Paris as a publishing capital for foreign authors


The article’s rather bombastic title, sounding like something General de Gaulle might have said, should be read as an invitation to consider how literary capitals shifted between 1930 and 1960. Paris was the nerve center of Western culture between the two world wars, attracting artists from South America, the English-speaking world, Eastern Europe, and Africa, until German occupation turned the city dangerously inward-looking. Most of the city’s foreign population was flung, as if by centrifugal force, out to other, brighter horizons, as Switzerland, Algiers, and New York took on their own immigrant colonies. A new dividing line separated the zone under German control from towns and cities in southern France, which set out to poach the authors and publishers that gave Paris its place at the heart of World Literature. Lyons, Marseilles, Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, even Algiers and Geneva proved dangerous rivals for the Left Bank. Would the power of attraction of 1930s Paris withstand the expansion of American culture after the war? Such was the major issue facing French publishing in 1945, as bookshop window displays were hastily emptied of authors from the dark days just passed and refilled with writers banned for four years.

A certain number of conditions must be met for a city to act as a publishing capital for foreign authors. One such is the presence of a network of publishers, in Paris’s case concentrated in just a handful of streets in the fifth and sixth arrondissements. Cultural exchanges are promoted by the existence of journals, meeting places (such as the Mutuality Hall in Paris), a prestigious university, an abundance of theaters, and literary cafés, standing in for their nineteenth-century predecessors, literary salons and reading circles. These conditions were necessary, but not sufficient. A further requirement was something that set French writers apart from their foreign
counterparts: their militancy. The American sociologist Priscilla Ferguson has studied this aspect.¹ As public figures, Parisian men of letters were discussed well beyond their own sphere of activity, in the press, on the radio, and within a few years, on the television and in the cinema. In the world of 1946–47, divided into two camps, writers chose their side: the advent of the existentialists, anti-colonialists, and Third-Worldists should be read in the light of the pacifist and anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s to determine whether they were truly the heirs to Malraux, Gide, and Aragon. Given that France was then engaged in two lengthy colonial wars, a further question is whether African and Far Eastern poets, novelists, playwrights, and essayists snubbed Paris, or whether they sought to strengthen ties with the city by seeking publication there.

Since the late nineteenth century, texts have increasingly circulated beyond their cultures of origin in versions adapted for each new country. French lost ground as the language of the European elite in the latter half of the nineteenth century, though it remained the dominant language of diplomacy to a certain extent. The significance of translation as a cultural phenomenon thus increased from the period 1880–1914 on. More research remains to be done in this area, focusing particularly on the role of publishing. While a statistical approach can only give a rough idea of tastes and fashions, quantitative data avoids the subjectivity of evidence taken from memoirs and diaries. The present article thus focuses on two points: Paris’s ability to translate foreign authors and the range of languages chosen for translation. A related issue is the presence in Paris of certain authors refused publication or even banned in their homelands. James Joyce’s publishing experience in the 1930s is comparable to that of Henry Miller and Vladimir Nabokov in the post-war period. In the former case, a marginal, censored publication became a cause célèbre in the 1950s as the Anglosphere clung to its puritan traditions. Europe served as a refuge and Paris’s role in publishing English-language works – small in size, huge in influence – kept up the work begun before the war, despite the risks they faced under the 1949 law on protecting the morals of young readers.

Literary Paris in the 1930s: A brief introduction

Paris’s power of attraction in the interwar period has often been noted. Hemingway paid homage to the City of Light in *A Moveable Feast*. The international writers’ congress for the defense of culture, held in June 1935, chose the city’s Mutuality Hall to speak out against the dangers of fascism. E.M. Forster, Robert Musil, Berthold Brecht, Aldous Huxley, Anna Seghers, Boris Pasternak, and Heinrich Mann spoke alongside Romain Rolland, Louis Aragon, André Breton, André Gide, and Henri Barbusse. Ilya Ehrenburg was a frequent visitor to La Coupole in the days when Montparnasse dominated the intellectual landscape. There were 25,860 Americans recorded as living in France in 1929. Many had arrived at the end of the First World War, but many others had fled the suffocating moral climate of the Prohibition era. Avant-garde, erotic, or otherwise scandalous literature could only come out in Paris. According to Bernard Wilhelm, French writers and printers, particularly Dijon-based Darantière, played a role akin to that of seventeenth-century Amsterdam. *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* reflect the bold literary undertaking of Sylvia Beach, Robert McAlmon, Edward Titus, Nancy Cunard, Harry and Caresse Crosby, and Gertrude Stein in giving voice to a new generation of writers. Jack Kahane launched the careers of Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin, both targeted by customs officers in the United States and United Kingdom.

Picasso and Braque’s explorations of African art in the early years of the century prefigured *Négritude*. Journals such as *La Revue du monde noir* in 1931, *Légitime Défense* and *L’Etudiant martiniquais* in 1932, and *l’Etudiant noir* in 1935 placed Black creativity at the heart of Paris’s cultural scene. South America was likewise present in Paris, with men and women from Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Mexico forming a 30,000-strong colony that, in the words of Maurice

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2 Translator’s note: a well-known Montparnasse brasserie.
5 Translator’s note: A literary and political movement created in the interwar period by writers from French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor.
de Waleffe, was a “sort of floating South American capital.”

6 Alejo Carpentier saw Montparnasse as the “international republic of artists” in June 1926, describing Paris in Reasons of State as “an Earthly Paradise, the Promised Land”. Pierre Brunel compares Spanish-speaking South Americans visiting France to Englishmen on the Grand Tour in the eighteenth century. The Russian community was similarly a significant presence, with its flow of immigrants and journals such as Annales contemporaines and Dernières Nouvelles publishing the best of literature from East and West alike. Germans likewise fell under the spell of Paris: those in charge of the city’s cultural life during the Occupation, such as Otto Abetz, Gerhardt Heller, and Karl Epting, were well aware of its cultural significance. Herbert R. Lottman sought to portray this heyday, concluding that after 1950, the city lost much of its magic as North America took over as the world’s leading intellectual center.

The war brought Paris’s intellectual supremacy to a sudden and brutal end. foreigners and Jews fled the country. Jacques Schiffrin set sail for New York, where he founded Pantheon Books. Gide left for Tunisia in 1942, where he helped Jean Amrouche set up L’Arche. Edmond Charlot attracted many leading writers to Algiers, where he edited Fontaine, the journal launched by Max-Pol Fouchet. Albert Skira and Albert Béguin moved to Geneva, while in southern France, free from Nazi occupation, Pierre Seghers worked on Poésie in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon. Robert Laffont started his career in Marseilles, and René Tavernier published Confluences in Lyons, where Pierre Barbezat helped publish Jean Genet’s first writings. Le Silence de la Mer carried the voice of Occupied France far and wide, but its author Vercors refused to publish openly while under German oppression and the work’s reputation did not redound to Paris’s benefit. Parisian literary life was slowly dying as it was cut off from English-language culture. While the prewar period saw between five and six hundred translations annually, with a high point of 834 in 1935 (see table 1), this

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6 Article by Maurice de Waleffe in Mondo latino 1, November 1938, quoted by Pierre Brunel in “Qu’est-ce qu’une capitale littéraire”, Paris et le phénomène des capitales littéraires, op. cit., vol. I, 1–12.


declined from 676 in 1940 to 322 in 1942, 130 in 1943 and 81 in 1944.\textsuperscript{10} Unable to engage in the vital processes of intellectual exchange and cultural transfer, Paris faced losing its status as a major literary capital.

**Table 1: Translations into French, 1930-1944**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>473</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Bibliographie de la France*, 1931–37. Figures were unavailable for 1938, 1939, and 1941.

**When reading was all the rage (1944–48)**

Though paper was in short supply after the Liberation of Paris, the *Bibliographie de la France* recorded an instant upturn in output, from 7,291 titles in 1945 to 9,522 in 1946, 14,746 in 1947 and 16,020 in 1948. Translations increased at a dazzling rate, from 81 titles in 1944 to 190 in 1945, 421 in 1946, 955 in 1947 and 1,088 in 1948 (see table 2 below).

\textsuperscript{10} Figures quoted by H. Lottman, *op. cit.*
## Table 2: French publishing output by language and year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total titles</strong></td>
<td>7291</td>
<td>9522</td>
<td>14746</td>
<td>16020</td>
<td>12526</td>
<td>11849</td>
<td>11850</td>
<td>11954</td>
<td>11351</td>
<td>12179</td>
<td>11793</td>
<td>11377</td>
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<td>6988</td>
<td>8892</td>
<td>13419</td>
<td>14143</td>
<td>9908</td>
<td>9993</td>
<td>10298</td>
<td>10410</td>
<td>10017</td>
<td>10622</td>
<td>10253</td>
<td>10016</td>
<td>10364</td>
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<td>Other languages</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>1767</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>273</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>1449</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total translations</strong></td>
<td>190</td>
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<td>955</td>
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<td>1059</td>
<td>1112</td>
<td>1164</td>
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<td>1259</td>
<td>1288</td>
<td>1161</td>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>541</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>394</td>
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<td>508</td>
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<td>435</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>473</td>
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<td>American</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>302</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>203</td>
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<td>Russian</td>
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<td>72</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Bibliographie de la France*, 1946–59. British and American English are combined prior to 1949. The total number of titles is obtained by adding titles in French, other languages, and translations.
Foreign literature was given a much warmer welcome than in the prewar period. The main language translated was English, mostly American, which was highly fashionable. Following the success of Steinbeck’s *Nuits noires* (The Moon is Down), published by Minuit in February 1944, Gallimard reprinted Hemingway’s *Adieu aux armes* (Farewell to Arms) later that same year and *Autant en emporte le vent* (Gone with the Wind) early in 1945, rightly anticipating the emergence of a new readership. As soon as Paris was liberated, Marcel Duhamel was packed off to London to sign contracts with James Hadley Chase and Peter Cheyney. The “Série noire” was launched a few weeks later with *La Môme vert-de-gris* (Poison Ivy) and *Pas d’orchidées pour Miss Blandish* (No Orchids for Miss Blandish). The new genre drew many African-American writers to Paris, like the prewar generation, including Chester Himes, James Baldwin, and Richard Wright, whose works *Enfants du pays* (Native Son) and *Black Boy* were published in 1946 by Albin Michel and *Les Temps Modernes* respectively, the latter serially. Maurice Girodias, then at the head of the publishers Chêne, took over his father Jack Kahane’s list at Obelisk Press. Sales of *Le Tropique du capricorne* (Tropic of Capricorn) reached 125,000 in late 1944, while *Le Tropique du Cancer*, published by Denoël, reached 160,000.

In a matter of weeks, Paris won back its laurels as a publishing center as other, more peripheral rivals such as Lyons, Marseilles, Geneva, and Algiers gave up the battle. The Greek publisher Tériade, who started his career with Skira before the war, relaunched the art books that Girodias had spent four years promoting. Albert Skira himself opened an office in the capital, hiring General de Gaulle’s son-in-law, Bernard Anthonioz. Edmond Charlot moved his business to the banks of the Seine, bringing with him his enviable list of foreign authors, the journal *L’Arche*, and Albert Camus. Pierre Seghers, Max-Pol Fouchet, and Robert Laffont followed suit, all setting up shop in the Latin Quarter. Stock’s Cabinet Cosmopolite collection published Katherine Mansfield, Pearl Buck, and Louis Broomfield, while *Fontaine* specialized in American poets and writers such

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as T. S. Eliot, Steinbeck, and Caldwell, who was also published by Gallimard. The trend continued in 1945: the publishers Nagel announced a new collection of “great foreign novelists” including Solovyov and Karel Čapek. Calmann-Lévy launched the “traduit de” series edited by Manès Sperber, a Franco-Austrian with a colorful past, who had considerable expertise in foreign literature and was himself a talented novelist. His former comrade in the communist International, Arthur Koestler, and the publishers Calmann-Lévy had a huge hit with Le Zéro et l’Infini (Darkness at Noon). The recently founded company Seuil launched the collection “Pierres vives” with Léopold Sedar Senghor; Edmond Charlot appointed Albert Camus to oversee the collection “Poésie et théâtre”; Seghers launched “La Terre vivante,” a new collection of foreign literature whose first title was Gens de l’Équateur, a collection of stories translated from the Latin American Spanish. Not to be outdone, Minuit took back Steinbeck just as Robert Laffont signed Graham Greene and launched the collection “Pavillons,” which published E. M. Forster and Evelyn Waugh.\footnote{12 Information gleaned from announcements published in the Bibliographie de la France for 1945.}

French writers were still very much active and journals reflected the research and topics for debate of the day. Les Lettres françaises were covered in glory for their role in the Resistance and Sartre began his dominance of the French intellectual landscape with Les Temps modernes. He published L’Age de raison (The Age of Reason) immediately followed by Le Sursis (The Reprieve) and gave a lecture that was to have a lasting impact: l’existentialisme est-il un humanisme? Albert Camus, whose 1942 novel L’Etranger (The Outsider) enjoyed worldwide success, published La Peste (The Plague) in 1947, adding his name to the list of French-language authors influencing the international literary scene. These acclaimed intellectuals and writers soon restored the Left Bank to its former prestige. Saint-Germain-des-Prés became a mecca for jazz lovers. The brasseries La Coupole and La Rotonde, fashionable before the war, fell out of favor as people moved on to Le Flore and Les Deux Magots, while the bookshop La Hune soon opened up nearby to form what became known as the “magic triangle.”\footnote{13 Bernard Gherbrant and Adam Biro, A la Hune. Histoire d’une librairie-galerie à Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Paris:}
the late 1940s. Gallimard had lost none of its splendor: it still published Sartre and Camus, who worked alongside Louis Aragon and Roger Caillois, who oversaw the collections “Littératures soviétiques” and “La Croix du Sud” respectively. Gallimard’s “Série noire” collection hosted a night of festivities for France’s leading literary lights on June 7th 1946, confirming its dominance of the literary sphere; Edmond Charlot, who had hoped to steal its crown after the war, had to admit defeat. He gave up his business in 1947, following the example of many other ambitious young publishers and booksellers who had kept the flame of French literature alive during the dark days of the Second World War. Only Julliard, Seuil, Minuit (with a change of management), Seghers, Robert Laffont, and Presses de la Cité survived more or less intact; Denoël and Grasset remained in business but lost considerable ground. The journals *L’Arche*, *La NEF*, and *Fontaine* kept publishing, but it was *Les Temps modernes* that dominated the field. *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, *La Table ronde*, and *Les Lettres françaises* continued to shape some sectors of opinion, but were no rivals for *Les Temps modernes*, which came to represent the major social causes of the post-war period.

**Publishing in the Fourth Republic**

From 1949 on, the number of titles published annually stabilized at a ten-year average of 11,852 (see table 2).  

By 1950, the printing trade had returned to prewar levels of activity. Between 1951 and 1958, imports and exports increased by a factor of 2.71 and 2.2 respectively (see table 3 below).

**Table 3: Book imports and exports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Imports in billions of francs</th>
<th>Exports in billions of francs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1.610</td>
<td>4.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>2.107</td>
<td>5.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>2.220</td>
<td>5.084</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2.552</td>
<td>5.582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>3.194</td>
<td>6.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>3.690</td>
<td>6.544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>4.101</td>
<td>7.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>4.376</td>
<td>9.163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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Centre Georges Pompidou, 1988).

14 All ten-year averages quoted in this article were calculated by the author.
When Charles de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, sales of books outside France reached 9.163 billion francs, while purchases of books published outside France stood at 4.376 billion. The balance of trade thus showed a large surplus of 2.1 (see table 3). Though less well known, foreign-language books printed in France also represented a significant slice of French publishing, with 179 titles in German in 1947, 503 in 1948, and a high point of 1,449 in 1949, falling to 547 in 1950 (see table 2): France played an important role in founding the Federal Republic of Germany, flooding it with books in the hope of earning political and ideological influence. A study of this aspect of France’s influence in Europe would doubtless reveal that school manuals were one area where particular efforts were made to provide books suitable for the former enemy. It is likely that the German Saarland was particularly, though not exclusively, targeted by such efforts. After 1950 the trend slowed, though some 100 to 150 titles were still published in English annually until 1954. These included the ever-energetic Maurice Girodias’s publications for American GIs stationed in Europe, which he referred to as the “onanism market.”

Olympia Press’s “Atlantic Library” series catered to the American troops, providing erotic fiction written by American writers hired by Girodias, whose father Jack Kahane was British. Paris was the sole outlet for these young English-speaking intellectuals to make their literary debut.

Numerous translation projects were launched after the Liberation of Paris, reaching 1,000 titles annually in 1948. The ten-year average from 1949 to 1958 was 1,023 (see table 2). By 1946, British and American authors represented over half of translation output, reaching 65.5% in 1949. English remained the dominant language until 1958, with American authors taking an ever larger share, with 163 titles in 1949, 262 in 1952, 322 in 1954, and 358 in 1957, representing 28% of all translations. In this particular Cold War battle, the USSR lost out spectacularly as the ten-year average for translations from the Russian stood at 47, compared to 224 for America (see table 2). Italian’s 55 titles placed it ahead of Russian, which in turn was ahead of Spanish, at just 25 titles.

German stayed at the top of the group with 137 titles translated annually over the period. While France no longer felt the need to print books for Germans to read, it did focus a great deal of attention on translating books by authors such as Robert Musil, Heinrich Böll, Ernst Jünger, Günther Grass, and Brecht’s plays, published by L’Arche. Les Editions sociales poured its efforts into translating Lenin, Stalin, and Alexander Fadeyev’s *La Jeune Garde (The Young Guard)*, while Gallimard published Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov’s *Le Don paisible (And Quiet Flows the Don)*, Ilya Ehrenburg, and Viktor Nekrasov, but the curiosity for all things Russian that was apparent prior to 1946 soon declined. South America was represented by Jorge Amado and Pablo Neruda, though they enjoyed far less success than *Don Camillo*, translated from the Italian by Seuil in 1951, which quickly sold over a million copies. Outside France, French literature and essays remained influential. UNESCO’s *Index translationum* records 8,570 translations from the French in 35 countries in 1948, 17,834 in 1951, 21,676 in 48 countries in 1954 and 29,213 in 1958. France still represented over 10 per cent of total translations with 1,683 titles in 1950, 2,064 in 1952, 2,405 in 1954, 3,014 in 1956 and 3,384 in 1958 (see table 4 below).

Table 4: Total number of translations and translations from the French in UNESCO’s *Index translationum*, 1948-1958

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Translations</th>
<th>Translations from French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>8570</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>10014</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>1957</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>29213</td>
<td>3384</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 1950, Lenin and Stalin placed higher than Balzac, Marx, and Tolstoy in the global literary hit parade. The same year, 2,267 British and 1,460 American titles were translated, the latter totaling less than French at 1,683 titles. Of these, 219 were published in Italy, 208 in Germany, the remarkably high figure of 186 in Japan, 141 in Britain, and 136 in the US.16 Simone de Beauvoir was doubtless right in claiming that while France was now a second-class power, it still exported “her most characteristic products with an eye on the export market: haute couture and literature.”17 She could have added philosophy to the list. As a host nation to writers from all over the world, France gave a prominent place to comparative literature in its universities and took its responsibilities in the translation field very seriously. The country both exported and substantially increased its own import of books, remaining an attractive home for foreign writers and works that could not find anywhere else a capital capable of giving their work the prominence and prestige it deserved.

North African and sub-Saharan African writers in Paris

The scholar Charles Bonn has argued that the very concept of the Algerian novel arose in Paris in the 1950s, the genre being unknown in North Africa.18 North African literature in French came into being between 1945 and 1962, when Emmanuel Roblès launched Seuil’s new collection “Méditerranée.” While the journal Forge, published in Algiers, was the first venue for poems by Mohammed Dib and Kateb Yacine, it was in Paris that Mouloud Feraoun published Le Fils du pauvre (The Poor Man’s Son) in 1950 before publishing his subsequent works with Seuil. Mouloud Mammeri wrote La Colline oubliée (The Forgotten Hill, untranslated) in 1952, Mohammed Dib La Grande Maison (The Great House, untranslated) the same year, and L’Incendie (The Fire, untranslated) two years later. Buchet-Chastel published Albert Memmi’s La Statue de sel (Pillar of

16 Bibliographie de la France, January 25th 1952.
Salt) in 1953 and Portrait du colonisé (Portrait of a colonized man, untranslated) in 1957. The Moroccan Driss Chraïbi’s Le Passé simple (The Simple Past) was published by Denoël in 1954; his subsequent works came out with Seuil, where Kateb Yacine published Nedjma in 1956. Paradoxically, for such intellectuals with an interest in the nationalist cause, they needed to earn a reputation in Paris for their voices to be heard back in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and the rest of the Arab world. Paris had a profound influence on that generation and, contrary to Albert Memmi’s prediction that “the well of colonized literature would naturally run dry” after independence, the trend was not reversed after Moroccan independence in 1956 or Algerian independence in 1962. All the Parisian publishers prided themselves on having a “house Arab,” as Ahmed Khatibi crudely put it: the later success of Tahar Ben Jelloun owed much to the groundwork of those years. No city in the Arab world, from Algiers to Rabat, Tunis, Tripoli, Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Beirut could rival Paris, particularly following the decision to found the Institut du Monde Arabe in 1974, which sealed the city’s cultural supremacy. The inescapable conclusion is that despite losing the long and unpopular wars of independence, France maintained its intellectual dominance over its former North African colonies and protectorates. The fact that many French intellectuals were outspoken opponents of France’s policy of using torture during the wars of independence helped preserve its cultural dominance, enabling as it did writers from the region to dissociate themselves from the crimes of the military and the U-turns of French politicians.

A similar process was at work in sub-Saharan Africa, depriving capitals such as Dakar, Abidjan, Brazzaville, and Kinshasa of the chance to shape their own nascent national literature. One major difference with Algiers is that there was next to no local printing and publishing industry. In the mid-1930s, the Société Africaine de Culture was founded in Paris, launching its own journal, Présence africaine, which was highly Franco-centrist. It was joined after the war by other journals,

20 Quoted (in French) in ibid.  
including *Jeune Afrique*, *Notre Librairie*, and *Recherche pédagogique et culture*. Prior to 1955, *Présence africaine* and its editor Alioune Diop, whose influential friends included Sartre, Gide, Camus, and Leiris, worked hard to recover the cultural achievements of older African civilizations. It also drew attention to writing by Africans, such as Sembène Ousmane’s 1956 *Le Docker noir* (*Black Docker*), Bernard Dadié’s 1959 *Un nègre à Paris* (*An African in Paris*), and Aké Loba’s 1960 *L’Etudiant noir* (*The Black Student*, untranslated), published by small independents such as Debresse.  

Thanks to UNESCO and the French agency for cultural and technological cooperation (ACCT), such journals were a vital resource in spreading African culture. In the words of Léopold Sédar Senghor, speaking at the constitutive national assembly on September 19th 1946, “Thus together we will create a new civilization whose center will be Paris, a new humanism which will be equal to the realm of men.”  

The French army’s bloody repression of an insurrection in Madagascar the following year failed to dampen his faith in a bright future: in 1948, he published *L’Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* with a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Together with his Senegalese friends Lamine Diakhaté and David Diop, he sought to persuade the West Indians he associated with to join him in the *Négritude* movement, including Aimé Césaire, Jacques Roumain, and others who admired his 1945 *Chants d’ombre*.

Seuil’s publication of Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*) in 1951 was something of an event, as the author staked a claim for himself as a future Third-Worldist leader. The work’s success should not, however, mask the presence of less overtly political sub-Saharan writers, closer to their North African neighbors. The most noteworthy novels of the period were the Congolese writer Jean Malonga’s 1954 *Légende de M’Pfoumou Ma Mazono* (*Legend of M’Pfoumou Ma Mazono*, untranslated), the Guinean Camara Laye’s 1953 *l’Enfant noir* (*The African Child*), the Cameroonian Mongo Béti’s *Ville cruelle* (*Cruel City*), 1954, and the Senegalese Sembène Ousmane’s 1957 *O pays mon beau peuple* (*O Land, my fine people!*).

23 *Journal officiel*, September 19th 1946.
untranslated). None of these works had anywhere near the print runs or the acclaim of those referred to previously. It was in fact the French-speaking West Indies that gave rise to the most dynamic voices in the Négritude movement. First and foremost among them was Aimé Césaire, with his Cahier d’un retour au pays natal (Notebook of a Return to my Native Land) in 1939. The Haitian Jacques Roumain, now largely forgotten, was hailed by the critics when the Editeurs Français Réunis published Gouverneurs de la rosée (Masters of the Dew) in 1946, a year after his death. His earlier works La Montagne ensorcelée (The Bewitched Mountain, untranslated) and Griefs de l’homme noir (The Black Man’s Laments, untranslated) had been published in 1931 and 1939 respectively. His poems, including the hugely powerful Sales nègres (Dirty negroes), express the feelings of revolt of the author, one of the founders of the Revue indigène and the Haitian Communist Party. Roumain’s work was published and translated in numerous countries, particularly in the Americas in English and Spanish; his untimely death in 1944 did not end his literary influence. His fellow Haitian writers René Depestre and Philippe Toby Marcelin and the Martinicans Lionel Atuly and Georges Desportes played a similar role in broadening France’s cultural horizons to include Francophone writing by African and West Indian authors. As was the case for the prewar generation, they had little choice but to publish in Paris if they hoped to give their works a worldwide audience.

The move towards decolonization and the armed struggle for independence thus by no means diminished the centrality of Paris. This further proved true after 1962 when the former leaders of Algeria’s National Liberation Front (FLN), some of whom were now in opposition, published their war memoirs. One key difference between North African literature and the literature of sub-Saharan Africa is that the former generally found a warm reception with major publishers; it was widely available and reviewed in the press and literary journals, while African literature tended to be published by small, recently founded publishers, Présence Africaine being the exception.

While it would be over-hasty to put forward definitive conclusions at this point, my hypothesis is that the key difference is the active opposition by French intellectuals to the war in Algeria, which had the unforeseen consequence of raising the stock of North African writers in terms of symbolic value, while their African counterparts – just as critical of France, though less overtly political – were, if not outright depreciated, at least victims of less generous public opinion. This may explain attempts after 1965 to found venues in support of African literature.

**Anglo-American literature**

Contrary to claims by Herbert Lottman and comparative literature scholars such as Pierre Brunel, the publishing center of gravity did not shift from Paris to New York immediately after the Liberation. France still drew Black American writers such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, and William Gardner Smith, escaping the racism of late 1940s America. Similarly, White American authors like Henry Miller were refused publication in their homeland, despite providing the new literary lifeblood the country needed. Maurice Girodias published *Sexus* in English, then in French, in 1950; the French government banned the translation. Girodias then published *Plexus* at his Olympia Press, which took over from Chêne when the latter was bought out by Hachette. He commissioned English translations of Beckett’s *Molloy*, *Malone meurt* and *L’Innommable* to bring the Irish author to an English-language readership. Paris’s English bookshops, Brentano’s, W. H. Smith, and Galignani, made sure Girodias’s output – erotic or otherwise – made it to the United States and England, albeit in tiny numbers. Only in 1961 was *Tropic of Cancer* finally published in New York, and even then Miller lost out on his copyright due to the Manufacturing Clause in US copyright law which gave the author three years to bring works published abroad back to the United States.

The situation in the United States showed signs of change in 1958, when Nabokov’s *Lolita* was able to be published without legal hindrance, two years after the White Russian émigré Douussia
Ergaz showed the manuscript to Maurice Girodias. Olympia Press immediately published it; the book was subsequently impounded. While American society gradually became less censorious after 1958, its prudishness prior to that date was of benefit to Paris, where other writers such as William Burroughs published their first works: Olympia Press was the first publisher of *The Naked Lunch* and *The Soft Machine*. Allen Ginsberg and other Beat generation writers living on the Left Bank entrusted their manuscripts to Girodias, whose name was synonymous with rebellion against authority and traditional morality. While this aspect of underground publishing is often overlooked, it undoubtedly influenced minds and hearts in the English-speaking world. J. P. Donleavy’s *The Ginger Man* was another *succès de scandale*, which owed much of its reputation to its semi-clandestine publication. It cannot be said that Girodias and his fellow publishers Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Claude Tchou, and Eric Losfeld were behind the wind of social change that swept across America, but their determination to break the taboos that weighed on modern industrial societies certainly helped prepare the ground. Nikos Kazantzakis, who worked at UNESCO after 1945, had Girodias publish his novel *The Life and Times of Alexis Zorbas* for similar reasons, reflecting Olympia’s reputation in the field.

It is important not to overstate the significance of such experiments, as French publishers had to work with New York from the mid-1950s on. Robert Laffont traveled there for the first time in 1954, arguing that “you would have to be very jingoistic not to realize that since the war, New York had taken over from Paris as the center of the literary world.”\(^25\) Laffont doubtless overstates the case, but his opinion nonetheless reflects a genuine shift in the world of publishing. The Frankfurt book fair was still the main hub for foreign rights sales, but the most powerful companies were now located on the East coast of the United States. The influence of American novels on European literature was obvious, even among those writers who were no admirers of the American way of life, as Edmond Buchet recorded in his diary as early as 1947.\(^26\) Faulkner, Dos Passos, "Robert Laffont, *Editeur* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1974).

Hemingway, Steinbeck, Caldwell, and Miller forged a new way of writing literature; Camus, to take just one example, shows how much European literature was in their debt. Yet the French publishing sphere remained influential, even though a serious structural crisis, caused in part by a lack of fresh blood at the top of the industry, posed a major threat.27

Compared with America, the French publishing sphere had undeniable advantages. It was less concentrated, less profit-driven, and remained open to essays whose readership was likely to be limited. Pocket paperbacks (livres de poche) only appeared on the French scene in 1953, but they were a promising new market. Above all, French publishers could devote time and money to launching unknown writers from North and sub-Saharan Africa and the West Indies when their counterparts in New York could only consider publishing books with print runs in the tens or hundreds of thousands. While references to American publishing norms became more prevalent in France after 1950, this was not so much because American publishers were known for publishing literature from around the world as because of their flair for marketing. Comparing the breadth of literature in book lists from each country, France retained its long-held advantage, though foreign rights acquisitions were rising at the expense of sales. This is doubtless what creates the illusion of a shift from Paris to New York. However, while numerous American writers were discovered and rose to prestige in France, from Miller, and Nabokov to Burroughs, Ginsberg, and Anaïs Nin, the reverse does not hold true.

**European writers**

Manès Sperber’s work with Calmann-Lévy is of particular interest. While a full exploration of his role is beyond the scope of the present article, reading the “traduit de” collection catalogs sheds some light on his significance as a cultural mediator. Paris, rather than London, played a leading role in challenging Socialism by publishing Arthur Koestler’s *Zéro et l’infini (Darkness at Noon)*

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and other works. Sperber’s own novels, most notably his trilogy *Et le buisson devint cendre* (published in English translation as *Like a Tear in the Ocean*) form part of this trend. He helped restore the fortunes of Calmann-Lévy, a general trade publisher that had faced severe wartime challenges, by publishing the French translation of Anne Frank’s diary, the company’s second major success of the post-war period. Much of Eastern Europe still looked to Paris: Romania is one such example. The 1949 publication of Constantin Virgil Gheorgiu’s *La Vingt-cinquième Heure (The Twenty-Fifth Hour)* was a literary sensation. Similarly, the venerable publishers Plon strove to put their wartime support for Marshall Pétain and Charles Maurras behind them, calling on the philosopher Gabriel Marcel to oversee the collection “Feux croisés,” launched before the war. Mazo de la Roche’s *Jalna* series proved highly profitable, and the company then poached Nikos Kazantzakis from Olympia. Eugene Ionesco had already moved from Bucharest to Paris long before; he was now joined by his fellow Romanian Emil Cioran, already published in his home country, who chose Paris, French, and Gallimard for his 1949 work *Précis de décomposition (A Short History of Decay)*. After 1970, Romanian exiles hostile to Ceausescu moved to the city where so many of their compatriots had studied in the nineteenth century: it remained an attractive haven at the end of the twentieth century.

The case cannot be extended to Poland, which leaned more toward the United States, or to Hungary or Czechoslovakia. The prestige of French intellectuals was such, however, that even in those countries Paris held sway over London and New York. While in absolute terms translations from central Europe were low in number, the journals *Europe* and *Les Lettres françaises*, among others, reported on literary developments from the region regularly and Paris saw an influx of immigrants after the Prague Spring of 1968. Milan Kundera has come to symbolize the fondness of foreign writers for a capital that transcended its own national borders. In scholarly publishing, the work of the French National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS) and later the Maison des Sciences

de l’Homme (MSH) explain the close ties between historians in central and Eastern Europe and their French colleagues, whose works were much studied. Jean-Paul Sartre’s influence in Italy was at least the equal of France, while Louis Althusser played an equally significant role in shaping intellectual opinion. After existentialism, Marxism and structuralism together promoted an ongoing intellectual dialog with Paris. In the case of Italy, the concept of cultural transfer is particularly relevant, as Gramsci and the Italian Communist Party had many French admirers between the 1960s and the 1980s.

France’s relationship with Spain under Franco reveals another type of interaction. Political immigration into France, which was home to a branch of the Communist Party of Spain, had an impact on publishing. Some refugee writers, such as Jorge Semprun, achieved a literary reputation in their homeland as a result of clandestine publications systematically smuggled into Spain after 1945. A print works specializing in political material provided a stream of publications for networks that took banned newspapers, tracts, pamphlets, and books to Barcelona, Madrid, and Bilbao. The frequent presence of Latin American writers, most notably Pablo Neruda and Jorge Amado, strengthened the Spanish-speaking community in Paris. The same is true to a lesser extent of Salazar’s Portugal, though immigration from Portugal was largely driven by economic rather than political factors.

Paris was also home to a number of bookshops specializing in foreign-language titles. Those serving the Polish and Russian communities for years disseminated ideas that political barriers were supposed to hold back. Communication between intellectuals benefited from the presence of such bookshops, several of which also printed works in their own right. Much research remains to be done in this field, but their role in the circulation of information after 1945 and in fostering contacts between East and West should not be underestimated. However, Paris was not alone in this respect, as Vienna, Berlin, and other European cities played a similar role.
New York, London or Paris?

I began this article by asking whether the power of attraction of 1930s Paris would withstand the expansion of American culture after the war. A straightforward “yes” hardly answers the question insofar as much of the material for comparison is as yet unavailable. The history of publishing in America has been started but is far from complete.29 The same is true of Britain, where the final volumes of the series are due for publication in 2005. However, some preliminary findings can be stated with a degree of certainty. Geographic analysis highlights the powerful attraction of Paris for writers from North and French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, including Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Madagascar, Réunion, French West and Equatorial Africa, and parts of the Middle East including Lebanon. In this instance, France’s rivalry with the United States can certainly be said to have benefited the former, due to colonial ties to the region. One significant factor was the number of intellectuals sent to study in French universities. The trickle of the early 1960s became a flood by the end of the decade: many more completed doctorates in France than in the United States. To this day, L’Harmattan and Karthala are leading specialists in publishing on Africa.

The same can be said of the French West Indies and Haiti, but not, however, of France’s former Far Eastern colony in Indochina. While some Vietnamese poetry was published in France by companies associated with the French Communist Party, the number of titles remained low. Prior to 1970, Cambodia and Vietnam had no way of raising their literary profile other than a handful of translations into Russian and Chinese, and when France failed to promote their writers, no other country stepped into the breach. It is clear that the former colonial empire, rechristened the French Union in 1946 and the French Community in 1958, remained a powerful cultural presence. America in no way threatened France’s standing in this field; intellectuals in the French sphere of influence became acquainted with American literature through its French translations rather than by reading the originals. The state of la Francophonie late in the twentieth century owes much to the energy of

29 Translator’s note: the present article was first published in 1995.
the French publishing sector.

Another significant factor has been Paris’s lasting power of attraction for American writers keen to challenge cultural mores in their homeland. Henry Miller, Vladimir Nabokov, and William Burroughs published in France to make their voices heard worldwide. The same was true of Irish writers, from James Joyce to Samuel Beckett. While Paris’s influence did decline after 1958, the Fourth Republic held onto its former literary and intellectual laurels to a great extent. The translation rate, for instance, was considerably higher than in the United States. To this day, countries like Britain admire France’s welcoming stance to authors from around the world and how swiftly it translates their works. Without reaching the giddy heights of Scandinavia, where more books are translated than are written in the national languages, the figures attest to the real vitality of the French translation sector. This is less true, however, of the humanities and research, where English has partially taken over from French. Intellectual exchanges with Belgium, Luxembourg, French-speaking Switzerland, and Quebec are lively. This is a new departure in the case of Canada, which was reluctant to accept French literature prior to 1945, though it did import schoolbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias.

One final point worth discussing is Japanese interest in France in the post-war period. While it was initially lesser than interest in American culture, since 1980, Japanese buyers have tended to replace Americans as buyers in Paris’s antiquarian bookshops. Japanese universities are the best market for history books, a trend rooted in the presence of a lively Japanese community in France. Bearing in mind the power of attraction Paris has had for intellectuals from across central and Eastern Europe, from Romania and Poland to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, it is clear that far from having been wiped from the map of literary and publishing capitals, Paris maintained much of its potential in the post-war period. Priscilla Ferguson sees the death of Jean-Paul Sartre as a milestone marking the end of France’s dominance of the international literary scene. The active support of French intellectuals for some of the great post-war movements, from decolonization to Third-
Worldism, acted as a catalyst, which perhaps explains Paris’s eventual relative decline, related to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the temporary slump in left-wing values.

Translated by Susan Pickford