic changes occurred in the Swedish book market. Fixed book prices were abolished, and as a result, a state financial subsidy for ‘translated and literary valuable fiction’ was launched in 1975 (Svedjedal, 2018; p. 459.). The state financial subsidy has been especially important for small publishing houses. Many were founded in the 1970s, some of them as a direct result of the new support system, while others were able to expand their work, thanks to the new financial possibilities (Steiner, 2006, p. 64; Peurell, 2018; pp. 525–528.).

The six laureates have been chosen from the 45 laureates in translation that were awarded the Nobel Prize during the period 1970–2016. This means, just as in the case of African literature in general, that the laureates do not have much in common, except their different connections to African countries. During especially the 1970s and 1980s, there was a reorientation within the Swedish Academy towards a more ‘global’ view in their decisions, which is why it is relevant to investigate (Espmark, 2001, p. 132 ff., 143–146, 149, 153 and 161 ff.). One could argue that neither Lessing or Le Clézio have been marketed or presented as particularly ‘African’ in the global book market, however, their connections to Southern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) and Mauritius respectively is not only part of their personal lives, but also their literary work. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that it could also have been a simple way for the Academy to approach literature from the African continent, since the Academy is heavily influenced by Western literatures.

I have chosen to expand on the case of Wole Soyinka in Swedish translation. Why the selection fell on Soyinka, is because he was championed by important cultural transmitters of African literature in a Swedish context, which makes it relevant to explore his specific cultural transfer. Sweden has also had a special relationship to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and other social issues regarding African countries, which I will return to shortly.

To be able to render a more precise picture of Soyinka’s cultural transfer, I have contrary to the other five laureates, examined articles about his work in the two largest Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, and collected information on his plays and short stories published in anthologies in Swedish translation. This makes it possible to give a more precise picture of his publishing trajectory as a whole.

Theory

This study does not primarily investigate the Nobel Prize itself, but uses it as a selection criterion. Research on the role of literary prizes in the book market by scholars such as Anna Auguscik, James F. English, Claire Squires, and Richard Todd have therefore only acted as a background (Todd, 1996; English, 2008; Squires, 2004; Squires, 2007; Auguscik, 2017). For a Swedish book market perspective on literary prizes, Jerry Määttä can be mentioned (Määttä, 2010).

The Nobel Prize in literature is instead used as a tool for selecting high prestige literature, i.e., consecrated and canonised literature.³ For quantitative descriptive study, it has been argued by scholars within the field of digital humanities that literary prizes can be

used as a measure for literary prestige (Cf. Porter, 2018, p. 2; Underwood, 2019, p. 73). Since there is no easy way to decide what literature is high prestige, one could base such a determination on other criteria, e.g., by examining curated lists of book recommendations (in a Swedish context, e.g., *Dagens Nyheter's* critics' list), by examining other prizes (e.g., the Booker, Büchner, Goncourt, or Pulitzer), or by compiling lists from literary historiographies where the most influential writers are named.⁴ The advantage of using the Nobel Prize is that it is awarded to writers from all language areas and has a worldwide impact.

My definition of high prestige literature has been inspired by David Damrosch's term *hypercanon*. I define high prestige literature as literature that has been assessed as prestigious by judges of the literary field, which is a definition inspired by canonical interpretations of world literature (Cf. Helgesson, 2006, pp. 308–318; Rosendahl Thomsen, 2008, especially pp. 1–32). The Nobel Prize laureates may be consecrated to what Damrosch describes as an international *hypercanon*, which is the highest level with the greatest reach within world literature, according to his three-level system of *hypercanon*, *counter-canon*, and *shadow-canon* (Damrosch, 2006; pp. 43–53). It is worth noting that not all laureates automatically become a part of the *hypercanon*, and some writers might already be a part of it before the Nobel Prize. What all the laureates do have in common is that they will always be laureates and therefore consecrated to some degree. This is a crucial point in understanding the mechanisms of the Nobel Prize in the world literary space.

Using the Nobel Prize as a selection criterion also creates some problems that need to be addressed. During the 46 years of Nobel Prize laureates that are examined in this study, the members of the Swedish Academy have changed, and the members have also altered what they want to reward with the Nobel Prize during different periods of time (Espmark, 2001, p. 132 ff., 143–146, 149, 153 and 161 ff). Nonetheless, the Academy has often been criticised for their lack of international perspective, their Eurocentric bias, and that they have chosen laureates to be representatives of their respective country (Lindfors, 1988, p. 477 and 481 f.; Winegarten, 1994, p. 73; Espmark, 2001, pp. 159–204 and 218–251; Huggan, 2001, p. 106; Beecroft, 2015, p. 257 f. and 297; Kern, 2017/2018; and Helgesson, 2019). This is another reason why it is interesting to take a closer look at laureates with a connection to an African country, and investigate how the Nobel Prize affected their presence in the Swedish market.

African literature in the Swedish context

The notion of 'African literature' is based on a simplistic view of the literary and cultural diversity of the continent, where the term has merely been constructed as an export product, since it is only a very small part of the literature from the continent that transfers to the Western world (Huggan, 2008; p. 106. Cf. Huggan, 2001; p. 34). African Literature is, as Graham Huggan points out, often written in First World languages, which means that the novels can travel untranslated, and often lets the writer act as a cultural spokesperson (Huggan, 2008; p. 106. Cf. Huggan, 2001, p. 34). Since some of the laureates have been marketed as African Literature, these notions are important to bear in mind, although the Swedish context has to be taken into consideration (Cf. Ragni Svensson, 2018; p. 143 ff). I follow Ragni Svensson, who has studied the small and prestigious publishing house Cavefors and its special relation to African literature. Svensson has argued

that although the term is problematic, the impact and power of the small independent publishing house Cavefors cannot be compared to the large actors in the publishing centre London, which are discussed by Huggan (e.g., the criticised Heinemann's African Writers Series) (Svensson, 2018; p. 144 f). It is therefore important to acknowledge the much more peripheral publishing context in Sweden.

There has been a special connection between Sweden and different African countries during the later decades of the twentieth century. Sweden was the first Western country to adopt sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa, the Algerian war was much discussed, and Swedish cultural actors used their platforms to demand freedom for imprisoned African writers. The Swedish writers Anders Ehnmark, Sara Lidman, and Per Wästberg all travelled to southern Africa and depicted the political situations in essays, articles, and novels. As an example, Wästberg's *Forbidden Territory* (1960) (on Zimbabwe and the Central African Federation) and *On the blacklist* (1960) (about South Africa), raised great interest among Swedish readers. The first mentioned was sold in 90,000 copies, and the second in almost 80,000 copies in Sweden, and both were translated into several languages (Ryberg, 1973; pp. 53–58). Both books were vital for what was called 'the African question', and were widely read and discussed in Sweden for a long time – 15 years after the first edition, *Forbidden Territory* was published in a revised edition, numbering 10,000 copies. Counting translations, both books were in total published in a remarkable 380,000 copies (Sellström, 1999; p. 114).

The public interest in 'the African question' was large, and inspired much discussion and activism (Svensson, 2018; p. 140 f. Cf. Sellström, 1999, pp. 111–117; Östberg, 2008; Granqvist, 2009, p. 63; Ekengren, 2011, p. 124 f). Independent publishing houses were essential for the dissemination of African writers' works in Sweden. This is another reason why it is important to use the very broad term African literature in this case, since it can be viewed separately from the large Anglophone marketing ventures of British publishing houses, and instead, understood from a Swedish semi-peripheral activist point of view. Where British publishing houses could present African writers untranslated and market them as 'new voices from Africa', the Swedish publishing practices were to a larger degree rooted in activism and in an interest in the social issues in Southern Africa – and the books had to be translated.

The laureates' publishing trajectories in Sweden

There are differences between the six laureates in regard to how widely disseminated they were in the Swedish market before the Nobel Prize. All laureates' first novels appeared in Swedish between 1951 and 1982, which means that the average time between introduction and Nobel Prize was 29 years.⁵ Of the six laureates, Lessing has been published the most, with 120 editions. Almost half of all the published editions in total were written by Lessing, and she is clearly the laureate that stands out.⁶ Coetzee, Gordimer, Le Clézio, and Mahfouz have between 31 and 37 Swedish editions, and the least published laureate of the six, Soyinka, has only 15 Swedish editions. The reach of the six laureates seems to have varied quite a bit, but the majority of them have a similar number of published Swedish editions.

Four of the six laureates have written in English (Coetzee, Gordimer, Lessing, Soyinka), one in French (Le Clézio), and one in Arabic (Mahfouz). First World languages are predominant in this group of laureates (Table 1).

Table 1. All Editions Published 1951–2016 in Swedish Translation by the six Laureates.

Laureate	Editions in Swedish Translation	Per cent
Doris Lessing	120	45
J. M. Coetzee	37	14
Nadine Gordimer	34	13
Naguib Mahfouz	31	12
J.M.G. Le Clézio	30	11
Wole Soyinka	15	6
Total	267	100

The publishing houses

To be able to say something about the larger picture of the Swedish book market, I have divided all publishing houses in the dataset into groups: large (I), medium-size (II), and small (III).⁷ I have divided them by size, not only in terms of how many books they publish each year or by revenue, but also by how many employees the publishing house has. A small publishing house might publish just as many books as a larger house, but has completely different possibilities for doing so.

The two publishing houses who have published the largest number of editions of African Nobel literature are Trevi (III) and Forum (II) (Table 2). These are the two most important publishing houses for Lessing in Swedish translation, which explains why they have published markedly more editions than the others (Cf. Rüegg, 2021; pp. 122–127). In third place, we find Bonniers (I), which is one of Sweden's largest and most prestigious publishing houses. The list in its entirety shows a quite diverse picture of the laureates' Swedish publishing houses, with many small and medium-size publishing houses represented. Some of the small ones specialise in publishing translations from a specific language, e.g., Elisabeth Grate (III) in French language literature or Alhambra (III) in Arabic language literature. It is even more interesting to see the divide between the publishing groups if all editions are examined: 111 of all the 267 editions were published by a medium-size, 94 by a small and only 61 by a large publishing house. Small and medium-size publishing houses have clearly been important in the publishing trajectories of these laureates.

By dividing all editions across publishing decades, we can discern the publishing patterns for the six laureates (Figure 1). The large publishing houses published most of their editions during the decades of the 1980s to the 2000s. Interestingly enough, they

Table 2. Publishing Houses who have Published seven or more Editions by the six Laureates (publishing group in parenthesis).

Publishing house	Editions Published	Per cent
Trevi (III)	51	19
Forum (II)	50	19
Bonniers (I)	31	12
Brombergs (III/II)	27	10
Wahlström & Widstrand (I)	18	7
Elisabeth Grate (III)	12	5
Månpocket (II)	10	4
Bakhäll (III)	9	3
Rabén & Sjögren (II)	9	3
Alhambra (I)	7	3
Gebers (II)	7	3
Norstedts (I)	7	3

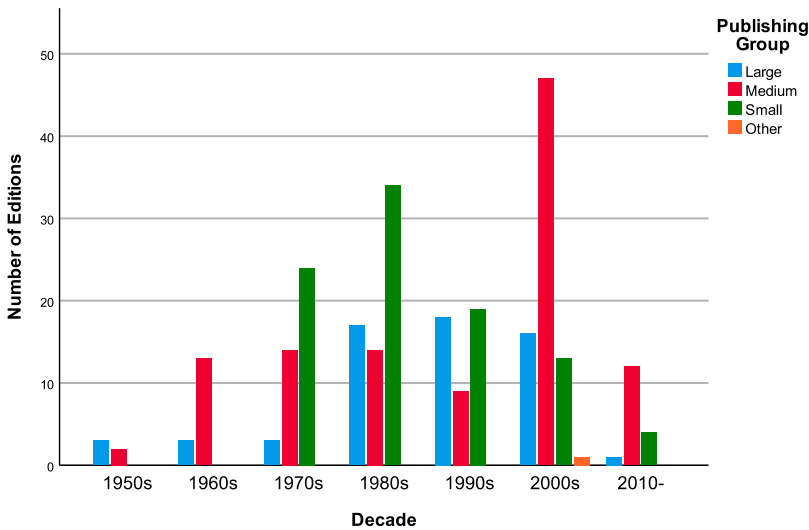


Figure 1. The Publishing Groups' Editions by Decade of Publication, All Editions.

published very few editions during the 1970s and 2010s, especially in comparison with the medium-size and small publishing houses.

The medium-size publishing houses published the largest number of editions in the 1960s. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, their number of published editions does not fluctuate very much. They reach their peak during the 2000s, which is directly linked to Lessing's Prize, and they also held a strong position during the 2010s.

No edition was published by a small publishing house before the 1970s. This is linked to the radical changes in the Swedish book market that took place during this decade. In the light of the fact that many small publishing houses were founded after 1970 thanks to the state financial subsidy, it is therefore quite astounding that the small publishing houses dominate the 1970s and 1980s, since they are, by and large, newly founded smaller players in the Swedish book market. On the other hand, one also has to remember that the state financial subsidy was founded to promote this type of publishing. It seems as though it had positive effects for the publishing of these laureates.⁸

The impact of the Nobel Prize

To be able to say something about the impact of the Nobel Prize, I have divided all published editions by the six laureates into three different categories: editions published before the Prize, editions published during the year of the Prize and editions published after the Prize. Generally speaking, the Nobel Prize stimulates an increase in publishing. How many books are being published during the Nobel year and after can be related to how well-known the writer was to the Swedish market before the Prize. If there is an extensive backlist to choose from, these titles reappear in new editions. A well-published writer continues to be translated, and a less translated writer returns to approximately the same number of editions as before the Prize. However, the Nobel Prize might still have had an effect, since it is not certain that the editions published after the Prize would otherwise have been published at all (Rüegg, 2021, pp. 79–104).

Of the six laureates, Mahfouz was the least published before the Prize, with only two editions. Most laureates had had between 35 and 40 per cent of their editions published before the Prize (Coetzee, Gordimer, and Soyinka) (Table 3). Two of the laureates stand out, as 76 per cent of Lessing's and 60 per cent of Le Clézio's editions were published before the Prize. There is a widespread notion that Nobel Prize laureates tend to be relatively unknown before the Prize, but this shows that all of the six laureates with the exception of Mahfouz were disseminated in the Swedish book market to a higher degree than one would have expected.⁹ Furthermore, this can be analysed by examining if laureates' works have been republished in paperback editions, since it can indicate the popularity of the writer (it is mostly used for large print-runs). All laureates except Mahfouz were republished in paperback editions before the Nobel Prize. This corresponds with the fact that the six laureates' works had a quite extensive circulation in the Swedish market before the Prize.

What Table 3 below shows is the large number of editions that has been published during the year of their respective Nobel Prize. Soyinka and Mahfouz have the highest percentages, with approximately a third of their Swedish editions in total appearing during their Nobel year.

Since Mahfouz is the laureate with the least number of editions published before the Prize, it is not surprising that he has the largest number of editions (65 per cent) published after the Nobel Prize year. Lessing, who was well published and known to the Swedish book market before the Prize, has the fewest number of editions succeeding it.

Tetz Rooke has examined the Swedish 'Mahfouz effect' after the Nobel Prize, and found that there were both positive and negative aspects to it. Mahfouz had, just in time for the Nobel Prize, migrated to Alhambra (III), which specialised in translations from Arabic. In record time, only six weeks after the Nobel Prize for Mahfouz was announced, two new translations were published. This timing led to new economic possibilities for Alhambra, and secured further publishing of translations from Arabic into Swedish. Although Rooke notes, Arabic literature was still marginalised in Sweden and Alhambra's issues with e.g., distribution only worsened the problem. There were plenty of new translations, but the readers were not many and the print-runs small (Rooke, 2011; p. 94 ff). For small actors, a Nobel Prize does of course add prestige to the publishing house, but they might lack the experience of calculating large print-runs and also the economic means to print them (Bremberg, 2008; p. 5). Elisabeth Grate has said that she was dependent on credits from her printer and distributor when Le Clézio was awarded the prize in 2008 (Bremberg, 2008).

As we can see from Table 4 where all first editions before, during, and after the Prize are listed (i.e., new translations), the majority of the laureates were published more in Swedish translation before the Prize than after. Mahfouz, had more translations after

Table 3. The Laureates' Editions in Relation to the Nobel Prize (percentage in parenthesis).

Writer (Nobel Prize Year)	Before the Nobel Prize	Year of the Nobel Prize	After the Nobel Prize	Total
Soyinka (1986)	6 (40%)	5 (33%)	4 (27%)	15
Mahfouz (1988)	2 (6%)	9 (30%)	20 (65%)	31
Gordimer (1991)	14 (38%)	6 (18%)	14 (41%)	34
Coetzee (2003)	13 (35%)	9 (24%)	15 (41%)	37
Lessing (2007)	91 (76%)	13 (11%)	16 (13%)	120
Le Clézio (2008)	18 (60%)	7 (23%)	5 (17%)	30

Table 4. The Laureates' First Editions in Relation to the Nobel Prize (percentage in parenthesis).

Writer (Nobel Prize Year)	Before the Nobel Prize	Year of the Nobel Prize	After the Nobel Prize	Total
Soyinka (1986)	5 (71%)	0	2 (29%)	7
Mahfouz (1988)	1 (7%)	0	13 (93%)	14
Gordimer (1991)	11 (61%)	2 (11%)	5 (28%)	18
Coetzee (2003)	9 (47%)	1 (6%)	9 (47%)	19
Lessing (2007)	36 (95%)	0	2 (5%)	38
Le Clézio (2008)	14 (74%)	1 (5%)	4 (21%)	19

the Prize, and Coetzee had exactly the same number before and after the Prize. This pattern has to be understood in relation to the time the writers have been available in translation to the Swedish book market. The average interval between the first published edition, i.e., the introduction to the Swedish book market, and the Nobel Prize for the laureates 1970–2016 is 20 years and many of them had their publishing peak long before the Prize – although in some cases so long in advance of the Prize that the public might have forgotten the writer in question (Rüegg, 2021, p. 54 ff. and 111 f). The Nobel Prize therefore activates other mechanisms than e.g., the Booker Prize, since the latter is given to a recently published writer, thus promoting frontlist publishing. The Nobel Prize stimulates the publishing of backlist books, not least because translations often are necessary for the publishing of a laureate in a Swedish context. The fact that a Nobel Prize does not mean an immediate increase of new translations from a certain language has been shown by Anna Gunder in her studies on Japanese and Icelandic laureates; neither case presented an increase of translations in the wake of the Nobel Prize (Gunder, 2011a, p. 113 f.; Gunder, 2011b, p. 69).

Case study: Wole Soyinka in Sweden¹⁰

Here, I will expand on the Nigerian laureate Wole Soyinka (b. 1934). Different factors, such as the Swedish state financial subsidy and independent cultural transmitters, have all worked together in this specific cultural transfer. Soyinka was also the first writer from an African country to receive the Nobel Prize in 1986, which makes his case especially interesting.

The first novel by Soyinka in Swedish translation was published in 1975, but he had actually been present in the Swedish literary field long before that.¹¹ When examining publications other than printed books, it becomes clear that Soyinka's first printed edition was in fact well prepared for. As in the case of many translated writers in a semi-peripheral context, there have been especially important cultural transmitters of Soyinka's work to Sweden: Per Wästberg and Bo Cavefors.

The writer (and from 1997 member of the Swedish Academy) Per Wästberg's interest in African literature originated from travels to African countries and led to an involvement in Swedish PEN, where he was president 1967–1978 (Svedjedal, 2013; p. 182). The early travels inspired him to edit an important anthology of African literature, in which Soyinka was featured, *Afrika berättar* (which roughly translates as 'Africa narrates', as in telling a story), published in 1961 at the independent and prestigious publishing house Cavefors förlag (III) (Svensson, 2018; p. 141 ff). Bo Cavefors had a great interest in social issues regarding African countries, and therefore published many books on the subject. The anthology was an early publication regarding the growing

interest in African culture in Sweden (Svensson, 2018, p. 141 & 145). Again, the term 'African culture' is fraught, but this term was used by Cavefors for marketing purposes and by Wästberg in the promotion of writers from African countries.¹² African literature remained a special interest of Cavefors förlag until the publishing house closed in 1982, and the publishing house has had a great impact on the quantity of African literature that has been published in Sweden in general (Svensson, 2018; p. 141 ff).

Wästberg is regarded as one of the most prominent cultural transmitters of African literature to Sweden. He started to write about African literature for *Dagens Nyheter* in the 1960s, and in his opinion, Soyinka was the most interesting writer at the time (Wästberg, 1968). Together with the solicitor Hans Göran Franck, Wästberg founded the Swedish section of Amnesty in 1964 and therefore had a prominent position in advocating for Soyinka's release from imprisonment 1967–1969 through articles and announcements in *Dagens Nyheter*.¹³ Earlier in 1967, Soyinka had visited Sweden for an African-Scandinavian writers' conference.¹⁴ He also visited Swedish PEN's international writers' meeting in 1973 (Wästberg, 1973a). Due to the many articles Wästberg wrote on Soyinka's behalf, he can be viewed as an important cultural transmitter of Soyinka's work to Sweden.

Up until Soyinka's first novel in Swedish translation, he and his work had repeatedly been discussed in *Dagens Nyheter*, he had visited Sweden twice, and his play *Swamp Dwellers* had played at the Royal Dramatic Theatre and on Swedish Radio. In addition, he had been featured in anthologies and literary magazines.¹⁵ The first novel was therefore well prepared for, when Cavefors (III) published it in 1975.

Cavefors (III) was to publish two more novels the following years,¹⁶ and all three novels where a part of the influential series 'Afrika berättar' (it shared its name with the first anthology), which continued until 1981 (Svensson, 2018; p. 149). As mentioned earlier, the state financial subsidy for translated fiction was founded in 1975, and Cavefors (III) received it for all three books by Soyinka and was by extension able to stabilise their financial situation (Steiner, 2006; p. 64).

Soyinka's continued publishing trajectory and the Nobel Prize

After Cavefors' (III) publications, there was a six-year hiatus before the large publishing house Wahlström & Widstrand (I) continued Soyinka's publishing trajectory. The main reason for the change of publishing house was that Cavefors closed down due to bankruptcy in 1982 (Svensson, 2018, p. 11). Wahlström & Widstrand (I) published two new first editions (*Oguns skugga* and *Aké*), and a backlist novel in 1983.¹⁷

During Soyinka's Nobel Prize year 1986, Wahlström & Widstrand (I) published new editions of all five novels and the poetry collection in their backlist.¹⁸ One of the backlist novels, *Aké*, was reprinted in 1987, and then there was a three-year hiatus until a new novel, *Isara*, was published in 1990.¹⁹ After a reprint of *Isara* the following year, there was a 17-year hiatus in Soyinka's Swedish publishing until his memoirs were published in 2008, which is the most recent Swedish translation. In total, 15 editions by Soyinka have been published in Swedish, seven of them first editions.²⁰

Interestingly enough, Soyinka's publishing trajectory follows the same pattern as Les-sing's. Both were introduced by small publishing houses and when they no longer had the possibilities to continue to publish them, both migrated to larger publishers. The small

publishing houses who had taken the financial risk of publishing the writers long before the Prize were no longer around when the Prize was awarded to Lessing and Soyinka. These examples actually illustrate the mechanisms of the Swedish book market, where the two large actors have remained in the market since the seventeenth century and smaller actors are more fleeting. None the less, small actors play an important part for the publishing of high prestige literature in translation.

Concluding remarks

The Nobel Prize laureates J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, J. M. G. Le Clézio, Doris Lessing, Naguib Mahfouz, and Wole Soyinka have been extensively translated into Swedish, though not only because of the Prize, since three out of the six laureates have more editions published before the Prize than after. The majority of editions, 77 per cent, were published by small and medium-size publishing houses, suggesting that they play an important role in the transfer of African high prestige literature in Sweden. Forum (II) and Trevi (III) were especially important for the publishing of Lessing, the most widely published of the six laureates and all laureates in translation 1970–2016 (Cf. Rüegg, 2021; pp. 122–127).

On some occasions, translated high prestige literature can be furthered by chance, e.g., by prestigious literary prizes which help direct attention to the writer in question. As in the cases of the six laureates, the Nobel Prize created opportunities for extensive backlist publishing during the year of the Prize.

Nevertheless, the Prize did not introduce any of the six laureates in a Swedish context. All of them, with the exception of Mahfouz, were well-known to the Swedish book market before the Prize, which can be measured by how many editions had been published before the Prize. The average time between the first published book and the Nobel Prize was 29 years, which implies that the Prize reintroduced rather than introduced them. This can also be seen in the number of new translations published after the Prize: Only in the case of Mahfouz did the Prize stimulate a large number of new translations, since very few were published before the Prize.

The publishing of translated high prestige literature in the Swedish semi-peripheral language space is often reliant on being championed by smaller, often prestigious and specialised, publishing houses and independent actors that act as cultural transmitters. This type of literature is also largely dependent on state financial subsidy, and in a Swedish context, the subsidy also helped smaller publishers, such as Cavefors (III), to start or expand their businesses (Steiner, 2006, p. 64; Peurell, 2018; pp. 525–528). In the case of Soyinka, an independent cultural transmitter, Per Wästberg, and a small but prestigious publishing house, Cavefors (III), were seminal not only for the introduction of Soyinka, but also for African literature and ‘the African question’ in Sweden at large. Coincidentally, the subsidy was introduced in 1975 – the same year as the first Wole Soyinka novel appeared in Swedish translation.

During Soyinka’s Nobel Prize year of 1986, Wahlström & Widstrand (I), even though it had nothing to do with the introduction of Soyinka to a Swedish context, was able to gain prestige from the Nobel Prize. Compared to the other laureates during the 1980s, Soyinka’s migration from a small to a larger publishing house is quite unique, since only one other laureate migrated in the same fashion (Rüegg, 2021, p. 168 ff. and 174–

178). This does not reflect the overall trend for the laureates 1970–2016, where there are tendencies of migration from larger to smaller publishing houses over time (Rüegg, 2021, pp. 151–158). This shows that both close investigations of individual publishing trajectories and examinations of larger patterns are vital in understanding the mechanisms of cultural transfer of high prestige literature.

Notes

1. Cf. English, 2008 [2005], pp. 1–3. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the European Society for Translation Studies Congress 2019 Living Translation: People, Processes, Products in Stellenbosch.
2. During 2005–2009, 56 percent of all printed fiction in Sweden were Swedish originals (Svedjedal, 2012; p. 43).
3. This section is an abbreviated translation from *Nobelbanor* (Rüegg, 2021). I base my understanding on Svedjedal's definition of the difference between *consecrated* and *canonised literature*, where consecration is short-term and canonisation long-term (Svedjedal, 1999; p. 10).
4. Using bestseller lists is not an ideal option, since they mostly consist of domestic literature (Steiner, 2018; p. 122).
5. The years of the first published edition of each laureate are: Lessing 1951, Gordimer 1955, Le Clézio 1964, Soyinka 1975, Mahfouz 1981, and Coetzee 1982.
6. Even in comparison with all laureates between 1970 and 2016 (Swedish laureates excluded), Lessing stands out. The second most published laureate in a Swedish context is Isaac B. Singer (90 editions), followed by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Heinrich Böll (both 75 editions) (Rüegg, 2021).
7. The large publishing houses: Bonniers (in three cases called Bonnierförlagen), Norstedts, Natur & Kultur, and Wahlström & Widstrand. The medium-size publishing houses: Aldus, AWE/Gebers, Brombergs (from 1991), Forum, Gebers, Hökerbergs, Litteraturfrämjandet, Månocket, Rabén & Sjögren, and Rabén Prisma. In one case, Forum and Wahlström & Widstrand co-operated in publishing an edition, and this co-operation has been categorised as medium in size, since the laureate was mostly published by Forum. The small publishing houses: Alhambra, Bakhåll, Brombergs (until 1990), Cavefors, Elisabeth Grate, Fischer & Co, Novellix, Nya Doxa, and Trevi. Only one edition was published by a publishing house (Grote Letter bibliotheek) that does not match any of the three main categories; it has been placed in the group 'other'.
8. Although many publishing houses are hard to place in a category based on size, Brombergs is a particularly difficult case. It started as a small, family-owned publishing house in 1975, founded by Adam Bromberg and his daughter Dorotea Bromberg. Due to successful publishing choices, where successes with publishing Nobel laureates e.g. Czesław Miłosz and Isaac B. Singer played an important part, the publishing house was bought by the Swedish media corporation MTG in 1991 (Warnqvist, 2007, p. 85; Sundin 2012, p. 289). Therefore, I have decided that Brombergs is categorised as a small publishing house up until 1990, and from 1991 it is categorised as a medium-size publishing house.
9. This aligns with the publishing trajectories of the translated laureates during 1970 to 2016, where 22 of them were reprinted in paperback before the Prize (Rüegg, 2021; p. 111 f.).
10. As mentioned above, an earlier version of this paper was presented at the EST Congress 2019 in Stellenbosch. A recent publication has in a commendable way investigated Wole Soyinka's position within world literature. There is an interesting examination of the Swedish translators' position, which is why I will not expand on the subject (Edfeldt et al., 2022, pp. 103–105). Instead, I recommend reading the section 'Anglophone African Nobel literature in Swedish: The case of Wole Soyinka' in *Northern Crossings* (2022).
11. *Röster ur förändringen* [orig. *The Interpreters*] (1975), translated by Estrid Tenggren and Eivor Olerup. *Northern Crossings* (2022) states that *Oguns skugga* was published as early

- as 1972 by Wahlström & Widstrand (I), but I have not found this edition in the Swedish National Bibliography or in the printed version *Svensk Bokkatalog*. Cf. Edfeldt et al., 2022; pp. 99–106.
12. Wästberg discussed the situation of the African book market in the early 1980s, when the market was still largely controlled by multinational publishing conglomerates, and what effects this had on the national book markets in African countries (Wästberg, 1984).
 13. The Swedish Academy, 'Chair no. 12 - Per Wästberg', accessed on September 30, 2020; 'Pennklubbsvädjan för fängslad poet', (1967b); Wästberg, 1968; 'Amnesty vädjar för fängslad dramatiker', (1968); Wästberg, 1969a; Wästberg, 1969b.
 14. Wästberg, 1967; '23 afrikanska författare möter nordiska kolleger', (1967a).
 15. E.g. '23 afrikanska författare möter nordiska kolleger', (1967a); 'Pennklubbsvädjan för fängslad poet', (1967b); Halldén, 1968; Wästberg, 1968; 'Amnesty vädjar för fängslad dramatiker', *Dagens Nyheter*, April 3, 1968; Wästberg, 1969a; Wästberg, 1969b; Björck, 1969; Zern, 1970; Wästberg, 1973b.
 16. *Laglöshetens tid* [orig. *Season of Anomy*] (1976), translated by Estrid Tenggren and Eivor Olerup. *Mannen dog. Anteckningar från fängelset* [orig. *The Man Died: Prison Notes*] (1977) translated by Estrid Tenggren and Eivor Olerup.
 17. *Aké. Barndomsåren* [orig. *Aké: The Years of Childhood*] (1983), translation by Lennart Olofsson. *Oguns skugga. Dikter* [collection of poems] (1983), translation by Gunnar Harding and Östen Sjöstrand. New edition: *Laglöshetens tid* [orig. *Season of Anomy*] (1986), translated by Estrid Tenggren and Eivor Olerup.
 18. For the Nigerian reactions on Soyinka's prize, see e.g. Lindfors, 1988.
 19. *Isara. En resa kring min far* [orig. *Isara: A voyage around 'Essay'*] (1990), translated by Björn Ranung.
 20. Seven translators have interpreted Soyinka's work in Swedish: Hans Berggren, Gunnar Harding, Eivor Olerup, Lennart Olofsson, Björn Ranung, Östen Sjöstrand, and Estrid Tenggren.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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