



Italian Publishing Research Project

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Table of Contents

- I. Methodology
- II. General Overview of Italian Books Published in the U.S.
- III. Italian Literature in Translation Compared to Europe and the Rest of the World
- IV. Translation Grant Support
- V. General Conclusions
- VI. Suggestions

I. Methodology

Before breaking down the data from the attached spreadsheets, it is worth explaining the source this information and the strengths and weaknesses of the general data-gathering approach.

The lists of fiction and poetry titles originate from the “Translation Database” maintained on the Three Percent website at the University of Rochester. This database is compiled continuously with new entries coming from publisher catalogs, book reviews, review copy submissions, and notifications from individual translators and cultural offices.

Since this database serves as the basis for determining the eligibility of titles for the Best Translated Book Award, it excludes any reprints (titles available in the past that are being reissued by a new publisher) and new translations of previously published books. The fiction and poetry included in the attached lists are books being published in English translation for the first time ever.

The listings of the nonfiction and children’s books came from reviews found in *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, *School Library Journal*, and *Choice*. Additionally, particular publisher websites were mined for missing titles. Again, books that had clearly been translated in the past were excluded in order to make this data consistent with the fiction and poetry listings.

It is almost certain that there are additional nonfiction and children’s books that could be added to this database. However, for the purposes of this report, it is being assumed that these missing titles wouldn’t skew the proportions of books published from certain countries, etc., enough to make a significant difference.

Graphic novels—manga in particular—are not included in this database, since it would require an entirely different research system to adequately identify all the titles published in translation over the past three years. This would also likely skew the results in favor of the Japanese language, since the Japanese manga industry constitutes a huge percentage of graphic novels published in translation.

Information about the original Italian publisher and whether or not a book received funding was gathered from the copyright pages of the specific books. Some data is incomplete, and although it’s possible that a publishing house didn’t include grant information on their copyright page, the information included here paints a very reliable picture of the state of international fiction in translation in the United States.

Finally, representatives from several American-based publishers were interviewed to get information about why they publish Italian literature (or why they don’t), issues they’ve encountered in applying for grants, and suggestions they have for improving the number of Italian titles making their way into English.

II. General Overview of Italian Books Published in the U.S.

Between 2012 and 2014, 174 works have been translated from Italian and published in the United States.

Of these 174 books, 87 (50%) were works of fiction, 62 (36%) were nonfiction, 14 (8%) were poetry, and 11 (6%) were children's books.

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In section III, these figures will be compared with books from other European countries (especially France and Germany), but first, it's worth taking a closer look at the Italian books alone to get a better understanding of what is being published in translation and by which presses.

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First off, over the course of the three years in question, the total number of Italian books being published has remained fairly consistent: 67 in 2012, 62 in 2013, and 45 so far in 2014.

Breaking this down by category leads to some interesting observations. For fiction, the numbers have been pretty stable: 32 titles came out in 2012, 27 in 2013, and 28 in 2014.

Poetry has vacillated wildly, with 3 collections coming out in 2012, 8 in 2013, and then 3 in 2014. With numbers this small, however, it's not unusual for such a distribution.

Although only 11 children's books translated from the Italian have come out since 2012, this seems like a category on the rise. In 2012 there were 0 titles published, then 4 in 2013, and 7 so far in 2014.

In contrast, nonfiction has been decreasing. In 2012, 32 nonfiction works came out, but that dropped to 23 in 2013, and only 7 so far in 2014.

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One of the most telling findings from the data is the extremely uneven distribution in publishers bringing out Italian works in English translation.

Over the past three years, 81 different publishers have brought out at least one work translated from the Italian, but the nine publishers who have published the most books account for almost half of all the Italian books available in translation.

Specifically, here are the top publishers followed by the number of Italian titles they've published since 2012:

Europa Editions	24
University of Chicago	10
FSG	9
Verso	7
Chelsea Editions	5
Penguin	5
Other Press	4
Pushkin Press	4
Rizzoli	4

By contrast, 66 publishers have brought out either one or two Italian works over this same time period. This is discussed in greater detail in later sections of this report.

This is an interesting mix of large commercial publishers (FSG, Penguin), independent presses (Chelsea Editions, Other Press), a university press (University of Chicago), and a couple presses with strong Italian connections (Europa Editions, Rizzoli).

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On the other side of things—Italian publishers whose books are being published in English translation—the distribution is much less pronounced. That said, there are a handful of Italian publishers who are most successful at getting their works published in English:

Giulio Einaudi	20
Arnoldo Mondadori Editore	18
Edizioni E/O	10
Sellerio	10
Feltrinelli	9
Fandango Libri	7

These six Italian publishers account for 42.5% of all the Italian books being published in English.

III. Italian Literature in Translation Compared to Europe and the Rest of the World

To get a better sense of ways to increase the number and visibility of Italian books in translation, it's important to see how Italian literature compares to that of other countries.

Between 2012 and 2014, 2,394 works in translation were published in the United States. These books came from 58 different languages and 103 different countries. Four hundred seventy-two different publishers brought out at least one work in translation during this period.

In terms of categories, 1,271 books were works of fiction, 524 were nonfiction, 359 were children's books, and 240 were collections of poetry.

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Separating these 2,394 books into their original languages, we find that Italian was the fourth most translated language over this period:

French	539
German	385
Spanish	253
Italian	174
Japanese	105

It is notable that there is a large gap between the number of Italian books published in the States and the number of French and German ones.

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Breaking this down by country of origin (instead of language), Italy moves up to third:

France	451
Germany	307
Italy	172

Still, the gap between Italy and its European counterparts is fairly extreme, with almost three times as many French books being translated into English. Some of the reasons for this gap—and ways to address it—are discussed below.

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One further breakdown worth looking at in advance of a discussion about how more Italian books could get translated into English is the list of publishers who published the most translations over the past three years:

Dalkey Archive	105
AmazonCrossing	75
Europa Editions	51
Seagull Books	47
FSG	37
Other Press	36
North-South	34
Yale University Press	34
New Directions Columbia	32
University Press	31

Below is a list of the number of Italian books these same ten publishers published over the past three years:

Dalkey Archive	2
AmazonCrossing	0
Europa Editions	24
Seagull Books	0
FSG	9
Other Press	4
North-South	0
Yale University Press	0
New Directions Columbia	0
University Press	2

Between 2012 and 2014, these ten publishers brought out a total of 482 works in translation, 41 of which were translated from the Italian.

If you remove Europa Editions, these numbers become even more stark, with the nine largest publishers of translation bringing out 431 books, only 17 of which are from the Italian. In terms of percentages, only 3.9% of the books these presses publish in translation are from the Italian.

By contrast, these same ten publishers put out a total of 115 works translated from the German and 94 books from the French.

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Looking beyond simple publication and instead focusing on public reception, we find that Italian books sell basically as well as German and French titles do, although there is room for improvement.

To make this comparison, year-to-date sales numbers from Nielsen's BookScan were acquired for a handful of French, German, and Italian books all published in 2014. These titles were all fiction, generally either thriller/mysteries or literary fiction, were from a

range of publishers (mostly from mid-sized and large publishers, including Random House, Europa Editions, and Other Press), and, in the case of the Italian books included, from a number of different original publishers.

BookScan is the only sales tool available to publishers, tracking actual point of sale information from a wide range of independent bookstores, chains, online retailers, and specialty outlets (like grocery stores). Although BookScan does gather a lot of data, it notoriously underrepresents actual sales of a given book. Although there's no hard and fast rule for how much BookScan numbers differ from the actual sales to customers, it's generally assumed that you can multiply the BookScan figures by 1.25 to 2 depending on the type of book and the type of outlet most likely to sell it.

For this report, what's most relevant is the relationship between books coming out from the three languages being examined. French fared the best, with average BookScan sales of 643 units for each title. (It's worth noting that one title—*The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair*—was excluded from this figure for being an extreme outlier: more than 31,000 copies of that title were purchased from bookstores across the country.) Germany averaged 375 units for each of the books considered, and Italy only averaged 339 sales.

The Italian book that sold the best was *Master of Knots* by Massimo Carlotto, published by Edizioni E/O in Italy and Europa Editions in the States. It has sold 653 copies so far this year. This was the only Italian book—of the ones included—that has sold more than 600 copies so far this year.

By contrast, four French books broke the 600 until level: *1914* by Jean Echenoz (1,629), *The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair* by Joel Dicker (31,672), *Frozen Dead* by Bernard Minier (810), and *Hotelles* by Emma Mars (748).

Drawing conclusions from this data is risky; most books are purchased for a range of reasons, including whether the title has been well-reviewed, if the bookstore is promoting it, what genre it is, etc., and very rarely because of the original language. That said, it's worth revisiting these numbers in relationship to Suggestion #4 below, since the French Government does provide a variety of ways of promoting French literature (including through their very active website), which may account for the general success of their books.

IV. Translation Grant Support

As discussed below, one potential reason that Italian books are not being translated as often as German and French ones is the lack of translation grants awarded for Italian literature.

Of the 174 Italian books published in English over the past three years, we were only able to verify that 26 were subsidized by funding agencies. Only 11 books were funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 4 were funded by the Segretariato Europeo per Le Pubblicazioni Scientifiche (SEPS).

In terms of percentages, less than 15% of the Italian books published in English translation received any type of funding (including grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and other U.S. based funders), and 6% were funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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By contrast, according to the documents found on the Goethe-Institut website (<http://www.goethe.de/kue/lit/prj/uef/enindex.htm>), 64 German books have received funding to be translated into English over the past three years.

And, although the full award information for all of the French granting programs (<http://frenchculture.org/books/grants-and-programs/publishing-grants-prizes>) isn't available online, 17 books received funding in 2013 though just the Hemingway program.

In short, both the German and French governments fund significantly more translations than the Italian government, which is one of the reasons there are so many more German and French works available to American readers.

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Over the past few weeks, several publishers provided information about their experiences publishing Italian literature in translation. One of the common complaints—addressed below—was the difficulty of applying for Italian translation grants and the lack of transparency in determining whether a grant application will be funded or not. These issues are addressed more fully below.

V. General Conclusions

At the most basic level, it's clear from the information above that although a relatively significant number of Italian books are being published in English translation, there is a lot of room for improvement. Some suggestions are included in section VI below, but first, here are a few of the observations that have informed those suggestions.

- 1) The number of Italian books being published by the most prolific publishers of translations is remarkably low. By targeting these presses and working with their editors, the number of Italian books available to the English-reading public could expand greatly.
- 2) Only a handful of presses that are publishing Italian literature in translation at all. Even if some of the smaller translation presses added on only a single Italian book that would increase the number significantly. Right now, Europa Editions accounts for more than 26% of the Italian works of fiction available in English—a startling figure.
- 3) Although most publishers state that they don't choose a book solely because of funding, all of those interviewed for this report indicated that the availability of a translation grant plays a role in when/if a book gets published. The paucity of translation grants awarded for Italian works—whether this is due to the lack of funds allocated to translation grants or because the process is too complicated—indicates that there is room to improve this process, which, in turn, would lead to increases in the number of Italian books published in English Translation and publisher interest in pursuing potential projects.
- 4) The concentration of Italian publishers whose books are being published indicates that the mechanism for getting information about Italian literature to American publishers could be improved. Granted, the largest Italian publishers are the ones that are most likely to have their books translated (and the data bears this out), but one way of increasing the number of Italian works published in English is to get more information about books from smaller Italian presses to the appropriate American editors.

VI. Suggestions

Based on all the data and observations above, and based on interviews with American publishers and information about programs other book offices run (such as the German Book Office, Estonian Literature Centre, etc.), below are a list of suggestions for increasing the number of Italian works published in English translation, and improving the visibility of those that are published.

It is highly unlikely that any one institution could implement all of these suggestions, but this can serve as a menu of options.

1) Increase the funding for translation grants, make it easier for publishers to apply, and market this information to American publishers (especially nonprofits).

Of all the suggestions listed here, it's possible that this is the most important. Improving the funding—and ease of applying for funding—will have an immediate impact on how many Italian works are translated into English. Every press interviewed for this report complained about the process for applying for translation grants, and mentioned the relative ease of applying for funding for German and French books.

These translation grants don't have to be huge to have a large impact. Most funding for German and French books is in the range of \$3,000-\$6,000 depending on the length of the book being translated. Also, most of these grants pay for only half of the total translation costs. Nevertheless, for a smaller press, this can make an enormous difference.

2) Editorial trips, or other opportunities for American and Italian editors to interact.

Several publishers interviewed had attended the Torino Book Fair at the invitation of the Italian Trade Agency and greatly appreciated that opportunity to experience the fair and meet with Italian publishers. Additionally, the Italian Trade Agency has sponsored editorial trips to Rome as well. These trips are invaluable and provide a wonderful introduction to the Italian publishing scene. By meeting with a variety of Italian publishers, the U.S. editors are made aware of which presses they should pay attention to, what types of books are being published, and specific authors they should be considering.

This sort of networking is a huge step in getting American presses to buy the rights to foreign books. Additionally, being able to attend a book fair—like the ones in Torino or Rome—provides a larger context within which to network, and generates a degree of excitement that emails just can't duplicate.

Many other government organizations sponsor similar sorts of trips, each of which is slightly different and worth examining as a possible model. The German Book Office takes a number of editors to Germany every year for a week-long trip to multiple German

cities to meet with a wide array of publishers. Every year the GBO identifies a different subset of American publishers to invite: those specializing in fiction, in children's books, nonfiction, university presses, etc. This is likely one of the reasons that so many German children's books are translated into English.

A couple years ago, the Nordic Countries hosted a mini-seminar in Washington D.C. that brought together foreign publishers, American editors, and a range of translators. Following a day of talks touching on a number of different topics—Scandinavian crime fiction, Denmark's young poet movement, Iceland's literary history—the attendees spent an afternoon “speed dating” and exchanging information about translation projects in process, what type of books a publisher is interested in, what funding opportunities are available, etc.

Every year the Estonian Literature Centre invites publishers to their Head Read Festival and complement the festival activities with opportunities for publishers to meet with specific Estonian authors. The attending editors receive sample translations from all of these writers in advance of the trip, then listen to their presentations, ask questions, and mingle. This has proven to be extremely successful in getting Estonian literature translated into other languages.

Following up on these trips is absolutely crucial. Creating a network of American and Italian publishers is a necessary first step, but needs to be supported by providing publishers with information and sample translations and translation grants. This will boost the likelihood of a U.S. publisher signing on an Italian book.

3) Provide more information about Italian titles along with sample translations.

Most book offices produce some sort of guide to new releases. A good example is *New Books In German* (<http://www.new-books-in-german.com/english/home/-/273,273,129002,liste9.html>), but the ones produced for Swedish, Catalan, and Estonian literature are also incredibly helpful. These are all a bit different—some focus more on reviews of new titles, others include longer articles on broader topics—but they are extremely useful for getting editors interested in new books and in providing information about available translation grants.

Sample translations are extremely important in the acquisitions process, especially since the number of editors who speak French and Spanish far exceed the number that speak Italian. Having a well-edited, professionally-translated sample for an editor to read and to share with other people at their company can make the difference between signing on a book and passing on it.

Producing a “10 Books from Italy” annual (or biannual) pamphlet would be an enormous help in informing American editors about titles they should look into. This could be organized through the Italian Trade Agency in Chicago, possibly by partnering with a university or other organization. To design this, a call could go out to all Italian

publishers asking them to submit titles of possible inclusion. These would be recent books that the publishers believe will appeal to the English-language market. Using a few different metrics—critical reception of the book, sales in Italy, availability of the author for potential touring, etc.—the Italian Trade Agency and a small group of advisors could narrow the submissions down to ten that they will include in the pamphlet. (It’s possible that this could be partially funded by charging the publishers of the included books a nominal marketing fee. This fee would go toward the creation and editing of a sample translation, and would be recouped by the publisher when the rights to the book are sold to an interested publisher.)

For each title included in “10 Books from Italy,” there would be a full description of the book, a biography of the author, information about the rights and whether the text has been translated into other languages, a sample translation, and a few blurbs from reviews (if available). This could be featured on a simple website, printed and distributed at book fairs and other events, and emailed as a PDF to hundreds of editors and other literary people.

A publication like this is useful in bringing attention to contemporary works, but also as a strategy for staying in touch with particular editors and reminding them of other projects from the Italian Trade Agency, such as grant opportunities and editorial trips.

4) Post-publication promotion via awards, marketing grants, etc.

In addition to providing support and information to presses so as to increase the number of Italian books published in the U.S., it’s also important to support the books that are coming out. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is a perfect example of a best-selling work in translation leading to a significant increase in books being published in translation. Following this success of this trilogy, American publishers bought up the rights to dozens and dozens of Scandinavian crime fiction, all in the hope of repeating Larsson’s success.

It may not be possible for a government agency to turn a book into a megahit along those lines, but any sort of marketing help can make a difference. For example, the German Book Office is very active on social media and hosts a “Book of the Month Club” to support new translations. Sending information about forthcoming Italian books to readers, reviewers, booksellers, librarians, academics, etc. is a relatively inexpensive way to increase awareness of which titles are available in English, and can help increase sales.

Certain government agencies—such as the Ramon Llull Institut in Barcelona—provide publishers with funding for specific marketing activities. This is something that can make a huge difference in how much time is interested in promoting a particular title, and is a great incentive for a publisher. Additionally, it allows publishers to be creative and try things they otherwise wouldn’t be able to.

5) Direct funding for translators.

Translators are one of the most important allies in getting international literature published. There are a number of ways to encourage Italian translators, including support for university translation programs, establishing a “translators’ house” where translators can work for a few weeks, and organizing seminars for translators from the Italian to meet and exchange information.

Overall, given the general interest in Italian literature and culture, and the current position of Italian literature in English translation, there is a great opportunity to work with editors and translators to increase the number of Italian titles being published in America.