

Cultural Diplomacy vs. Bestseller Culture. Semi-Peripheral literature on a Central Literary Marketplace. Example: Swedish Literature in France ca 1980–2018

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The 1980s brought about important changes to the literary field in many European countries. France stands out as an especially illustrative example. As described by literary sociologist Gisèle Sapiro, the French state launched a number of reforms that formed a “counter-policy”, challenging what was described as an anglo-globalisation and an increasing commoditization of literature. The goal was to defend diversity on the literary market, especially when it came to translations from peripheral and semi-peripheral languages.

In this paper, I will discuss some effects of this “ideology of diversity”, focusing on one example: the translation and publishing of Swedish fiction in France from the 1980s until today. To understand this specific cultural exchange, it is necessary to take into consideration a number of important factors, including minor “niche publishers” focusing on translations, new kinds of translators and successful market-driven genres such as crime fiction.

The description of this contemporary situation on the French book market will also be discussed in relation to earlier periods, especially the years 1945–1980.