

## Translation, *Littérisation*, and the Nobel Prize for Literature

**Abstract:** This work is a cultural economics study of the problem of translation production and assessment in and leading up to the literary Nobel Prize deliberations. I argue that the constraints of assessing an unevenly and partially translated body of literary works, many of them from less common languages, present an unbreachable expertise gap. Translation as a sacralization, or *consecration* in Casanova's (2004) term, of a writer's work is considered in the context of the award. Ultimately the prize is shown to depend upon translations carried out in dissimilar circumstances for each candidate. The award of the Nobel is part of the founder's call for works to be more widely circulated, not to reward fame; thus a Nobel is more an *invitation to translate* than a recognition of an author in translation, although evidence suggests that the post-Nobel translational impact may vary by writer and over time. This study sheds light on the degree to which the Prize is an authority-mediated phenomenon, and while critiquing the quixotic task of judging disparate forms and amounts of cultural capital side by side, and never from a point of neutrality, it also attempts to show how translation shapes this symbolic form of prestige in the struggle for existence. I posit that alternative prizes and prize-awarding in general are fraught with similar cross-language challenges. Possibilities for future research, qualitative analysis of the Nobel and translation demand, among other consequences, are briefly sketched.