



# **The Selection, Promotion, and Reception of Translated Fiction in Wellington**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Victoria University of Wellington—Te Herenga Waka

January 2022

## **Abstract**

This is the first systematic study of the selection, promotion, and reception of translated fiction anywhere in New Zealand. The study has two phases. The first draws on the responses of 277 adult readers in Wellington to a questionnaire about their perceptions of translated fiction. The findings reveal that most Wellington readers say they enjoy reading books set in other cultures, but their actual reading is largely English-language oriented. While some respondents expressed a specific interest in reading translated fiction, most prioritised genre and content. Age and ethnicity correlate only weakly with perceptions of translated fiction, but knowledge of one or more second languages is a strong predictor of positive perceptions of translated fiction. The second phase of the study draws on seven semi-structured interviews with representatives from three major book-related entities in Wellington: New Zealand Festival's Writers Week, Wellington City Libraries (WCL), and Unity Books. The interviews provided first-hand insights into each entity's policies and practices for selecting and promoting translated fiction. Although its past and current coordinators speak highly of translated literature, Wellington's Writers Week has seen a significant decline in the number of non-English-speaking writers in the last two decades. Similarly, Unity Books claims to treat all categories of books, including translated fiction, equally, but its commercial practice in fact prioritises certain other categories. Wellington City Libraries, on the other hand, has taken a proactive approach to the promotion of translated fiction, for example through blogs and physical displays. Combined with the survey data, the interview findings demonstrate both the complex nature of reading choices and the challenges of advocating for the enhanced visibility of translated fiction in a largely monolingual context. However, many signs also point to a growing recognition of translated fiction as an important element of eclectic reading. This recognition can lead to positive changes in the future.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is a result of almost four years of hard work and many a sleepless night. I was lucky enough to be surrounded by a supportive group of people during this journey.

I will be forever grateful to my primary supervisor, Dr Richard Millington. Ever since our first correspondence in 2017, Richard listened attentively to my ideas and helped me turn them into manageable research questions. He not only provided excellent timely feedback on my manuscripts, but he also encouraged me to challenge him on his suggestions. I will always cherish our conversations about history, travelling, and the etymology of words. To you, Richard, I say *xaste nabaashi* and *xeili mamnun* for making my PhD experience one to remember.

I also wish to acknowledge my late supervisor, Professor Lydia Wevers, who sadly passed away a month before my defense session in 2021. Lydia's insights on reader studies and the literary landscape in New Zealand were seminal to my work, and I'm grateful that she got to review the final draft of the thesis. Having Lydia as a supervisor will remain a bright point in my academic career.

I am grateful to my examiners for their constructive feedback. I believe the thesis has improved considerably thanks to their suggestions. I also wish to mention Dr Marco Sonzogni, whose enthusiasm for intercultural communication runs in the veins of the School of Languages and Cultures, motivating early career researchers like myself to continue on this uneven path.

I owe a sincere note of thanks to Claire Mabey and Suzy Cain from the New Zealand Festival for patiently responding to my queries, to Tilly Lloyd from Unity books for her help in distributing my survey and her insights on Wellington's book market, and to my expert interviewees, Chris Price, Deborah Olson, Neil Johnson, Cathy Underwood, Claire Mabey, and Marcus Greville for sharing their expert opinions.

Finally, I wish to thank my beautiful wife, Mehri. You know how appreciative I am of your unconditional love and support. I'm very lucky to have you by my side.

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# 1. Introduction

The New Zealand Cultural Experiences Survey of 2002 suggests that Wellingtonians love reading works of fiction, but does it make a difference if the text was originally written in English or has been translated from another language? More importantly, do readers prefer one over the other? Which book-related institutions in Wellington have the most influence on readers' preferences for and perceptions of different types of books, and how do they approach literature in translation? These questions merit exploration if a more comprehensive understanding of New Zealanders' perceptions of translated fiction is to be achieved. New Zealanders' perceptions are not necessarily the same as readers in other English-speaking countries. If this were the case, the current research would have been unnecessary, given Catherine Campbell's 2015 study of UK readers' attitudes towards translated books. Throughout this thesis, I challenge any conception of the English-speaking readership as a monolith, primarily by discussing the features of New Zealand's sociocultural context and how these can influence readers' perceptions of translated fiction.

As will be shown throughout the thesis, *open-mindedness* and *monolingualism* are two dominant characteristics of the Wellington readership and two recurrent motifs that link the different stages of this study. They are important for the purposes of this study because they are also forces that pull people's attitudes to translated fiction in different directions. This duality extends to the perceptions of book-related stakeholders, which in turn shape their practices for selecting and promoting translated literature. Before elaborating on the ways in which these two factors contribute to shaping individual and collective attitudes to translated literature, I will provide a brief background of New Zealand's reading culture and New Zealanders' approach to reading.

Geographically isolated from the rest of the world, especially from Britain which was still *home* for many early settlers, New Zealanders turned to anything that could keep them connected to their roots. Given the limited entertainment options throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reading was the most accessible means to achieve that goal. For early European settlers, reading was less about exposure to the *unknown* than reconnecting with the *known*. Settlers relied on fellow citizens to bring with them newly published books from the home country, Britain (Wevers, 2010). Reading was "a necessity of life in colonial New Zealand from the very beginnings" (Traue, 2007, p. 46). An article on reading published in *New Zealand Journal* in 1844 described "a well-conducted colonist" as

of necessity a reading man... None but they who have resided in a new colony can appreciate the value of a new book; and we are happy to bear testimony, that in no colony is literature more appreciated than in New Zealand (Craik, 1844).

Te reo Māori as a written language was developed by the first missionaries in the 1840s. While a wealth of research has been conducted in the area of New Zealand's reading culture in general, "very little [scholarship] looks specifically at Māori experience of reading in their own language (Driver-Burgess, 2015, p. 2). In an interview with Radio New Zealand's Jesse Mulligan (2017), Lydia Wevers had finished explaining her project on nineteenth-century reading in New Zealand when Mulligan asked the following questions: *what were Māori people reading? Were they reading the same stuff?* Wevers' response sheds some light on the history of reading among Māori:

Well, they were reading Dickens, which we know from various remarks that Māori people made about it, especially Rēweti Kōhere who mentions Dickens in his autobiography. But Māori reading was really, for most of the nineteenth century, happening in te reo Māori, so where you see it is in the Māori-language newspapers. A master's student that I was supervising did some research on that. In fact, Māori were less interested in fiction and more interested in things which were of practical use, but also *The Bible*. So, what they were really reading a lot of was Biblical texts.

During a later correspondence that I had with Wevers, she said the master's student referred to here is Frith Te Aroha Driver-Burgess. Driver-Burgess's MA research (2015) focused on te reo reading in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the abstract of her thesis, she writes:

At the end of the long nineteenth century, a well-developed reading culture in te reo existed in New Zealand. Although reading was not engaged in by the whole population, it was, in many cases, highly respected and a part of daily and official life (iii).

Driver-Burgess delves into the details of the content that Māori read during that period, including translated material and Biblical texts. Other researchers have also looked at the reception of certain types of books by Māori. Hessel (2018), for example, conducted an extensive study of the translation and reception of Romantic literature into indigenous languages, including te reo. Overall, the available literature suggests that not only did Māori show great interest in learning to read, but they were also keen to pass on their knowledge to friends and family. Combined with the evidence about settler readers presented above, it is safe to say that nineteenth century New Zealand was a country of readers.

Although circumstances have changed dramatically since then, especially in terms of travel and communication, it seems that the love of New Zealanders for books has not faded. Data presented in the New Zealand Book Council's Reading Report (2018) cement the view of contemporary New Zealand as a reading nation. According to the country's Cultural Experiences Survey conducted in 2002 (but not repeated since), 'purchasing books' was the most popular cultural activity among adult New Zealanders, followed closely by 'visiting public libraries' and 'purchasing music'. Although someone who purchases a book or borrows one from the library may not necessarily end up reading it (Eliot, 2012), the level of interest in owning and borrowing books indicates a deeply embedded reading culture.

According to the terminology of the polysystem theory proposed by Even-Zohar (1979), book-reading occupies a central position in the cultural polysystem of New Zealand, ahead of many other forms of cultural participation. In a recent national survey commissioned by the New Zealand Book Council (2018), 80 percent of adult New Zealanders had read or started reading a fiction book in the preceding 12 months, with an average of 22.6 books per reader, including fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. Although this report provides no city-specific information, previous research (e.g. Miller et al., 2012) has shown that residents of large urban areas are likely to read more regularly than those in rural areas. This is partly because the former often have greater access to a wider variety of books and enjoy a higher socio-economic status, which, according to Miller et al's 2012 study in the US, correlate positively with engagement with books and libraries.

The idea of a relationship between the place someone lives and their reading habits has been around for quite a while. Statistics aside, several novelists have touched on this perceived relationship. Doris Lessing, for instance, points to it in her 1950 novel *The Grass is Singing*. Describing the dull life of her protagonist, Mary Turner, in a small African village, Lessing writes: "better educated, living in the town with access to books, she would have found Tagore perhaps, and gone into a sweet dream of words" (Lessing, 1950/1973, p. 163). Apart from the impact of varying levels of access to books and book-related institutions on the reading habits of individuals, the characteristics and social dynamics of a locale can also create an interest in certain types of books, themes and genres, as will be shown throughout this thesis. In the New Zealand context, one of the most tangible examples of the impact of *place* on reading interests is the stark difference between the weekly bestseller lists of Unity Books' Auckland and Wellington stores published in *The Spinoff's* Review of Books. I selected five lists in 2020 and 2021 and compared the bestselling titles in Auckland and Wellington. For the selected lists, the two stores had only four, five, four, three, and five titles in common out of a total of ten titles featured in each list. In other words, one would be hard pressed to find a 50 percent similarity between Auckland and Wellington bestsellers.

Almost the same books are stocked in both stores, so the difference in bestselling titles might point to other factors, including the local cultural and literary scenes.

As New Zealand's political capital and one of the country's self-proclaimed arts and culture capitals, Wellington has several features which distinguish it from other large cities in New Zealand. First and foremost, it takes pride in being a culturally diverse city and "home to many museums, theatres and arts festivals" (*Profile of Wellington*, Wellington City Council Website<sup>1</sup>). Wellington City has a vibrant cultural, literary, and artistic scene. According to the New Zealand Cultural Experiences Survey, many cultural activities, including visiting art galleries, museums, theatre and opera performances and going to the movies, were more popular in Wellington than any other part of New Zealand (Ongley, 2003).

With 46 percent of its population holding a bachelor's degree or higher in 2018, Wellington tops the country in terms of education level, followed by Auckland (24.7 percent) and Queenstown-Lakes District (24.6 percent). It also has the highest median personal income of the 67 territorial authority areas in New Zealand. What makes these features meaningful for this study is the documented correlation between education, income, and reading. For instance, the 2018 Book Reading in New Zealand Report shows that adult non-readers were "less than half as likely as readers to have education qualifications above NCEA Level 2"<sup>2</sup> and had "lower average household income and personal income than readers" (New Zealand Book Council, 2018, p. 9).

As residents of the capital of New Zealand, Wellingtonians have plenty of opportunities to participate in cultural events held or supported by foreign embassies, high commissions and international cultural organisations. Increased exposure to cultures other than one's own can lead to an interest in the literary productions of those cultures. Focusing on the accessibility of translated fiction in the public libraries of metropolitan cities across Canada, Dali and Alsabbagh (2014, p. 576) argue that "the presence of multicultural ethnic groups and greater exposure to international collaborations and events certainly stimulate the interest of English-speaking readers in translated works."

Although New Zealand has a rich reading culture, one aspect of literary production and reception attracts very little attention in this country: translated literature. This neglect is illustrated by the 2018 Book Reading in New Zealand Report (New Zealand Book Council, 2018). The sample of New Zealanders surveyed for this report "was weighted to match national demographics

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<sup>1</sup> <https://wellington.govt.nz/wellington-city/about-wellington-city/profile-of-wellington>

<sup>2</sup> "This is one of three National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEAs)" in New Zealand, "designed to enable access to the foundation skills required for employment." (<https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/NZQF/NQ/Ref/0973>). Most secondary students do NCEA Level 2 during their twelfth year of schooling.

for age, gender, personal income, education level, employment status and ethnicity” (23). The survey set out to discover the reading and book buying habits of New Zealanders and to present a broad picture of the demographics of New Zealand readers, their favourite genres, main reasons for reading or not reading, and main sources of information about new books, among others. Although it claims to offer a holistic account of book reading in New Zealand, the word ‘translation’ does not appear in the report, nor do any of its derivatives (e.g. translated or translator).<sup>3</sup> The overlooking of translated books in national book surveys does not seem to be limited to New Zealand. Heilbron (2000, p. 22) similarly criticises a large-scale project (1982-86) examining the French book trade for neglecting translated books; in “the otherwise outstanding project... which contains more than three thousand pages, there is not a single chapter on translations or translators.”

Just as translation reception has been neglected in previous research, the selection and promotion of translated fiction in New Zealand has hardly been mentioned, let alone studied, in previous accounts of book-reading in the country. This neglect partly reflects the actual translation publication landscape in New Zealand. Aside from literary translations between English and te reo Māori, little translated work is published by New Zealand-based publishers (see chapter two for an extended discussion). If we accept that research output correlates to real-world practices, lack of research on the selection and promotion of translated fiction in New Zealand should not come as a surprise.

Readers’ perceptions of translated fiction are shaped by a complex web of factors, and it is difficult for researchers to account for them all. One approach is to identify and examine the entities that are likely to have the greatest influence. Without doubt, an increasing number of readers refer to online platforms for learning about new books and making decisions about their future reading. Most online booksellers provide a huge variety of books often at lower prices than brick-and-mortar bookstores, although at the latter it is easier for customers to physically browse through a book and obtain it immediately after purchase (Brynjolfsson et al., 2003; Chu et al., 2012). Physical bookstores also provide a platform for customers to meet people with shared interests, hear writers and other experts talk about literature, and keep updated with news from the world of books. The same can be said with regards to the environment created by public libraries and literary festivals. Collectively, these factors have contributed to the retention of local stakeholders like public libraries, bookstores, and literary festivals as the main points of reference for readers in New Zealand (see chapter three of this thesis and the New Zealand Book Council’s

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<sup>3</sup> For a more general criticism of the Book Council’s Reading Report, see King (2016).

2018 Reading Report for more details). It is for this reason that the present study considers the practices of several local stakeholders<sup>4</sup> for selecting and promoting translated fiction.

### 1.1 The Question of Translation as a Genre

Early in the study, I noticed the difficulty of distinguishing among concepts such as text-type, genre, and literary category in relation to translation. Genre and text-type have been used frequently, at times interchangeably, in studies of the translation process and product. Gambier (2013, p. 64) observes that “the distinction between genre and text-type remains vague and there is a constant terminological confusion as to how texts may be referred to”. To avoid such confusion, I decided not to use these two terms. Instead, I limited the scope of my investigation to a specific text-type, that is expressive texts (to use Katharina Reiss’ 1981 terminology) translated into English. The other two text-types outlined by Reiss are *informative* and *operative*. Texts that belong to each text-type are thought to share certain characteristics.

The idea of shared characteristics among translated texts has mainly been discussed under “translation universals”. In fact, Toury (1995) maintained that discovering translation universals was one of the fundamental tasks of descriptive translation studies. Most, if not all, translation universals are of a linguistic nature (see Chesterman, 2004 for a breakdown of the types of translation universals). In the last two decades, electronic corpora have been extensively used to extrapolate some of the unique features of translated texts compared to both source texts and comparable untranslated texts in the target language (see the volume edited by Mauraanen & Kujamäki, 2004 for a few theoretical and experimental studies). Based on these explanations, it seems that ‘translated fiction in English’ is a distinct enough category for the purposes of the present study. However, I allowed the survey and interview participants to apply their own definition of translated fiction when responding to my questions. This approach resulted in interesting findings which I will share in different parts of the results chapters.

### 1.2 Research Questions

During the first few months of my PhD candidature, I talked to several stakeholders in Wellington’s book sector about the way they approach literature in translation, either as booksellers, library staff, or festival organisers. With few exceptions, almost all those conversations reinforced the idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Early in the study, I had to choose a term to refer to the selected book-related institutions: Writers Week, Wellington City Libraries, and Unity Books Wellington. The final options were gatekeeper, tastemaker, and stakeholder. After outlining the main activities of these institutions, I noticed that all of them undertake a gatekeeping role that is likely to result in some form of literary taste making. Yet the terms *gatekeeper* or *tastemaker* fail to capture the breadth of these institutions’ engagement in the literary sector. I decided to use ‘stakeholder’ because it is a more generic and therefore fitting term in this context.

translated literature occupying the margins of the New Zealand literary polysystem, both on discursive and practical levels. Having gained a fuller understanding of the relatively small size of the New Zealand book market and readership, I set out to draw a clear picture of how translated fiction is approached in this market, both by stakeholders and readers. The overarching goal for this study was to strengthen the discourse around the reception and promotion of translated fiction in New Zealand, with a focus on the capital, Wellington.

Many factors contribute to the neglect of translated fiction, some of which are outside the control of stakeholders in New Zealand. Precisely for that reason, I decided to focus on the stages after book publication, over which the stakeholders have the most control, namely the selection of translated fiction by booksellers, libraries, and literary festivals in Wellington, the promotion of translated fiction by the same organisations, and finally perceptions of translated fiction among Wellington readers. The following questions guided this research:

1. What are the perceptions of translated fiction among adult readers in Wellington?
  - 1.1 Do age, ethnicity, and knowledge of one or more second language predict readers' perceptions of translated fiction?
  - 1.2 Is there a connection between readers' international engagement and their perceptions of translated fiction?
2. What are the policies and practices of New Zealand Festival's Writers Week, Unity Books Wellington, and Wellington City Libraries for selecting and promoting translated fiction?

I designed a mixed-methods research framework to address these questions. The instrument of data collection for the first question and its sub-questions was a self-administered online questionnaire which consisted of a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. To collect the data for addressing the second research question, I used a semi-structured interview protocol for conducting face-to-face interviews with seven key informants from Wellington's book sector: two coordinators at Wellington's Writers Week (hitherto referred to as Writers Week), two members of staff at Unity Books Wellington, and three fiction specialists at Wellington City Libraries (hitherto referred to as WCL). The details of the interview protocol as well as the rationale for choosing these organisations will be explained in the methodology chapter.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This survey-based study is the first attempt to explore perceptions of translated fiction among a sample of adult readers in Wellington and describe the policies and practices for selecting and

promoting translated fiction of some of the institutions that contribute to shaping these attitudes, namely Writers Week, Unity Books, and Wellington City Libraries. The results provide an unprecedented account of readers' perceptions of translated fiction, which can inform the strategies of stakeholders in the Wellington's book sector for selecting and promoting translated fiction. Building on previous studies of New Zealanders' reading habits (e.g. Thomson, 2008; Wevers, 2010; White, 2012), the study also provides researchers of book history, sociocultural studies, and translation studies with an account of the reading of translated fiction in early twenty-first century New Zealand, or at least its capital. Writing within the target-oriented paradigm in translation studies, Nord (2000, p. 195) underscores the importance of researching the readership of translated texts: "if a text is to be functional for a certain person or group of persons, it has to be tailored to their needs and expectations." Although most translated books in New Zealand are imported from the UK, the US, and Australia, they are meant to be read and appreciated by New Zealanders. Moreover, Anderson (2006) believes that researchers must establish strong links with people outside academia, including readers, if a profile is ever to be developed for literary translation in New Zealand.

One way to look at the reading preferences of people in a certain locale is to analyse the lending records of local libraries or sales records of publishers and booksellers. However, as Eliot argues in an introductory article for The Reading Experience Database, "to own, buy, borrow or steal a book is no proof of wishing to read it, let alone proof of having read it" (Eliot, 2012). Eliot calls this "the first and greatest caveat in the history of reading." Moreover, while borrowing and sales figures are a good indication of reading preferences, they alone will not capture the underlying attitudes and perceptions which have led to the decision to read a specific book. Asheim (1953, p. 458) maintains that "accessibility, then readability, and only then, interest, are the factors which lead people to read the specific things they do." This statement suggests that having access to books is the primary factor that determines reading choices.

As with other consumer-reliant sectors, the book sector will benefit from more information about its customers' attitudes towards different types of products, in this case translated fiction books. This need was voiced by some of the staff and managers at major bookstores in Wellington during informal preliminary talks. Public libraries and literary festivals will similarly benefit from nuanced knowledge about their patrons' reading preferences, given that one of their main objectives is to cater to as diverse a clientele as possible. More information about reader attitudes and preferences could help all actors in Wellington's book sector in making more informed decisions regarding the selection and promotion of translated fiction. These decisions can range from buying stock to arranging displays, among others.



By describing the policies and practices of Writers Week, Unity Books, and WCL for selecting and promoting translated fiction, this study will help create a fuller picture of the translated fiction market in Wellington. Combined with data regarding Wellington readers' perceptions of translated fiction, information about stakeholders' relevant practices can shed light on the actual treatment of translated fiction in a predominantly anglophone context.

This study is also distinguished by its focus on Wellington, the capital of New Zealand. As will be discussed later in the thesis, it is naive to consider reading as a purely individual activity occurring in a social and cultural vacuum. Adoni and Nossek (2013, p. 56) argue that "sharing similar literary tastes and texts contributes to individuals' identification with and integration within social groups." From a different perspective, the social, cultural, and political dynamics of a locale can impact the way its citizens engage with the arts and literature. More specifically, the approach of book-related organisations towards promoting different types of books can influence readers' perception of and preference for those books. For instance, LGBTQ literature is actively promoted by Wellington bookstores, in line with other events in the city which celebrate gender diversity. Unity Books, in particular, has dedicated a permanent section of the store to showcasing LGBTQ literature, including fiction and nonfiction. It is likely that such a separate display will increase sales of these books. While some studies (e.g. Miller et al., 2012) present age and socioeconomic status as the main predictors of people's engagement with book-related institutions, I will try to explore the possible influences of 'place' and 'local culture' on people's cultural participation, with a focus on their reading habits and perceptions of translated fiction.

It is proper here to acknowledge that my position as a practicing translator and interpreter, as well as a translation researcher, is not neutral. I approached this topic from a position of commitment to literary translation and that is reflected in my institutional position as a PhD candidate of a literary translation programme at Victoria University of Wellington. This position has necessarily informed the design of the study and the discussion of findings. However, as a researcher I also have a commitment to scholarly detachment, which I have sought to maintain throughout the study, especially while designing the survey and interpreting the survey and interview findings.

The thesis is structured as follows. In chapter two, I will present a review of the literature, which will provide some context for the gap identified above. In the third chapter, I will outline the major methodological considerations of the study, including the theoretical framework, the selected samples, the instruments of data collection, and finally the procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter four will host a combination of findings pertaining to the closed-ended and open-ended survey items. The survey findings will be presented thematically. Chapters five to

seven contain the findings obtained from my interviews with representatives from Writers Week Wellington, Unity Books, and Wellington City Libraries, respectively. The findings in each of the result chapters will be discussed and situated within the wider context of the study. The final chapter, conclusion, contains a summary of the survey and interview findings, followed by some reflections on the connections between the two, as well as avenues for future research.

## 2. Review of the literature

The present study borrows concepts, approaches, and methods from translation studies, library studies, and reader studies, among others. I have divided the literature review chapter into seven parts. In the first and second parts, I will outline the status quo of literary translation in the anglophone world and in New Zealand, respectively. The third and fourth parts present an introduction to reader studies as a distinct area of investigation followed by case studies from New Zealand. The fifth part entails a brief account of the development of translation studies in the second half of the twentieth century, leading to the target-oriented approach and the descriptive paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s, while the sixth part covers recent scholarship on translation reception. Several studies have been conducted on the reception of legal (e.g. Rojo & Cifuentes-Ferez, 2017), commercial (e.g. Valdés, 2000), and religious texts (e.g. Smelik, 1999; Alanbari, 2020) in translation, but those on the reception of translated literature will form the focus of the current literature review. Since this study focuses on perceptions of translated fiction among non-professional readers, I concentrate here on the existing literature on the reception of translated literature by this group. Some previous studies have investigated the attitudinal aspects of the translated literature readership (e.g. Bijani et al., 2014; Campbell, 2015), while others have analysed the reception of certain translated works by a given audience (e.g. Sousa, 2002; Chan, 2014; D'Egidio, 2015). I have considered studies of both types. In the seventh and final part, I will review scholarship on the gatekeeping role of public libraries, focusing on the approach towards selecting and promoting translated literature.

### 2.1 Literary Translation in the Anglophone World: past and Present

Prose translation is a relatively recent arrival in literature. Of course, prose can take different forms, but the novel is one of the most common types of prose translated into English. Many critics believe that the first modern-day novel translated into English was Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Barslund, 2011). Thomas Shelton translated the first and second volumes of *Don Quixote* in 1612 and 1620, respectively. In the eighteenth century, "with the Enlightenment's desire to investigate and gain knowledge came an interest in translation" (Barslund, 2011, p. 141). This interest was mainly directed towards translating scientific texts but was later extended to the translation of creative writing (for an extended discussion of prose translation in the eighteenth century, see McMurran, 2009).

Fiction translations remained sporadic until the second half of the nineteenth century, which saw a significant change in the types of novels selected for translation into English. Largely

a product of the times, novels coming from Europe had become “critical and questioning, highlighting moral issues and social injustice” (Barslund, 2011, p. 5). The publishers of the English translations of these novels in the UK were often penalised by the state. Henry Vizetelly (1820-94) was one such publisher. Having set up a publishing house in 1887 to publish English translations of French and Russian novels, Vizetelly was fined several times for publishing novels dealing with social problems by writers like Emile Zola. He was also “imprisoned under pressure from the National Vigilance Association” (Pym, 2001, p. 73). Pym mentions the petition of several writers including Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symonds for the release of Vizetelly, but “conservatives opposed any concession to what Tennyson had generally labelled ‘poisoned honey, stolen from France’” (73).

The publishing landscape changed dramatically in the 1930s. With the introduction of the paperback in 1935, book publishing became more affordable and ordinary readers could also afford to buy books, including translated novels. The development of prose translation into English in the second half of the twentieth century was extremely rapid. In a chapter of *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, Pym (2001) analyses different aspects of the English literary translation landscape between the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He discusses the changes that happened in terms of the status of translators and translations, translation norms, translation publication in the UK and US, and the competition between small and large publishers, among other things. According to Barslund (2011), English-language publishers began adopting a more targeted approach towards foreign fiction, increasingly looking for avant-garde foreign-language novels they could bring to English-speaking readers through translation.

Although this study focuses on the selection, promotion, and reception of translated fiction among a sample of Wellington readers, it is, more generally, a study of translated fiction reading in an English-speaking context. Despite translation’s longstanding existence as a literary practice, deploring the status of translated literature has been the norm in the English-speaking world. Several notable translation scholars (e.g. Even-Zohar, 1990; Venuti, 2017) have placed translated literature at the margins of the literary polysystem in English-speaking countries. Those who describe this position (e.g. Pym, 2001; Fock et al., 2008; Donahaye, 2012; Venuti, 2017) often refer to the low rates of translation in the UK and US—less than five percent of total book output. Drawing on a report by the EC (now the EU), Barslund (2011) reports that only three percent of all published books in the UK in 1993 were translated, not much different from the figure in the US.

The “three percent problem”<sup>5</sup> is famously associated with low rates of translation in English-speaking countries, although some experts have called it “outdated” (e.g. Charlotte Collins quoted in *The Booker Prizes*, 2019). Entire dissertations have been devoted to answering the question “why do English speakers read so few books in translation?” (e.g. Morrison, 2016). Many stakeholders have acknowledged this issue, some of whom have made it their mission to bring about change. New York-based Archipelago Press, for example, make the following mission statement:

Sadly, less than three percent of new literature published in the United States originates outside the Anglosphere. By publishing diverse and innovative literary translations we are doing what we can to change this lamentable circumstance and to broaden the American literary landscape. (*About*, Archipelago Books)

According to a research commissioned by the Booker International Prize from Nielsen Book (The Booker Prizes, 2019), in 2019 the ratio of translated fiction to total published fiction in the UK increased to 5.63 percent, which is almost double the figure for preceding years. However, this ratio remained at about three percent in the US. This is surprising given the establishment of several publishing houses in the US which specialise in translated literature.

While the ratio of translated books to total published books can be helpful for evaluating the status of translated literature, it needs to be considered within a broader context of book publishing. For example, according to Three Percent’s Translation Database which tracks “all original publications of fiction and poetry published in the U.S. in English translation”, the number of published translations in the US almost tripled from 2010 (372 titles) to 2013 (936 titles) and has remained around the 600 mark ever since. However, the ratio of translated books to total books has remained unchanged at around three percent because the number of English-language books published during the same period has also increased. In addition, the history of literary exchange between English and other languages has shown an inverse correlation between the publication of original-language books and translated books. Translation between English and French in the eighteenth century is a distant but illuminating example in this context. In the first half of the eighteenth century, translations from French formed around 25 percent of the market of available novels in England, while very few English-language novels were translated into French; In the second half of the century, however, translations from French into English dropped significantly.

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<sup>5</sup> A term coined by Chad Post, the founder and publisher of Open Letter Books.

English-language novels “began to keep pace and the proportion of imports decreased” (McMurran, 2009, p. 46).

All of this should not distract from the low number of translated books published in English compared to the other “central languages”, to use Heilbron’s terminology. The most prolific year so far in terms of translation publication in the US was 2013, with 936 translated titles published for the first time in English. In France alone, 6326 translated titles were published in 2005, and the numbers have only increased in the following years (Fitzpatrick, 2016). Data from some sources (e.g. *Index Translationum*)<sup>6</sup> suggest that most books written in languages other than English (LOTE) will never become available in English translation. For instance, only 72 out of 1515 sub-Saharan Francophone African novels published from the 1920s up to 2008 had been translated into English by 2014, which is less than five percent (Batchelor, 2009, p. 16). The same pattern can be found in the translation of books from other marginal or semi-marginal languages into English.

Roxburgh (2004) mentions some pragmatic reasons that US publishers are less willing to publish literature in translation: higher publishing costs, relatively lower chance of commercial success, and the time-consuming process. Another common, though less talked about, factor is monolingual commissioning editors who are averse to considering texts they cannot read (see Mansell, 2017 for an extended discussion of how some non-English-language publishers have found a way around this problem). Pym (2001), however, challenges this proposition. Focusing on some arguments made about the lack of interest of monolingual editors at larger publishing firms in translations, Pym suggests that “there is no hard evidence that conglomerisation can be casually linked with any overall decline in the number or quality of translations in English” (76). Sandro Ferri, the co-founder of Europa Editions, sides with Roxburgh: “the main obstacle for the diffusion of translated fiction in America is not to be found in the readers, but in the publishers.”<sup>7</sup> Ferri further explains how impressed he was as a European publisher in the US to see the enthusiasm of American readers and independent booksellers for translated literature.

It should be remembered that “translations could also be divided according to their level of complexity, ranging from John Grisham thrillers to classics like Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*” (Adoni & Nossek, 2013, p. 65). That could explain why the position of translated literature in the Anglosphere is itself stratified: “while one section of translated literature may assume a central position, another may remain quite peripheral” (Even-Zohar, 1990, p. 49). An instance of this

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations’ International Translation Bibliography. <http://www.unesco.org/xtrans/>

<sup>7</sup> Europa Editions is best known for publishing the English translations of Elena Ferrante’s renowned Neapolitan Novels.

stratification is the perceived high market demand for Scandinavian crime novels in English translation, as opposed to the perceived low market demand for translated literary fiction. These stratifications are themselves changeable, exemplified by the growing popularity of translated literary fiction as opposed to the declining popularity of translated crime novels and thrillers in the UK between 2017 and 2018 (see Flood, 2019). Within the English-speaking world, translated literature may enjoy different levels of prestige and market demand in different countries. Some scholars, however, have discussed translation flows and language hierarchies without consideration of the place and context in which language exchange takes place. One such scholar is Johan Heilbron.

Largely based on de Swaan's (1993) model of power relations among linguistic communities, Heilbron (1999) adopted a core-periphery framework to analyse the international exchange of books in translation. He argues that the international translation world-system is hierarchical, and the flow of translation from and into a language depends largely on its centrality within this system. Heilbron assigns English a hyper-central status, because "more than 40 percent of all the translated books worldwide were around 1980 translated from English" (p. 434). Other central languages at the time were French, German, and Russian. According to Heilbron, there is an inverse correlation between the centrality of a language and the translation flow into that language. Like any other open system, the international translation system is influenced by the dynamics of the outside world. The hierarchy of languages within that system is, therefore, also dynamic. Political and economic developments, among other factors, can disrupt this hierarchy. Moe et al. (2019) provide the example of an international sport competition in Slovenia where Slovene, normally considered a marginal language, became the sole language of communication between the volunteers and organisers. They use this example to suggest that "languages otherwise considered peripheral can gain a temporary status as a central language while languages considered central are left with a more or less marginal role" (p. 37).

A fairly recent example of the latter is the gradual decline of Russian as a central language following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (see Heilbron 2000 for an extended discussion of the cultural world-system). In the last 20 years or so, Japanese and Scandinavian languages, especially Swedish and Norwegian, have gradually replaced Russian in the hierarchy of languages in the world translation system, mainly thanks to the proliferation and successful reception of literature translated from these languages. According to the Nielsen Book survey, in 2015 fiction books translated from French, Italian, Japanese, Swedish, and German were most popular in the UK, while in 2001, the most popular languages for translation had been French, Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, and Mandarin. While such clear-cut distinctions allow for easy

comparisons, they fail to account for the differences between the contexts in which books are produced and the different ways in which they circulate.

There is an important difference in scholarly perspective between Heilbron and, for example, Spencer (2015). Whereas Heilbron (1999) thinks about languages and books in generalised categories ignoring particular contexts, Spencer pays closer attention to networks of actors in specific places and contexts. In her critique of the bias shown in some previous studies in the use of data on translated books, Spencer (2015) outlines the field of German-English literary translation in current German and Anglo-American contexts. She discusses some circumstances in the early years of the twenty-first century which have helped demarginalise translated literature in the Anglosphere and “configure and celebrate translated literature as a genre” (p. 74).<sup>8</sup> These circumstances include the awarding of new prizes for literature in translation (for an updated list of non-language-specific and language-specific awards for literary translation into English, see Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively),<sup>9</sup> the emergence of corporate publishers, such as Amazon Crossing, dedicated to publishing world literature, or as they like to put it, ‘help great stories cross borders’ (‘Amazon Crossing Thanks Our Translators and Authors’, 2014), and the establishment of independent publishing houses specialising in foreign fiction in translation. Spencer discusses the activities of three independent publishers as case studies, namely And Other Stories, Peirene Press, and Frisch & Co. These publishing houses operate differently in terms of scope and area of expertise, but they share a vision for bringing some of the lesser-known international writers to anglophone readers. Spencer (2015, p. 74) sees

an identifiable tendency for new translational activities to spark discussions about translation’s marginality, for discussions about translation’s marginality to prompt initiatives, and for institutions and agents with variously motivated interests in English-language literary translation to work together or otherwise contribute to the celebration of English-language translation as an ideological necessity or aesthetically valuable pursuit.

Perhaps as a result of such efforts, the situation concerning the production and reception of translated literature in English has improved notably in the years leading to 2020. Apart from enhanced critical recognition, translated literature has gained unprecedented popularity among

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<sup>8</sup> Note the contrast between this view of translated literature as a separate genre and ordinary readers’ view of translated literature in Campbell’s 2015 study in the UK and the current study of New Zealand readers.

<sup>9</sup> These awards not only give more visibility to the individual translated titles that might have otherwise gone unnoticed, but they also raise awareness of the larger category of translated books. In a 2016 interview about translated fiction, a representative of Europa Editions explained how the popularity of Elena Ferrante’s translated novels made British audiences more familiar with reading translations, therefore helping the sales of other translated books (Erizanu, 2016).



English-language readers. A 2016 article in *The Guardian* reported the results of a study commissioned by the Man Booker International Prize and conducted by Nielsen Book on the sales of translated books in the UK. While “fiction in translation accounts for just 3.5% of literary fiction titles published, it accounted for 7% of sales in 2015” (Flood, 2016). The report draws a comparison between the sales of original and translated literary fiction titles from 2001 to 2015. In 2001, each fiction title originally written in English sold 1153 copies on average, while each translated fiction title sold an average of 482 copies. By 2015, translated fiction titles sold an average of 531 copies, which is a slight increase from 2001, but the sales of English fiction titles dropped to an average of 263 copies a year. This indicates a 400 per cent decrease in the sales of English fiction titles over a 14-year period. Sales aside, the sheer number of translations published for the first time in English has increased consistently since 2010 (see chapter two for some diachronic data).

With the growing number of published translations has come increased attention from English-language literary awards. This trend has both fed from and contributed to the increased popularity of translated literature as a larger category. For instance, as seen in the table presented in Appendix A, five of the eight major non-source-language-specific awards for literature in English translation have been established since 2007, including the International Booker Prize (established in 2016) and the National Book Award for Translated Literature (established in 2018). The number of source-language-specific awards for literature in English translation has also doubled since the early 2000s. Aside from these general awards, some genre-specific awards have introduced prizes for translated works, too. The Crime Writers’ Association International Dagger, for instance, has been awarded every year since 2006 to the best crime fiction in translation.

While it is impossible to measure the exact contribution of each of these awards to the increased prominence of translated literature, the fact of their contribution is undeniable. The same is true for the positive impact of the establishment of publishers specialising in translated literature and online platforms devoted to showcasing and reviewing literature in translation. Since the early years of the twenty-first century, translated books have appeared in unprecedented numbers in the book review sections of mainstream outlets (e.g. *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*), shining light on the broader category of writers in translation. In 2015, 13 out of *The New York Times*’ list of the 100 most notable books were literary translations into English (Fitzpatrick, 2016).

In an article published in *Vulture*, Post (2019) responds to Stephen Kinzer’s overly pessimistic projection of the appeal of translated literature to American readers after the Hungarian writer Imre Kertész had won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2002. Post writes, “there are plenty of signs of a growing culture, if not a thriving one, from new stars (Elena Ferrante, Stieg Larsson,

Karl Ove Knausgård, Édouard Louis) to specialized institutions, academic programs, and conferences.” He then presents “an incomplete list of presses, magazines, organizations, and prizes that started up since September 11, 2001”:

Archipelago Books, Europa Editions, Open Letter (which I founded and run), Two Lines, Deep Vellum, Transit, InTranslation, Amazon Crossing, New Vessel Press, Words Without Borders, Asymptote Magazine, Arkansas International, Other Press, the Best Translated Book Award, and the National Book Award for Translation.

As a result of these developments, novels written in rarely translated languages are now beginning to find their way into the English-language book market. For instance, the 2019 Booker International prize went to Jokha Alharthi for her translated novel *Celestial Bodies* (original Arabic title: *Sayyidāt al-qamar, riwāyah*). The first female Omani writer ever translated into English, Alharthi shared the £50,000 prize money with Marilyn Booth, the translator of the book from Arabic into English. Also in 2019, *The Devils’ Dance*, the English translation of Hamid Ismailov’s original Uzbek novel, won the EBRD Literature Prize.<sup>10</sup> A 2018 article in *The Guardian* dubbed Ismailov’s novel “the first major Uzbek work to be translated directly into English” (Taplin, 2018). Winning a prestigious literary prize can not only boost the visibility of an individual title (Bold & Norrick-Rühl, 2017), it can also, in some cases, have a longer-term impact on the popularity of books translated from a particular language or region.

Hoyte-West (2019) mentions the case of Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian* winning the Booker International Prize in 2018, and how its success led to an unprecedented international interest in Korean literature (see Licher, 2016 for an extended discussion). The same can be said for the growing popularity of translated Chinese-language science fiction in recent years. A 2019 *New York Times* article described this phenomenon as “Chinese Sci-fi conquering America”, and largely attributed it to the successful reception of Liu Cixin’s *The Three-Body Problem* by anglophone audiences (Alter, 2019). This specific book was mentioned by Neil Johnson, a Wellington City librarian who was interviewed for this study in early 2019:<sup>11</sup>

*At the moment, for example, there is a real thing in science fiction for Chinese novels translated. But first and foremost, like The Three-Body Problem, which won science fiction’s biggest award and it is by a Chinese author, it is really good science fiction. It*

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<sup>10</sup> Awarded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the EBRD Literature Prize acknowledges a work of literary fiction written originally in any language from a country where the EBRD invests, translated into English, and published by a UK publisher.

<sup>11</sup> Italics are used here to distinguish direct quotations from the survey and interviews.

*also has some cultural aspects, I guess it's making comments about Chinese society. I know the author has flirted with the Chinese authorities' identity and individualism, and obviously China has different views on that, but the thing that makes people want to read it in the first place is that it's a good read.*

Cathy Underwood, another librarian interviewed for this study, also mentioned Chinese science fiction alongside Nordic noir as examples of popular translated literature:

*I think science fiction was also quite interesting, like Chinese science fiction. I think it has been shown so far that within a particular subgenre, for example Nordic noir, if a set of translated works finds an audience because it is more genre-specific, it would definitely attract an audience that way.*

## **2.2 Literary Translation in New Zealand**

The status quo of literary translation in New Zealand is of relevance to this study for obvious reasons. Most importantly, the extent and type of translation activities in a country can impact how its citizens perceive translation as a profession, translators as professionals, and translated books as products. New Zealand shares many cultural and linguistic features with other major English-speaking countries, especially the UK and Australia. Therefore, some conditions of the broader English literary translation landscape apply to New Zealand. However, any conception of English-speaking readership as a monolith needs to be challenged. A small country with a high proportion of cultural imports, New Zealand brings a complex set of cultural and social dynamics which can impact how New Zealanders approach reading. New Zealand has at least two characteristics which distinguish it from the UK, US, and Australia, and which justify separate discussion of its literary translation landscape: it is the smallest of these and is officially a bicultural/bilingual country. Both characteristics have implications for the way the publishing industry operates in New Zealand, but the latter is especially relevant here.

With regards to bilingualism, New Zealand can be likened to two other majority native English-speaking countries, namely Canada and the Republic of Ireland, both of which also have two official languages. English is the most commonly spoken language in New Zealand. In 2018, 96 percent of the New Zealand population reported speaking English either as a mother tongue or second language (Statistics New Zealand, 2018).<sup>12</sup> Te reo Māori, on the other hand, is spoken only by a tiny proportion of the population, despite its official status alongside New Zealand Sign

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<sup>12</sup> Despite it being the most commonly spoken language in New Zealand, English is yet to gain official status in the country. A bill was proposed to the New Zealand parliament in 2018 to recognise English as an official language.

Language. Only four percent of the population could hold a daily conversation in te reo in 2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018), but all New Zealanders are continually exposed to its lexis in place names, government documents, TV programs, and elements of popular culture.<sup>13</sup> Not only can this exposure create an understanding and acceptance of te reo Māori (Māori language) and tikanga Māori (Māori culture and customs), it can also foster broader acceptance of the representations of languages other than one's own. In the context of this study, translated literature can be considered as one of the representations of other languages and cultures. This is one reason that New Zealanders' perceptions of translated literature cannot be regarded as necessarily mirroring those of English-speaking readers elsewhere.

Another factor that can impact readers' perceptions of translated literature is their familiarity with the concept and practice of translation. Regardless of individual circumstances, living in a bilingual country presents a higher chance of exposure to the process or product of translation. In fact, New Zealand's founding document, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, has been at the centre of discussions around translation accuracy and equivalence due to alleged discrepancies between its English and te reo versions (see Moon & Fenton, 2002). Even to date, visitors to the National Library of New Zealand, where the te reo version of the treaty is kept, are told about the controversies surrounding Henry Williams' translation. This historical background might logically produce a certain level of awareness among New Zealanders of the importance of translational activities, if not an appreciation of the difficulties associated with translating texts.

Aside from legal requirements for the undertaking of certain translational activities in New Zealand, which oblige government organisations to prepare bilingual English-te reo versions of important documents and arrange sign-language interpreters for a range of official speeches, literary translations between te reo and English have become a mainstay in the country's literary landscape, especially since te reo revitalisation efforts gained traction in the 1980s. Several publishing houses have contributed to this "translation movement". In October 2019, New Zealand's Prime Minister launched the Kotahi Rau Pukapuka Trust at Auckland University Press (AUP). This Trust has been tasked with undertaking a project "to publish 100 books in te reo Māori." As part of this project, AUP will publish te reo translations of well-known international literature. The project was led off by a translation of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, followed in 2020 by translations of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and Dr. Seuss's *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* into te reo.

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<sup>13</sup> Following the unprecedented demand for te reo courses in recent years (see <https://educationcentral.co.nz/unprecedented-demand-for-te-reo-maori-classes/>), this figure is likely to grow in subsequent censuses.

It is important to note that a significant portion of these translations target children's and young adult literature and that translations from English into te reo far outweigh those from te reo (and other languages) into English. The latter is a possible reason why local commentators have not been very optimistic about the status of the translation profession in New Zealand. In the introduction to her essay collection *Literary Translation in New Zealand*, Anderson (2006, p. 1) found it "scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that literary translation has little or no profile as a profession in New Zealand." Almost all the translated titles available in local libraries and bookstores are imported from larger English-speaking countries. There are several reasons why import trend becomes starker for translated books. First and foremost, the cost of publishing a translated book is, on average, higher than a book written in English, because the publisher must incur extra costs for paying the translator and the original rights-holder. During one of the interviews for this study, the manager of Unity Books Wellington at the time Tilly Lloyd also alluded to this issue and the impact it has on readers' purchase decisions:

*Readers would not bother going to a bookstore and buying a translated book at double the price they can get it from an online book-selling website. So, this has added to the marginalisation of translated books, because they are more expensive to produce than non-translated books.*

Moreover, large publishers in the UK and US are far more likely than their counterparts in Australia and New Zealand to obtain the foreign rights for books which have achieved commercial and/or critical success in their original markets and are therefore expected to succeed in an English-language market. This is mostly due to those publishers' stronger distribution channels and a backlist of successful titles both in English and in translation. As a result, publishers in New Zealand are often left to choose among titles which have not been picked up by UK, US, and Australian publishers. Notwithstanding their literary value, these titles have been deemed unlikely to do well in English.

Focusing on translated children's fiction in New Zealand, Siebeck (2014) reports that 61 percent of the translated children's books in the National Children's Collection were published in the UK, 28 percent in the US, three percent in the UK and US, and eight percent in other countries (e.g. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand).<sup>14</sup> These data refer to children's literature, the most common form of published literary translations in New Zealand (Long, 2006).

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<sup>14</sup> Since the establishment of Gecko Press, a Wellington-based publishing house, in 2005, the situation around the publication of translated children's books has improved significantly in New Zealand. According to its founder, Julia Marshall, since 2005 Gecko Press has published almost 240 translated titles, which make up 85 percent of its total publications.

For adult fiction, the proportion of books translated in New Zealand by a New Zealand-based translator is considerably lower, although a few local publishers have done some valuable work in this area.<sup>15</sup> Siebeck (2014) refers to data from *Index Translationum* about the number of translated books published in New Zealand: from the total of 180 titles (fiction and nonfiction) translated into English in New Zealand from 1978 to 2006, only 70 titles were indexed as “literature”. The one-way flow of books into New Zealand is not a recent phenomenon. Studying bookselling in colonial New Zealand from 1840 to 1890, Liebich (2007) also states that the books available in bookstores around Wellington and Auckland were almost identical to those in London bookshops. A lot has changed since then, and the book sector in New Zealand has become far more independent; however, local booksellers and libraries still rely heavily on imports from the UK, US, and Australia. Due to the difficulties associated with publishing translated books, this import trend becomes starker for literature in translation.

Although Siebeck (2014) uses *Index Translationum* data for situating her findings, she does not gloss over its shortcomings. Still the most comprehensive and all-encompassing source of information about translation publications worldwide, *Index Translationum* suffers from several drawbacks, including inconsistencies in book categorizations, lack of clear definitions for basic terms, and complete reliance on the submission of publication data by each country. This third drawback can result in discrepancies caused, among others, by countries’ different definitions of what constitutes a book, or a translated book for that matter. The *Index Translationum* website contains useful information about the contributions of each country to the database. As of mid-2020, most countries had only submitted their translation publication data up to 2010. Given that *Index Translationum* was discontinued around 2015, a five-year gap is left in the dataset.

A positive change regarding the documentation of translation publications in English was the establishment of the Translation Database by Three Percent and Open Letter Books at the University of Rochester in 2008. Holding bibliographic information about translated books published from 2008 onwards, the Translation Database not only fills the post-2015 gap in *Index Translationum* data, but it also improves on *Index Translationum* by offering a set of clear

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<sup>15</sup> Victoria University Press published a few translated fiction titles in the early 2000s, including *Bluebeard's Workshop and Other Stories* (2008), *Been There, Read That! Stories for the Armchair Traveller* (2009) and *Náhuatl Stories: Indigenous Tales from Mexico* (2012). Some smaller Wellington publishers, such as The Cuba Press and Wai-te-ata Press have also published poetry translations into English and vice versa. In 2019, for example, The Cuba Press published *The Occasional Demon*, a collection of Primo Levi’s poems translated into English by Marco Sonzogni & Harry Thomas. Wai-te-ata Press began a project in 2014 to translate some of the previous issues of Best New Zealand Poems into different languages. As of January 2021, it had published translations into Chinese, Italian, Samoan, Persian, and French, with more languages to follow.

guidelines and inclusion criteria. It even allows users to improve the database by suggesting missing titles that meet the eligibility criteria. Suggested titles should meet the following criteria in order to be considered for inclusion: “never appeared in English in any form, distributed through conventional means in the U.S., published on or after January 1, 2008.” Given its improvable structure and clear-cut guidelines, the Translation Database is likely to be used more regularly in future corpus studies involving translated books.

### **2.3 Translation Awareness and Its Implication for Research**

There is a clear distinction between anglophone countries like New Zealand and many non-anglophone countries, like Iran, in terms of the level of translation awareness. This distinction has important implications not only for the feasibility of conducting translation research in each context, but also for society’s perception of translators (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2018) and the translation profession (Kafi et al., 2018). In a recent article (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020), my colleagues and I elaborated on the extent of translation penetration in the Iranian literary landscape. It is difficult to quantify the difference noted above, but my experience of conducting translation research in both Iran and New Zealand has provided some interesting comparative insights. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I initially found it quite challenging to find readers in Wellington who were willing to participate in this study. My communication with several active book clubs in the capital resulted only in a small number of responses, which is why I approached Unity Books Wellington. Finding translation enthusiasts in Iran, on the other hand, is far less challenging. On the first day of our face-to-face data collection for the project mentioned above, people were so willing to participate in the study that we ran out of questionnaire copies.

The difference in translation awareness is also reflected in the treatment of translated books by book-related institutions. Bookstores are a useful example in this context. As I have shown in several parts of the thesis, translated books tend to be pushed to the side in Wellington bookstores. In Iran, however, most brick-and-mortar bookstores are divided into two overarching sections: Persian originals and works of translation. The same can be said for online bookstores operating in Iran. This categorisation reinforces the central status of translated literature in the Iranian literary landscape. From a research perspective, the central position of translation is likely to facilitate data collection, because both readers and stakeholders are naturally more inclined to participate in a study on the topic of translation.

### **2.4 Reader Studies**

Some studies of readers focus on the act of reading as it happens in a specific context, such as public and academic libraries (e.g. Maker, 2008; Gladwin & Goulding, 2012). These studies often

recommend measures librarians and readers' advisors can take to improve reader experiences. Another group of studies adopt a more generic approach by exploring reader experiences and preferences, regardless of where the act of reading takes place or where the reader obtains a book from. These two groups of studies are collectively known as reader studies. Asheim (1953) outlines the historical origins of reader studies:

The first scientific studies of reading, which began to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century... were concerned with the reading act as a physiological process... By the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the scientific findings of these psychological and physiological investigations were applied to the question of efficient pedagogical method (454).

The mid-1930s saw the first studies on the social role of reading and its relation to the purposes it serves (e.g. Wight & Carnovsky, 1936; Wilson, 1938; Ellsworth, 1939). In the 1950s, studies on readers dealt with three main questions: “who reads what, where does he get it, and how does it affect him?” (Asheim, 1953). In the meantime, studies on readers have developed significantly in terms of the diversity of research methodologies and subjects of study. Campbell (2015) classifies studies on readers into four categories based on the method of investigation:

1. **Research on text reception**, which analyses the reception of a work by professional readers, including academics and critics (e.g. Bullock, 2011; Craighill, 2013; Ghasemnejad & Anushiravani, 2018)
2. **Experimental reader-response research**, which studies readers during the reading process through experimental methods (e.g. Carminati et al., 2006; Zyngier et al., 2007; Chang, 2008);
3. **Experimental consumer research**, which uses experimental methods to investigate issues of purchase and consumption (e.g. Laing & Royle, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2020)
4. **Survey research**, which asks readers about reading, cultural and consumer habits, and demography (e.g. Leppihalme, 1997; Bijani et al., 2014);

While reviewing the literature on reader studies, I discovered another array of studies which adopt a historical approach to explore the reading habits and preferences of past readers, contributing to a history of reading (e.g. Rivers, 1982; Lyons & Taksa, 1992; Rose, 2002; Sherman, 2010; Martin, 2014). On a larger scale, the Reading Experience Database (RED) is dedicated to recording the experiences of readers in the UK throughout a 500-year period from 1450 to 1945. “Its sister



organisations, the Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and Dutch REDs are similarly collecting large quantities of data” (Halsey, 2016, p. 5). According to the official website of the RED,<sup>16</sup>

UK RED has amassed over 30,000 records of reading experiences of British subjects, both at home and abroad, and of visitors to the British Isles... These include both famous and anonymous readers... For our purposes, a ‘reading experience’ means a recorded engagement with a written or printed text—beyond the mere fact of possession.

The present study falls within the fourth of Campbell’s categories of reader studies since it aims to investigate the attitudes of readers towards translated fiction using a survey. Surveys have been a relatively common method of data collection in reader studies. Apart from individual studies in different countries, a series of studies in former Eastern-Bloc countries (e.g. Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Estonia, and Kazakhstan) made use of national user surveys and library statistics to investigate different aspects of reading culture. Most results of these studies were published in the first issue of the *International Information & Library Review* in 1995.

## **2.5 Reader Studies in New Zealand**

During a thorough review of the literature, I became aware of a trend of reader studies in New Zealand which had been gaining momentum since 2007. Although such studies are still sporadic, the literature points to an increasing interest in researching New Zealanders’ reading habits. From 2007 to 2012, several studies aimed to retrieve the reading experiences of readers in the past (e.g. Traue, 2007; Wevers, 2010). In addition, four master’s theses completed at Victoria University of Wellington have focused on contemporary readers in New Zealand (Ooi, 2008; Thomson, 2008; Bain, 2009; White, 2012).

Traue (2007) offers a detailed account of the place of reading in the lives of mid-nineteenth century miners and diggers in Tuapeka goldfields. Focusing on the period following the gold rush in Otago, he presents some information on the number of libraries and newspapers as well as library subscribers in Tuapeka and other parts of the country. Traue concludes that “reading had indeed become a necessity of life in colonial New Zealand from the very beginnings” (p. 46).

Three years after the publication of Traue’s article, Wevers (2010) authored a book entitled *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World*, which reflects on the meaning of books, reading, and intellectual life in colonial New Zealand. Brancepeth Station library in the Wairarapa offers an extraordinary opportunity to reconstruct the lives of readers in a specific time and place. The heyday of the library came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/index.html>

“Committee of Taste” ultimately selected the books to be bought for the library, but some degree of subscriber choice was also considered in the selection of books. Wevers provides a wealth of information about individual readers and their tastes.

Since the lending register of the library is lost, Wevers attempts to trace reader preferences by exploring the physical condition of the books, the composition of the library, and the comments of the readers themselves. This illustrates the difficulty of retrieving the experiences and tastes of readers in the past. Applying these three methods, Wevers categorises the books into three groups, namely heavy use, medium use, and low use, to indicate their popularity among the readers. In general, Brancepeth readers gravitated towards the same categories of fiction loved by Victorian readers in the UK, US, Australia, New Zealand, and the rest of the colonial world: romance (including sensational fiction), historical fiction, and adventure novels. Liebich (2007, p. 197) similarly argues that “the British world shared an imperial culture created as much by the exchange of reading material and literature as by other cultural activities.”

In contrast to the historical focus of the aforementioned studies, Thomson (2008) interviewed a sample of readers of Japanese graphic novels (Manga) at the Graphic Novel Café in Auckland to investigate their reading habits and preferences.<sup>17</sup> Her ultimate aim was to empower collection development librarians to make more informed decisions for building a stronger Manga collection. Using the same instrument of data collection (i.e. interview), Ooi (2008) looked at how adult readers in Wellington select the fiction books they wish to borrow from the public library. She recruited 12 participants through referrals from the public library, snowball sampling, and word of mouth. Having interviewed 12 readers aged between 34 and 85, Ooi concludes that several factors affect the type of fiction books readers decide to borrow, including “everyday life contexts – which include ‘personal influences’ such as mood and lifestyle; interactions with family, friends and book clubs; and uses of the mass media” (p. 78).

Tackling a topic of great importance to New Zealand’s literary landscape, White (2012) explored readers’ attitudes towards fiction by New Zealand writers. She argues that “discussion in the existing literature ... is predominantly opinion-based and largely confined to the media, publishing magazines and industry-focused blogs and presents the views of industry insiders rather than New Zealand readers” (p. 6). Her sample consisted of 497 adult readers in New Zealand who read for pleasure. This MA thesis is a strong starting point for a more systematic study of New Zealanders’ reading habits and preferences, despite the fierce criticism it was subject to by King (2016) after it was used as the basis for a nationwide Reading Report by the New Zealand Book

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<sup>17</sup> The only café in New Zealand dedicated to English-language Manga.

Council. King questioned the representativeness of White's sample and criticised her methods of participant recruitment, claiming that the study consists of "a typical M.A student's snowball survey using questionnaires placed at bookshops, and recruitment by friends, and friends of friends." He overlooks that gaining access to a large network of people with shared interests is an important step in the data collection process, especially for researchers in the social sciences.

White (2012) refers to several reports of recent years to argue that New Zealanders read more international titles than titles published in New Zealand. The "international titles" category is problematic, because it overlooks the variety of genres it encompasses, as well as the distinction between translated and original works. Some of the participants in White's study expressed lack of interest in reading about familiar people in familiar settings. We might assume, however, that novels set in other parts of the anglophone world are also "familiar" to New Zealand readers in ways that novels from most other countries are not. White's finding may indicate an interest among readers in encountering new settings by reading stories from non-anglophone cultures, especially in the form of translated novels. This matter is, of course, relative, and the original language is only one factor determining the degree to which a book appears familiar to readers.

Some of the studies discussed above included discussions about international fiction in their work, but none of them focused on translated literature. Recently, translation scholars have paid increasing attention to the reception of translations. This phenomenon reflects a paradigmatic shift in translation studies. In the following section, I will outline the background to this change and provide some examples of studies that have focused on target audiences.

## **2.6 Translation Studies in the Late Twentieth Century: the Rise of Target-text Readers**

For most of the twentieth century, studies of translation were preoccupied with concepts such as accuracy and equivalence. There seemed to be a never-ending debate over the possibility of finding equivalence between words in different languages. Recurrent dichotomies were also prevalent in the field, including formal/dynamic equivalence (Nida, 1969) and semantic/communicative translation (Newmark, 1981). The 1960s and early 1970s saw a rise in the popularity of linguistic approaches to translation, with figures like Vinay, Darbelnet, and Catford adopting different linguistic approaches to solving translation problems. However, the linguistic approach gave way to a new paradigm in the later years of the twentieth century: "The tendency towards the end of the century, and not only in Translation Studies, was clearly away from strict compartmentalization and towards interdisciplinary cooperation, away from rigid ideology and towards real-life experience" (Snell-Hornby, 2006, p. 150)

The 1990s witnessed a shift of focus towards the contexts in which translated texts are produced, circulated, and received. Translation, therefore, was no longer considered a mere decoding of the source text, but a social practice that takes place in a specific sociocultural context and involves several participants, including the commissioner of the translation, the translator, the editor, and the receiver (Wolf & Fukari, 2007; Wolf, 2010). This shift, which Wolf and Fukari (2007) rightly saw as the beginnings of “a sociology of translation”, was characterised, among other things, by the prioritisation of the target text and culture over the source text. It was within this new paradigm that target-text readers received more attention than before (see Pym, 2014 for a comprehensive account of the evolution of translation theories).

The major advocates of the target-oriented approach in translation studies were Susan Bassnett, André Lefevere, Hans Vermeer, Justa Holz-Manttari, Gideon Toury, and Andrew Chesterman. The two main schools that emerged in this period were the functionalist school and descriptive translation studies (DTS), both of which underscored the target culture and target-text receiver. According to Toury (1995), “translations are facts of one system only: the target system” (p. 29). Such an extreme emphasis on the target system was criticised by Chesterman (1997 [2016]), among others, who maintained that translation is a complicated phenomenon with multiple participants, each having different needs and expectations. Chesterman also introduced the concept of expectancy norms of readers. The descriptive paradigm in translation studies led to many experimental studies attempting to describe the translation product and process, and the function of translated texts in the target system, technically known as product-oriented, process-oriented, and function-oriented DTS, respectively. The main idea behind the descriptive paradigm was moving away from linguistic prescriptivism towards non-evaluative descriptivism.

An important theory introduced as part of the descriptive paradigm in the 1990s was the polysystem. According to this theory, the main proponent of which was Itamar Even-Zohar, any literary culture is a system of systems, or a polysystem. Different literary genres compete to gain a central position within the polysystem. Even-Zohar (1990) argued that translated literature often has a peripheral position in this system, although he mentions some cases where it becomes central, namely when a national literature is young, weak, or undergoing a crisis. Heilbron (1999, p. 439) similarly connects the centrality of a language and the way it approaches cultural products from outside the centre, stating that “the core of an international cultural system has the highest status... it is much less oriented towards products and producers from outside the centres.” This process ultimately results in an uneven translational exchange, which is reflected above all in low rates of translation into English.

These conditions can explain the centrality of translated literature in some contexts, but they fail to account for some of the more complicated circumstances that give rise to the popularity of translated literature. In countries where authors are limited in terms of the topics they can write about or even the words they can or cannot use, translated fiction is more likely than original fiction to be able to circumvent some of the restrictions, and therefore appeal to a wider range of readers. In Iran, for instance, all cultural products undergo scrutiny from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). However, there is a “tacit agreement between MCIG and publishing houses about the imposition of less restrictions on the content of translated books compared to Persian originals” (Kafi, 2021, p. 111). This situation cannot be explained using Even-Zohar’s proposed trichotomy of a literature that is young, weak, or undergoing a crisis, nor can it be analysed through Heilbron’s hierarchical view of languages. Instead, in this case the status of translated literature within the literary polysystem is a direct result of the socio-political context of a country and the outside circumstances that contribute to the centrality of translated literature.

Another notable concept proposed as part of the descriptive paradigm in translation studies is the translational norm. Patterns of social practice determine the way people do creative work, including literary translation. On a general note, norms fall somewhere between rules and idiosyncrasies (Hermans, 1998). They are not a strict set of guidelines to be followed, but disregarding them may lead to some level of penalisation, whereas following the existing norms will often result in appraisal by the receivers of the creative product. As put by Toury (1995, p. 55), norms “always imply sanctions – actual or potential, negative as well as positive.” With literary translation, there is an extra intercultural element, which creates an interesting tension between source culture norms and target culture norms. According to Barslund (2011, p. 3),

With the emergence of a reading public for translated books, the need for a prose translator arose. And with this new profession came the need for rules or norms defining what translation was and what constituted a successful translation, and this was a complex matter because of the subjective nature of creative writing.

Due to the varying strategies of individual translators and editors, it can be hard to pinpoint translational norms in a specific context. However, some patterns have been extrapolated as part of the descriptive paradigm. Adopting a domesticating translation approach, for instance, has been described as one of the main norms of literary translation into English (Venuti, 1995). This norm is reflected in some of the common critical and public praise for translated books: “the translation reads as if it was originally written in English” and “the translation reads very fluently”. By

contrast, Khazaee Far (2001) mentions *Lafz Geraie* (“orientation towards the word”) as the major norm for literary translation into Persian.<sup>18</sup>

Michael Cronin (2012) points to the unprecedented volume of studies in the English-speaking world devoted to theoretical speculation about literary translation. He argues that these works have sometimes informed the norms governing translation practice. Cronin calls the reader-oriented approach in the anglophone world “the single most striking feature of translation norms in the period after the Second World War” (p. 379). This emphasis peaked in the concept of “expectancy norms” proposed by Chesterman in 1997: “expectancy norms are established by the expectations of readers of a translation (of a given type) concerning what a translation (of this type) should be like” (p. 64). They are not validated by any norm authority and are governed by the translation customs of the target culture, the discourse principles of the corresponding TL genre, and different social, economic, and ideological factors. One way to find out about these audience expectations is to study reader or viewer experiences.

In recent years, audiovisual translation researchers have employed advanced methodologies to explore the reception of translated products by their audiences. An array of studies have analysed the reception of translated audiovisual products through, among others, surveys and eye tracking (e.g. O’Hagan, 2009; Ameri et al., 2018; Doherty & Kruger, 2018; Kruger et al., 2018). The application of advanced methodologies has added to the credibility and robustness of reception research in translation studies, but some scholars are encouraging the use of more traditional methods of data collection. During an online lecture for the School of Modern Languages at Cardiff University, Anthony Pym (2020) criticised the frequent use of comprehension tests, eye-tracking, and neuroimaging for researching the reception of translated products, likening them to “spying on the brain”. Instead, he advocated for methodologies such as focus groups and interviews, and “asking questions that have no right answer”.<sup>19</sup>

Research on the reception of translated literature has been fourfold in terms of subject of study:

1. Reception of a single translated title (e.g. Xu & Yu, 2019; Sun, 2021)

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<sup>18</sup> According to Khoshsaligheh, Kafi and Ameri (2020), *Lafz Geraei* is “a type of source-oriented translation approach which attempts to transfer the lexical, syntactical and stylistic features of the original writing to the target text”.

<sup>19</sup> In formulating the questions for the online survey and expert interviews, I consciously avoided asking simplified questions that are likely to result in straightforward data. Instead, the questions have been designed to rely on each respondent’s unique viewpoint of translation and translated products, providing a more realistic image of the status quo.

2. Reception of a specific author's works in translation (e.g. Farnoud, 2020; Wu, 2020; Linares, 2021)
3. Reception of translations from/into a specific language (e.g. Mintz, 2001; Arnold, 2016; Saldanha, 2018)
4. Reception (and perceptions) of certain categories of translated books (e.g. Kruger, 2012; Boase-Beier, 2015)

The current study is a combination of the third and fourth categories, because it examines Wellington readers' perceptions of a certain group of translated books (translated fiction) in a specific language (English). The following section lists some of the studies that have focused on the readers of translated books.

## **2.7 Readers in Translation Studies**

The end users of a translated product, be it readers, viewers, or listeners, play a vital role in determining its success or failure. When it comes to readers of translated books, professional readers (e.g. literary critics and prize committees) are perceived as having more impact in the early stages following book publication, while non-professional readers, "although having little direct influence on the immediate process of translation, are vital stakeholders in the sphere of translation, with the result that their opinions about translated books should be an essential part of a well-rounded Translation Studies" (Campbell, 2015, p. 177). One of the problems commonly associated with literary reception studies is a passive view of readers and target audiences. This viewpoint is especially visible in studies which assume that readers are a homogenous group of people with similar attributes and expectations. On the other hand, an array of works have appeared in literary studies and, more specifically, translation studies, which use credible methodologies to extrapolate readers' perceptions of and opinions about translated products.

Sousa (2002) analyses an adaptation of *Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens and the Portuguese translation of the *Wolves of Willoughby Chase Chronicles* by Joan Aiken to investigate the role of the translator in assessing the readership of a literary prose text. Sousa frequently mentions the translator and the author, the implicit translator and the implicit author, as well as the implicit target reader and the implicit source reader. She argues that translators must assess the cultural knowledge of potential target language readers before attempting to translate any literary text. In her own words,

As the recipient of the translator's work, the TL reader is of major importance to the translator and vital to the translation process, and should not, therefore, be dissociated from

the TT. It follows that the translator needs to assess the TL reader's receptivity to the TT beforehand and address it as he builds the TT from the ST (p. 27).

This is an interesting proposition, but it underplays the diversity of life experiences and cultural knowledge among the group of people collectively labelled "target-language readers". Also, it remains to be seen how the translator, as an intercultural communication agent, is supposed to consider all these factors while trying to render the source text into the target language. In addition, the above statement assumes substantial knowledge about the characteristics and opinions of target audiences. Sousa's research adopts a textual approach common in translation reception research, but it seems that the most feasible way for gaining such knowledge would be through empirical research on actual readers of translations. While still marginal, research of this type is becoming more common in translation studies.

In 2006, Chan used insights from textual studies, narratology, and translation studies to explore how readers respond to translated fiction. In particular, he set out to discover how readers react to paratextual matters such as footnotes, endnotes, and parenthetical notes in translated novels. Chan believes that theories of reading have made it easier for researchers to investigate different aspects of the reading of translated fiction. In his book *Readers, Reading and Reception of Translated Fiction in Chinese*, Chan (2014) discusses at length the reception of translated British fiction in China in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, providing examples of well-known works such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In addition to these detailed analyses, Chan presents a broader view of different approaches to reception in literary studies and how they can be applied to readers of translated fiction.

Bijani et al. (2014) categorise expectations of textual and extratextual features of fiction translation into Persian among young, educated Iranian readers. This study is one of the first to use complex statistical analyses for investigating reader expectations in translation studies. It draws on Chesterman's concept of expectancy norms. Overall, 424 undergraduate students participated in the study by completing a 48-item questionnaire. The results led to six categories: visualisation, preface, source cultural items, target text language, authorial loyalty, and target culture. Several studies have since analysed the reception of audiovisual and literary translation in Iran (e.g. Ameri & Khoshsaligheh, 2018; Ameri et al., 2018; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020).

A major study on the readership of translated books in the English-speaking world was conducted in 2015 by Catherine Campbell at the University of Edinburgh. Campbell's PhD dissertation was a multi-dimensional analysis of the attitudes and opinions of non-professional readers in the UK towards translated books read for pleasure, the act of translation, and the role of



translators. Since Campbell's research was conducted in an English-speaking context with a focus on translated books, it is one of the major works upon which I have relied for situating and discussing the findings of the current study. Campbell (2015), like others (e.g. Kruger, 2013; Chan, 2014; Suojanen et al., 2014), argues that text analysis alone does not fully capture the meaning negotiation between the text and readers and that the nature of readers of translated fiction can be revealed only through an extratextual approach to reception:

Very often ... statements on reader reactions are highly abstract or intuitive; studies of actual readers and their relationship to translated texts are rare, with many references to 'the reader' or 'translation effects' being simply assumptions derived solely from the text itself (or from the researcher examining that text) (p. 12).

She also points to the limited samples of past research, which mostly comprised university undergraduates. To avoid this limitation, Campbell surveyed members of book clubs in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, and London, representing the four countries of the UK. One consequence of this decision was that the average age of her participants was unusually high. I attempted to follow Campbell's example by recruiting participants from book clubs, but the response was disappointingly small, which was why I had to find an alternative source. Using a written questionnaire and a series of oral interviews, Campbell aimed to identify the attitudes of the British readership towards translated books read for pleasure. Her investigation considers a broad range of factors, including general purchase factors (brand, price, physical features, retailer reputation, and country of origin), text-specific factors (genre, cultural differences, and fluency), translation factors (identification of translations, translator skills, translations as status goods, and awareness of translations), and demographic factors.

As mentioned in the introduction, the present study not only explores Wellington readers' perceptions of translated fiction, but it also looks into the activities of Writers Week, Unity Books, and WCL for selecting and promoting translated fiction. The reasons for selecting these institutions will be detailed in the methodology chapter. The following section of this chapter entails a review of the literature on the gatekeeping role of public libraries as it relates to the treatment of translated fiction. The academic literature on the gatekeeping functions of bookstores and literary festivals is sparse, so I have not allocated a separate section to those. Instead, I will use the little available literature on those topics to discuss the findings in chapters four to seven.

## 2.8 Public Libraries as Cultural Gatekeepers

Despite the rapid growth of the world wide web in the last 20 years, libraries and bookstores have retained their position as the main gatekeepers of the book market, elsewhere known as “tastemakers” and “surrogate consumers” (Solomon, 1986). This is not to underestimate the impact of book blogs and more recently, book vlogs, on creating and shaping reading tastes (see Driscoll, 2019). In a chapter of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Janssen and Verboord (2015) discuss the different roles of mediators throughout the process of cultural production and distribution and how these mediators can add to the existing imbalances in international cultural exchanges. They outline seven common mediating practices, starting from the production cycle of cultural products: selecting from the supply (gatekeeping); co-creating/editing; connecting/networking; selling/marketing; distributing; evaluating, classifying, and meaning making. Focusing on the distribution stage, Janssen and Verboord state:

Whereas cultural industries studies routinely refer to distribution as the process of bringing products into circulation for sale (e.g. stores, galleries), display (film exhibitors), or performance (theatres), some institutions primarily seek to make culture more accessible (e.g. libraries and art loan organisations) (p. 6).

This statement highlights the role of certain institutions in making cultural products more accessible, but it indirectly speaks to the impact of such institutions in shaping artistic and literary tastes as well. The more public an institution, the more impact it is likely to have on shaping these tastes. In relation to book-reading, libraries are undoubtedly one of the most important mediators. Their mediating role takes different forms in academic and non-academic contexts. Since the current study focuses on the selection and promotion practices for translated literature, the available literature on recreational reading is of most interest. Several studies have investigated different aspects of recreational reading in public and academic libraries, including the promotion of recreational reading in university libraries in the UK (Gladwin & Goulding, 2012), the selection and development of popular fiction collections in academic and public libraries (Fleet, 2003), fiction provision in public libraries (Spiller, 1980), and the promotion of fiction collections by librarians (Kelly, 2000). Some studies have dealt specifically with the link between fiction readers and public libraries.

As Yu and O'Brian (1996, p. 157) note, “the lack of understanding of fiction readers has hampered the development of fiction services in libraries.” This statement points to the intersection between stakeholders and readers which the current study attempts to address. In 2005, Moyer reviewed the literature on readers’ advisory services, adult fiction librarianship, and

fiction readers from 1995 to 2003. Her review included more than 180 books, articles, and theses, nearly half of which were published in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. The parts of her review which are of most interest for the current study are those dealing with user studies of adult fiction readers and readers' advisory services. Throughout the review, Moyer explains how research on readers can inform the practices of readers' advisors. In the same vein, Maker (2008) presents a reader-centred approach for classifying adult fiction in public libraries. He criticises the genre-based approach and suggests that libraries are better off classifying adult fiction based on the potential readers of a certain book, not the genre(s) to which it belongs. In this customer-driven approach, "the first consideration is the end user", in this case the library patron.

The bulk of available literature has focused on the treatment of larger categories of books, such as fiction and nonfiction, at public libraries. However, a few studies have adopted a translation-focused approach. Two major studies investigating the status of translated fiction in public libraries were conducted in Canada in 2010 and 2014. Dali (2010) focuses on the place of translated fiction in readers' advisory services in Canada and provides practical suggestions for elevating the status of translated books. She discusses the ways in which readers' advisors can recommend translated books to readers, and herself advocates for the "good for you" versus the "great reads" approach. Dali poses three questions regarding the perceived responsibility of readers' advisors towards translated fiction:

1. Should readers' advisors do anything to improve the situation of translated fiction?
2. How should they promote translated fiction?
3. Are they sufficiently informed and prepared to promote translated fiction and how can they be helped in this regard?

Dali and Alsabbagh (2014) investigated the quality of access to translated fiction books in six large public libraries in Canada, "located in the cities with the highest concentration of ethnically diverse population, as defined by the number of immigrants" (p. 570). The authors emphasise that their focus is on intellectual rather than physical access to translated fiction at the selected libraries. They also acknowledge that libraries cannot do much to influence the dynamics of the publishing industry and the book market, but they can mitigate what Post (2011, p. 91) called the 'one country, one author' problem: "People found out about Jose Saramago, fell in love with *Blindness*, and didn't bother reading other Portuguese writers because they had already read the best. And Garcia Marquez equals Colombia. Tolstoy was Russia." After detailed analyses of the bibliographic information for translated titles, Dali and Alsabbagh (2014) discuss the selected libraries' promotional activities for translated books. They specifically looked for "recommended lists/guides

and library programs by closely examining the respective website sections” (p. 591). Four libraries did not have any relevant guides on their websites, while the remaining two had “a list of award winners for international literature ...; a recommended list of international authors ...; and specially compiled lists of East European, Nordic and translated fiction.”

While Dali and Alsabbagh have analysed the treatment of translated fiction at public libraries, others (e.g. Martin et al., 2012; Garrison et al., 2014; Lyons & Parrott, 2015) have focused on the potential role of translated literature in enriching the literary education of children and young adults. Garrison et al. (2014), for instance, attempted to introduce more international fiction titles to school libraries. The premise of their study was that school libraries will be able to develop global citizenship among their students by providing better access to international literature. The trio categorised the winners and honoured titles at the Mildred L. Batchelder Award<sup>20</sup> based on the criteria outlined in the United Nations *Declaration of the Rights of the Child (DRC)*. They then assigned one criterion to each title, making it easier for school librarians to choose the titles according to the teachers’ needs. In their conclusion, Garrison et al. (2014, p. 88) state that “the Mildred L. Batchelder Award titles represent a quality option for getting global literature into library collections and [in] the hands of teachers and students.” Garrison et al. (2014) are not the only ones who believe in the importance of Batchelder Books. Lyons and Parrott (2015), for example, recommend curricular practices for incorporating the Batchelder award titles into the classroom. They argue that in addition to assisting children “in strengthening reading fluency and language arts skills”,

The titles serve to nurture the value of international understanding and respect amongst peoples of the world, develop humane and supportive world citizens, and confirm humanity’s universal experiences, overshadowing differences and conflicts (p. 30).

Although Garrison et al. (2014) and Lyons and Parrott (2015) focus on the benefits of incorporating more translated literature into school libraries, a strong case can also be made for the heightened representation of translated literature in public libraries, bookstores, and literary festivals, for precisely the same reasons. Mapping the status quo with regards to the selection, promotion, and reception of translated literature, especially in an understudied context like New Zealand, is a significant first step towards the ideal described by Lyons and Parrott (2015). The present study set out to do this with a focus on readers and stakeholders in Wellington.

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<sup>20</sup> “The Batchelder award honours an American publisher...who has published an English translation originally published outside of the United States in another language” (The Association of Library Services to Children, 1987).

In the methodology chapter, I will outline the study design and procedures for data collection and analysis, as well as the logistical challenges of implementation.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine the selection, promotion, and reception of translated fiction in Wellington, New Zealand. In the following sections, I will outline the philosophical worldview and theoretical framework of the study, the recruited samples of respondents, the instruments for data collection, and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

#### **3.1 Philosophical Worldview: Pragmatism**

As a research paradigm, pragmatism is based on the idea that researchers should be eclectic in their choice of philosophical and/or methodological approach and, in line with that, select the most appropriate methods for answering the outlined research questions (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). For the present study, I adopted a pragmatic viewpoint, which is reflected in my decision to conduct a mixed methods study. Mixed-methods research is where quantitative and qualitative approaches and techniques are combined in a single study (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Here this has taken the form of an online survey and a series of semi-structured interviews, resulting in a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The mixed-methods nature of the research is also reflected in the methods of data analysis, where descriptive and inferential statistics are used alongside axial coding and thematic analysis. However, this study as a whole is inclined towards a qualitative analysis which will provide more weight to the main insights.

#### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study sits within the descriptive paradigm in translation studies. Descriptive translation studies (DTS) was proposed by Toury (1995) as an alternative to the linguistic prescriptivism that dominated the field for so long. DTS sparked the interest of translation researchers worldwide, some of whom conducted unprecedented experimental research that contributed to a greater understanding of the translation process and the reception of translated products (see section 2.5 for more details). The present study contributes to DTS by describing the activities of a selected group of stakeholders in Wellington for selecting and promoting translated fiction and outlining the perceptions of translated fiction among a group of Wellington readers. Given the scarcity of translation research in New Zealand, conducting descriptive studies seems to be the most effective way to map the field in the country.

#### **3.3 Survey Sample: adult Readers in Wellington**

The population pertaining to the first research question, which set out to explore the perceptions of translated fiction among adult readers in Wellington, consists of adult readers (18 years of age

or older) in Wellington City. According to the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings (Table 1), a little over 150,000 adults lived in Wellington City in 2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). Wellington City is only one part of the Wellington metropolitan area. According to the 2018 census, around 400,000 adults resided in the metropolitan area, which includes the Hutt Valley and Porirua.

**Table 1.** Adult age groups in Wellington City based on the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings (2018)

Age group	N
18-24	26858
25-34	31911
35-44	29040
45-54	26601
55-64	18330
65 years or over	18225
<b>Total</b>	<b>150965</b>

The report on Book Reading in New Zealand (2018) presents many insights into the reading habits of New Zealanders, without providing any city-specific information. As surveying the whole population of regular readers of fiction in Wellington would have been a mammoth task beyond the scope of a single PhD thesis, I used the criterion sampling technique (Palinkas et al., 2015), a type of purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). In purposive sampling, the researcher sets out some characteristics for the population of interest and then looks for individuals who have those characteristics (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

I set out three inclusion criteria for the sample of readers: potential respondents had to be 18 years of age or older, reside in Wellington, and consider themselves regular readers of fiction in English. To objectify the third criterion, the potential respondents were asked to confirm that they read at least two fiction books in English a year. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling method; therefore, it results in a nonprobable sample. Unlike probability sampling, where “each element in the population has a known nonzero chance of being selected through the use of a random selection procedure” (Battaglia, 2008, p. 2), nonprobability sampling involves recruitment of members with certain characteristics. This means that some members of the population are more likely than others to be included in the sample. In the current study, members of book clubs in Wellington and followers of Unity Books’ social media account were more likely

to be exposed to the survey link and participate in the study. Although these people seem likely to provide a largely representative cross-section of the broader category of Wellington readers, it is impossible to measure this overlap and any discrepancies using the available data. What is certain, however, is that the respondents were volunteers with a pre-existing interest in literary topics. Most of them were subscribed to the newsletter and social media accounts of Unity Books, and some were members of book clubs in Wellington. Therefore, the survey findings cannot be presented as a comprehensive account of Wellington readers' perceptions of translated fiction. However, the findings do provide insights into these perceptions among the previously mentioned group of readers.

Battaglia (2008) mentions three reasons why some researchers choose nonprobability (non-random) sampling over probability (random) sampling, the most common being that it is less costly and more time efficient. Having to deal with an ill-defined population and lack of interest in drawing inferences from the sample to the population are other potential reasons for choosing a non-random sample. As far as the current study is concerned, a loosely defined population and limited resources were the main factors driving my decision to recruit a non-random sample. Also, since this was the first study of Wellington readers' perceptions of translated fiction, discovering shared perceptions had priority over generalising the results to the whole population of readers in Wellington.

By the end of data collection in March 2019, 277 adult readers in Wellington had voluntarily taken part in the study by completing the online survey specifically designed for this purpose. The data collection procedure and the structure of the survey will be discussed later in the chapter. Had this been a random sample of respondents, it would have been representative of the target population with a 90 percent confidence level and a five percent margin of error. The current sample is non-random and therefore any generalisation to the population requires reasonable caution. Nonetheless, data collected from a non-random sample of 277 readers in Wellington provide an unprecedented account of translated fiction reading in New Zealand, one that can become the stepping stone for future studies of translation reception in the country and elsewhere. Moreover, the representativeness of the sample in terms of several demographic features adds to the validity of the findings.

### **3.4 Interview Sample: representatives From Book-related Stakeholders**

The second part of the study comprised semi-structured interviews with representatives from selected stakeholders in Wellington's book sector about the policies and practices of their respective organisations for selecting and promoting translated fiction. These representatives were



selected because of their expertise on the literary landscape in Wellington. Expert interviews are ideal for situations where insider knowledge is required, and the researcher is looking for facts rather than opinions. Expert sampling procedure, a sub-set of purposive sampling, was used to select the key informants. According to Patton (2018), “expert sampling to interview key informants can be part of research and evaluation on any specialised issue that requires in-depth knowledge of what goes on in a place and how things work.” Tremblay (1957) outlines the following five characteristics for ideal key informants:

1. **Role in community:** Their formal role should enable them to provide the kind of information sought by the researcher.
2. **Knowledge:** They should have absorbed the information meaningfully and to a high level.
3. **Willingness:** They should be willing to pass on their information to the researcher.
4. **Communicability:** They should have the necessary skills to communicate their knowledge in a comprehensible manner.
5. **Impartiality:** They should be unprejudiced and objective.

Patton (2018) similarly asserts that expert sampling should ideally result in the selection of respondents who are distinctively knowledgeable about a certain topic and are willing and able to share their knowledge. However, as Marshall (1996) notes, only the informant’s role in the community can be determined with certainty in advance. Someone with a major role in the community may not be willing or able to communicate their knowledge in a clear manner. Even if a key informant fulfils the first four criteria mentioned above, they may be biased when talking about the organisation they represent. I witnessed instances of most of these issues during my semi-structured interviews with the key informants. The most common issues during the interviews were lack of impartiality and insufficient knowledge of the topic under discussion. The former showed itself in subjective appraisals of the respective organisation, while the latter resulted from a discrepancy between the person’s role and their depth of knowledge about the topic. Still, none of these issues were so serious as to lead to the disqualification of an interview.

With due consideration of these criteria and an acknowledgement of the limitations associated with any possible selection of key informants, my supervisors and I agreed on three establishments as the main gatekeepers of Wellington’s book sector, namely Writers Week, Unity Books, and WCL. More specifically, I interviewed two representatives from Writers Week, two from Unity Books, and three from WCL. The first interview of the series took place in February 2019 at the former Central Library in Wellington with two WCL librarians, Deborah Olson and Neil Johnson (Olson & Johnson, Feb 2019). Since both interviewees responded to most questions,

this interview lasted for about two hours. I interviewed a third librarian, Cathy Underwood, in May 2020 at a central city café in Wellington (Underwood, May 2020). I conducted the first Writers Week interview with Chris Price in February 2019 in her office at Victoria University of Wellington's International Institute of Modern Letters (Price, Feb 2019), followed by the second one with Claire Mabey in January 2020 (Mabey, Jan 2020). Both sessions lasted about one and a half hours. Finally, the first interview session with Tilly Lloyd and Marcus Greville of Unity Books took place in the Wellington store in June 2018 (Lloyd & Greville, Jun 2018), followed by a complementary interview with Lloyd in November 2020 (Lloyd, Nov 2020). All the interviewees were sent an information sheet prior to the meeting which outlined the objectives of the study and their rights as study participants. They were asked to express their consent to take part in the study either by return email or in-person on the day of the interview.

Selecting key organisations was always going to be a subjective endeavour, but a necessary one to make the research feasible. What is shared among the three selected entities is the perceived impact that they have on the book-buying and book-reading habits of Wellington readers through their selection and promotion decisions. Collectively, Writers Week, Unity Books, and WCL perform almost all the cultural mediation practices outlined by Janssen and Verboord (2015): selecting from the supply (gatekeeping); co-creating/editing; connecting/networking; selling/marketing; distributing; evaluating, classifying, and meaning making; censoring, protecting and supporting. Each of the entities may perform a variety of these practices, but they have different focuses.

Due to the different mechanisms by which book-related institutions select and promote translated fiction, the questions put to experts from the three selected organisations differed in terms of wording and conceptual premises, but they had a common focus on these organisations' approach to selecting and promoting translated fiction. In other words, the interview protocol was tailored to fit the operational structure of each of the organisations, but the data were collectively used to answer the second research question: *what are the policies and practices of Wellington City Libraries, New Zealand Festival's Writers Week, and Unity Books for selecting and promoting translated fiction?* Before discussing the relevant features of each of the selected organisations which made them suitable as case studies, I will provide some background information relating to their major mediation practices.

WCL is mostly involved in selecting from the available supply of books as well as classifying those books both physically and online. Another relevant practice at WCL is their physical displays and online blogs, both falling into the category of 'promotional activities'. Writers Week, on the other hand, connects writers to readers and offers an evaluation of the works of writers through its selection of guests. The selection and promotion stages almost merge in the

case of Writers Week. Inviting an author to one of the most longstanding literary festivals in the southern hemisphere is a nod of approval to their work, which will generally lead to sales growth. Writers Week often creates a reading list based on the works of the invited authors, which is shared with patrons through online newsletters or printed brochures available at local libraries and bookstores. Add to this the publicity that the participating authors receive in the form of posters, brochures, and interviews, among others. Chosen as the representative of the bookselling community in this study, Unity Books is interesting because it is actively engaged in almost all the mediation practices outlined by Janssen and Verboord (2015). Apart from performing the normal activities of a bookseller including selling/marketing, distributing, gatekeeping, and classifying books, Unity Books plays an active part in evaluating, meaning making, and creating paratexts for books. For instance, manager Tilly Lloyd and some of the staff at Unity Books appear regularly as guests on Radio New Zealand's Nine to Noon programme, reviewing recently published books available in New Zealand bookstores. These reviews seem to have a notable impact on the types of books readers ask for at local libraries and bookstores, as reflected in the survey responses and the data from semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. I will try to unravel some of these connections throughout the sixth and seventh chapters.

What follows is an extended introduction to each of the three organisations and a more detailed discussion of why they were selected.

### **3.5 Wellington City Libraries**

At the time of writing this chapter in early 2020, Wellington City Council owned and managed 14 branch libraries<sup>21</sup>, collectively known as Wellington City Libraries. Based on my search on the Library's online catalogue in December 2021, over 70 thousand books were available across all branches of WCL. Before its closure in early 2019, Wellington Central Library was the largest branch, attracting over 3000 visitors each day. The closure of the Central Library due to the building's structural vulnerabilities was lamented by Wellingtonians of all ages and backgrounds. I started working at WCL as a customer service representative in late 2019, and I lost count of the number of times I was asked about the possible reopening of the Central Library. Of course, not all visitors to a modern-day library are after a book to read. In an article for *The Spinoff* following the closure of the Central Library, Wilder (2019) describes the variety of activities which took place in that space:

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<sup>21</sup> Before the closure of the Central Library in early 2019 due to earthquake safety concerns, Wellington City Council owned 12 branch libraries. Since the closure of the Central Library, three pop-up libraries have been opened in Wellington Central.

The desks that lined the enormous stretch of windows along the length of the back wall of the library would be filled with students, studying or being tutored. There would be people reading the paper, senior citizens on their way from the drop-in centre, businesspeople returning books on a quick break from work, people heading to the Citizen's Advice Bureau, and Clarks Cafe upstairs, feeding and caffeinating the hordes.

The close connection of New Zealanders to public libraries may be better understood by looking at some relevant figures. Data from several sources suggest that despite the significant increase in the internet penetration rate in New Zealand, which sat at 89 percent in 2018 (Hughes, 2019), public libraries have retained their position as the main points of reference for readers. According to the Book Council's 2018 Reading Report, 54 percent of adult New Zealanders will visit a public library if they want a fiction book to read. Only 27 percent of the books read by New Zealanders in the preceding year were bought or downloaded online, while 29 percent were borrowed from public libraries and 20 percent bought from brick-and-mortar bookstores. The remaining 23 percent were either borrowed from a friend or family member or were re-readings of books the participants already owned (New Zealand Book Council, 2018). This data highlights the fact that the selection and promotion of books by libraries and bookstores can have a significant influence on readers' choices of books. In one of the interviews for this study, Underwood, an experienced librarian, mentioned another dimension of the work of WCL which adds to the importance of its selection and promotion decisions: *"Another thing we do in fiction is giving book clubs a hand collating their material."* It is safe to say that the City Libraries network is the most powerful literary tastemaker in Wellington. This level of popularity comes with a responsibility to cater to vastly different reading interests. As stated in the City Libraries' Collection Policy (2016, p. 1),

Wellington enjoys a rich cultural and social diversity, and the library's ongoing goal is to remain responsive to all areas of our communities. The focus is expressed in the Mission Statement 'to connect our communities to knowledge, wonder and possibilities'.

Connecting citizens to "knowledge, wonder, and possibilities" can take different forms. In recent years, for example, WCL has significantly improved its online services, providing patrons with free access to several video-streaming applications as well as a wide range of eBooks and audiobooks. However, the aspect that I was most interested in was the library's treatment of translated literature. In my interviews with three fiction collection specialists at WCL, I sought to find out how the collection development team approaches literature in translation and what factors underlie their decisions for selecting and promoting translated fiction. The initial response from

my contacts at the library was that translated fiction is just another category of books, and that the selection team does not follow any specific set of policies or practices for selecting and promoting translated books. The semi-structured interviews, however, yielded some findings which at times challenged the prevailing view, if not contradicting it. In addition to conducting three interviews with library staff, I investigated some of the recent physical and online showcases around WCL network which aimed to promote translated fiction.

Although libraries cannot change the dynamics of the publishing industry or the book sector's approach to translated literature, "they can invest in ensuring the best access to and promotion of translated fiction" (Dali & Alsabbagh, 2014, p. 570). Moreover, libraries' approach to collecting and ordering foreign literature can contribute to the way world literature takes shape, as Schwartz (2019) has shown in a comparative study of two multilingual libraries in Stockholm, Sweden. This makes the decisions of individual libraries in terms of collecting and promoting translated literature even more important in the long term. In the following excerpt, Mani (2013, p. 243) beautifully captures the essential role of libraries in providing access to world literature, a term which is not synonymous with translated literature, but is often used interchangeably with it:

If "books", considered simply a publication medium for human creativity and intellect, have served as manifestations of the zeitgeist, libraries have served as manifestations of the *Weltbild*, the image of the world, cumulatively formed through the collection of individual books that serve as forming units.

### 3.6 Writers Week

Writers and Readers Week, later shortened to Writers Week, has been part of the biennial New Zealand Festival since its first edition in 1986.<sup>22</sup> During the week-long event, writers from New Zealand and abroad talk about a range of topics related to fiction, nonfiction, and poetry in separate chaired sessions. Although the format of Writers Week has evolved over the years, the sessions often take the form of question and answer between the invited guest and a session convenor, followed by brief questions from the audience. What makes Writers Week an interesting subject of study for the current thesis is the attendance of international writers, some of whom have been introduced to New Zealand readers through translation. In this sense, Writers Week can be considered as one of the major tastemakers of the book market in Wellington, possibly

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<sup>22</sup> New Zealand Festival has undergone several name changes throughout the years. From 1986 to 1998, it was known as the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts. The 2000 and 2002 festivals were branded the New Zealand Festival, but it bounced back to the New Zealand International Arts Festival from 2004 to 2012. The last four editions (2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020) have again been branded the New Zealand Festival.

contributing to shaping reader attitudes towards different types of books. The type and extent of this influence could only be determined through longitudinal studies of reader attitudes and preferences, so these questions fall outside the scope of the present thesis.

In the earlier editions of Writers Week, international guest writers had often outnumbered New Zealanders. The 1994 edition, for example, featured only six writers from New Zealand, while the UK alone had seven representatives. The same pattern, with slight variations, continued up to the early 2000s, when it began shifting gradually. This shift has led to a much higher proportion of New Zealand writers. The reasons for this shift and the procedures in place for selecting international guest writers were the focus of my interviews with the past and current coordinators of Writers Week.

### **3.7 Unity Books**

Established in 1967, Unity Books is an award-winning independent bookstore which relies on its “fabulously ‘forward’ selection of books” (*About Us*, Unity Books Website<sup>23</sup>). It has two operating branches in New Zealand, one in Wellington and another in Auckland. In early 2020, Unity Books Auckland won the Bookstore of the Year award at the London Book Fair. Unity Books Wellington is located at the heart of Wellington Central and it is almost always filled with visitors. It is closely connected to the wider literary scene in the capital and contributes to the literary community by organising events such as book launches and author talks. It has established a close connection to WCL over the years, supplying them with newly published New Zealand titles and, at times, international bestsellers. Unity has also been an official partner of Writers Week since the first edition of the New Zealand Festival, which means that it manages book sales after author talks as well as during the festival.

Apart from its role as the official bookseller of the festival, Unity Books had a representative on the selection committee of Writers Week in several editions of the early 2000s. In an interview for this study, former coordinator of Writers Week Chris Price commented on Unity’s contribution to the process of selecting the authors to be invited:

*The bookseller, which was by that stage Unity Books, would come along right from the beginning and feed in their knowledge about who was interesting out there in the world and who their customers were asking them for.*

This role alongside the previously mentioned connections to the wider literary scene in Wellington qualify Unity Books as a cultural mediator and literary tastemaker. In almost all my interviews

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<sup>23</sup> <http://unitybooks.nz/about/>

with staff members at Writers Week and WCL, Unity Books was mentioned as an influential institution in Wellington's literary landscape. This level of popularity implies that the approach taken by Unity Books toward literature in translation can have an impact on Wellington readers' perceptions of translated literature.

It is important to note that Unity Books has several competitors in Wellington, unlike Writers Week and WCL, which are unique entities in Wellington's literary scene. For this study I was faced with a choice: either considering the policies and practices of several Wellington bookstores or delving deep into the practices of the one perceived as having the most influence on readers' choices. I chose the latter, but many respondents to the survey for this study mentioned different bookstores as their favourites, including Whitcoulls and Vic Books, or second-hand bookstores like Pegasus Books, The Ferret Bookshop, and Arty Bees Books. For the purpose of this study, second-hand bookstores were not an option. Although even second-hand bookstores apply a certain level of discretion in choosing which books to buy, their selection and promotion practices largely reflect the types of material they receive from individual sellers rather than the owners' approach toward translated or untranslated fiction. While they feature in this study only marginally, I do acknowledge the part that all these bookstores play in shaping Wellingtonians' reading tastes. In chapter six, which focuses on Unity Books, I have reported my findings from a brief analysis of some of Whitcoulls Wellington's promotional practices to provide a comparative perspective. The selection and promotion practices of other bookstores in the capital could be evaluated in future research.

### **3.8 Instruments of Data Collection**

I used two distinct methods to collect the data required for addressing the research questions. The first was an online survey of Wellington readers' perceptions of translated fiction and the second was a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants in Wellington's book sector. I will start with a discussion of the rationale for using the survey method and the process of survey data collection, followed by the same discussion for the key informant interviews.

#### **3.8.1 Self-administered Online Survey**

Studying the translation landscape in an English-speaking country, especially a small one like New Zealand, is challenging. This is mainly because awareness of translation and translated literature in English-speaking countries is lower than in countries where translation is a more established practice among the reading public and stakeholders. For example, the study by Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020) responds to massive demand for and discourse around translated books in Iran. Most participants in that study read more translated books than books written in

Persian. For that reason, the researchers were able to ask readers detailed questions about which textual and extratextual features they expect to encounter in fiction books translated into Persian, which the authors call ‘fiction translation expectancy norms’. By contrast, reading translated fiction is, broadly speaking, a ‘niche’ cultural activity in English-speaking countries (Tekgül, 2019).

Aware of the challenges ahead, I decided to use the survey method to collect the data required for addressing the first research question, that is to investigate the perceptions of translated fiction among adult readers in Wellington. Since hardly any data existed on this topic, I had to generate my own. To that end, I set out to collect data from a sample of adult Wellington readers. Administering an online questionnaire was the most accessible means for reaching this goal. Focus group interviews or even one-to-one interviews with a few avid readers could have been used for answering the same question, but those methods are most useful when based on existing primary data. They are best used as follow-up methods to complement survey data or perhaps help disambiguate/expand on survey findings. Moreover, since little is known about the actual, rather than perceived, attitudes of New Zealand readers towards translated literature, purely qualitative methods of data collection would not have provided the breadth of data required for addressing my research questions.

Initially, I planned to reuse some of the items of Khoshsaligheh, Kafi, and Ameri’s (2020) fiction expectation questionnaire in my survey. However, preliminary talks with stakeholders in Wellington’s book sector led me to take a step back and build the research questions around readers’ *perceptions* of literature in translation. The same stance was taken by Campbell (2015) in her study of UK readers’ attitude to translated books. While the detailed questions asked in the Iranian context assumed a relatively high level of engagement with and knowledge about translated literature among the participants, the questions in the current survey were designed for regular readers of fiction in English, regardless of how often they read literature in translation or how engaged they are with discussions about translated literature.

The questionnaire designed for this study was used to conduct the first-ever survey of Wellington readers’ perceptions of translated fiction. It is broadly modelled on Campbell’s Books and Translation Survey in the UK. Investigating British book group members’ attitudes towards translation, Campbell (2015) designed and tested a survey consisting of 26 questions. While a handful of the questions in Campbell’s questionnaire could be re-used without any changes, the majority had to be reworded or reworked. Moreover, certain questions were omitted, because they lie outside the scope of this study. For instance, Campbell’s questionnaire deals with matters such as book price and characteristics of translators, which are not considered as variables in the present



study. On the other hand, many questions were added to the current survey to reflect the unique objectives of this study, including those which ask about the international engagement of the respondents, their knowledge of foreign languages, and their interest in fiction from particular countries or regions. What follows is a brief discussion of some of the advantages and disadvantages of the survey method as a data collection instrument.

### ***The Pros and Cons of Self-administered Surveys***

Just like any other method of data collection, online surveys have certain intrinsic shortcomings. First and foremost, they often receive lower response rates than traditional survey modes, which could potentially lead to non-response error. This problem has intensified in recent years due to the increased volume of online correspondence people receive every day. As stated by Manfreda et al. (2008, p. 79), “over-surveying internet users may negatively impact on their willingness to participate.” To minimise non-response bias in the current study, I provided an incentive for the respondents in the form of five \$20 book vouchers. It is impossible to gauge the exact impact of this incentive on the respondents’ decision to complete the survey. Nonetheless, 90 percent of respondents responded positively when asked if they wished to provide an email address to enter the draw for a book voucher, which shows that the incentive matched the topic of the survey quite well.

Brown (2017, p. 60) expresses concern about “the problem of survey fatigue, arising from the convenience of online surveying, and the ethical and practical problems of asking audience members repeatedly and endlessly to take surveys.” Although survey fatigue is often used to refer to the phenomenon whereby respondents tire while responding to the survey, Brown has stretched the term to refer to individuals’ frustration at frequently being asked to complete surveys. This limitation was minimised in the survey for the current study, because potential respondents did not receive any email messages asking them to take part in the study. Instead, the link to the survey was promoted on the social media pages of Unity Books and pages belonging to three Wellington book clubs on the Meetup<sup>24</sup> platform. Therefore, respondents were under no pressure to complete the survey and participation was entirely voluntary.

A third problem associated with self-administered online surveys is the respondents’ inability to seek on-the-spot clarification about survey items. Although a pilot study was conducted in order to maximise the clarity of questions, it is impossible to predict and eliminate all potential ambiguities. While this limitation cannot be completely overcome, I tried to mitigate it by including an open-ended question at the end of the survey where participants could comment

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<sup>24</sup> Meetup is a service used to organise online groups that host in-person events for people with similar interests.

on the survey questions and/or the fixed answers provided for closed-ended questions. The most frequent comment was about the need to include more options for questions about favourite bookstores and sources of information about translated books. More specifically, the respondents mentioned the name of some of their favourite Wellington bookstores which had not been given as options in the survey. Also, since I had intentionally included only local sources of information about translated books, many of the respondents stated that their main sources of information about literature in translation are international online platforms, including Goodreads, Amazon, and LibraryThing. Lastly, a few respondents commented on how the demographic questions could have been presented differently, such as including more ethnicity options and adding another category for the education question. I will discuss the survey demographic categorisations later in the thesis.

Finally, some scholars are sceptical about the validity of data collected through online surveys. For instance, Brown (2017) blames online surveys for “a rise in self-selection bias and the abandonment of standards of methodological rigor associated with social science research” (58) and advocates the use of more creative methods in audience research. He also points to the potential of ethnographic research for a longitudinal documentation of audience experiences:

What if we asked whole communities of people to chronicle their arts experiences in an online scrapbook – a place for them to preserve memories of all of their arts experiences, and perhaps even share them with friends...Over time, the scrapbooks would become an invaluable source of data on shifting patterns of arts participation (p. 58).

It remains to be seen what kind of response rate such a study would achieve. Also, the extra commitment required from participants would logically increase the risk of self-selection bias, not reduce it. Notwithstanding their limitations, self-administered online surveys give researchers access to the opinions of a large group of participants in a short time. They are also less costly to administer than pen-and-paper surveys, assuming non-random sampling is employed. Another advantage of self-administered surveys is that participants can complete them at their own leisure, therefore the pressure to respond at short notice is lifted. Previous work in Translation Studies (e.g. Campbell, 2015; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020) has documented the value of survey data for revealing translation readers’ preferences and attitudes.

### ***Pilot Study***

In December 2019, three book club organisers in Wellington responded positively to my request to take part in the pilot stage and provide feedback on the relevance and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items. The most important feedback was that wording of options provided for some multiple-choice questions was not clear enough. Also, the respondents pointed to the redundancy of certain open-ended questions, which might ‘make the survey lengthy’ and could possibly ‘increase dropout rate’. Accordingly, I deleted some of the less relevant items and revised the options for certain multiple-choice questions. One pilot-stage respondent commented on the relationship between travelling and reading choices. She said that her book choices are sometimes influenced by the countries/regions she visits, and this could be true for other readers too. I also became aware of some comments by literary experts regarding the relationship between easier travelling and increased interest in translated fiction, for example by Fiammetta Rocco, the administrator of the Man Booker International prize (Flood, 2016). Therefore, an item was added to reflect this viewpoint. The final version of the questionnaire (Appendix C) consisted of 29 questions, 23 closed-ended and six open-ended, divided into three parts based on their focus of investigation:

- 1- General reading habits
- 2- Perceptions of translated fiction
- 3- International engagement and knowledge of foreign languages

The questions included in the first part of the current survey (e.g. number of books read each year, favourite genres) had also featured in the survey for the New Zealand Book Council’s Reading Reports in 2017 and 2018. The surveys for those reports were completed by over 2000 randomly selected adult New Zealanders, which makes the findings representative of the target population. The aim of including the ‘general reading habits’ questions in the current survey was to reveal similarities and differences between my respondents and those for the Book Council surveys, as well as possible correlations between general reading habits and attitudes to translated fiction. The open-ended questions were intended to allow respondents to elaborate on their responses to closed-ended questions. This process resulted in the generation of both quantitative and qualitative data, which were later analysed using Qualtrics’ quantitative analysis tools and NVivo 12, respectively. The final open-ended question asked the respondents to share their final thoughts on translated books or any related topic. This question attracted many interesting responses, from suggestions on how the survey could be improved to personal reflections on the act of reading.

Several display logics were built into the survey to enhance its user-friendliness. Apart from certain questions which all respondents had to answer, the others were displayed subject to the respondent's answer to the previous question(s). In addition to ensuring the accuracy of input data, these logics are thought to reduce the risk of respondent fatigue, "a well-documented phenomenon that occurs when survey respondents become tired of the survey task and the quality of the data they provide begins to deteriorate" (Ben-Nun, 2008, p. 743). Several other measures were also taken to make the survey as user-friendly as possible. Qualtrics produces an iQ score for each survey, which is an indication of how well it has been structured, both in terms of format and methodology. This score is often accompanied by specific suggestions for improving the survey and increasing the likelihood of survey completion. For the current study, I optimised the survey for both personal computers and mobile devices. Moreover, I tried to make minimum use of text entry boxes and matrix tables, both of which negatively affect the iQ score. Also avoided in the survey design stage were certain question types (e.g. sliders) which could potentially make the survey inaccessible to people with disabilities.

### **3.8.2 Semi-structured Expert Interviews**

Due to the exploratory nature of the second research question, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a group of stakeholders in Wellington's book sector. These included three interviews with collection development staff at WCL, two interviews with Unity Books staff, and two interviews with the past and current coordinators of New Zealand Festival's Writers Week. Semi-structured expert interviews often result in a wealth of data that are best analysed using qualitative methods. This type of interview is suitable for situations where the researcher is looking for in-depth data about a specific topic. According to Fylan (2005), semi-structured interviews are conversations in which the interviewer knows what to look for and probably has a set of questions written down, but the structure of the conversation is flexible and may take various forms for different interviewees. The main themes covered in the interviews with representatives from the three selected organisations were as follows:

- Policies for selecting translated fiction
- People involved in the selection process
- Policies and practices for promoting translated fiction
- Wellington readers' interest in translated fiction

While the topics covered in the interviews were similar for all three organisations, some of the questions were formulated differently to reflect the unique roles of each. Since the interviews were

conducted after the survey data collection, I had the opportunity to use some of the key findings about readers' perceptions of translated fiction for informing the formulation of interview questions. This approach proved particularly useful for my interviews with the Writers Week coordinators, because many survey participants had responded to the open-ended questions about the impact of Writers Week on their reading habits. Apart from using survey findings to hone the interview questions, I used the first interview with each organisation as a starting point for conducting subsequent interviews. While some details about practices for selecting and promoting translated fiction were provided during the first interview with each organisation, certain questions remained unanswered and in need of further clarification, and this was reflected in the formation of the questions for subsequent interviews.

### 3.9 Survey Data Collection

After applying the changes proposed by the pilot participants, I published the questionnaire on 23 January 2019 using Qualtrics. Before disseminating the questionnaire, I created an online form through JotForm to receive emails from respondents who wished to enter the draw for five \$20 book vouchers. My reason for creating the form using JotForm instead of Qualtrics was to receive the identifiable information separately, which means no link could be drawn between an email address and a submitted response. This was in line with the ethical requirement to deidentify the responses. After completing the survey, the respondents were redirected to a separate URL where they could enter their email address. The survey data collection officially started on 30 January 2019, when I sent an open link to the questionnaire to the organisers of ten active book clubs in Wellington (see Table 2 for a list of these book clubs) and asked if they would agree to disseminate the survey link to their members. The link was accompanied by an information sheet for survey respondents (Appendix D) outlining the objectives of the study, the data collection process, and the ethics approval letter by Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (Application number 0000026632).

**Table 2.** Book clubs in Wellington (as of January 2019)

Name	No. of Members
The Wellington Girly Book Club	1330
Improbable & Impossible - Sci-Fi & Fantasy	800
Wellington City Book Club	340
Wellington Classic Literature Group	320

Reading Between the Wines (Wellington Casual Book Club)	51
The New Torchlight List Book Club	50
Southern Cross Book Club	Not specified
Wellington Book Club	Not specified
Fiction Book Club	Not specified
City Gallery Book Club	Not specified

Only three out of the ten organisers agreed to this request: Wellington Girly Book Club, The New Torchlight List Book Club, and Wellington City Book Club. The remaining book clubs did not respond to this email, which may indicate the inactivity of that club or their lack of interest in being involved in the research. Following this round of data collection, I received 30 complete responses only, which was below my initial expectation of about 60.

One possible reason for this low response rate among book club members is the discrepancy between number of members and people who actively participate in a book club's events and activities. This is not peculiar to book clubs; I have seen the same trend in other types of clubs on the Meetup platform. Those who attend club meetings are often a tiny proportion of the total members. The next step was to ask Tilly Lloyd, the manager of Unity Books at the time to share the survey link on the store's social media pages. Lloyd accepted this request. The shared link reached an audience of approximately 1200 readers across all platforms, 247 of whom completed the questionnaire. Of these, 38 participants were also a member of a book club in Wellington, adding to the initial 30 book club members who participated in the first round of data collection (N=68). Of all respondents who reported membership of a book club, 38 said their club has no official name. The remaining 30 respondents were members of the following book clubs: Wellington Girly Book Club (n=14), Wellington City Book Club (n=9), The New Torchlight List Book Club (n=3), Wellington's Classic Literature Group (n=2), and Northern Lights Book Group (n=2). Overall, 277 complete responses were submitted by the end of March 2019, which was designated as the expiry date of the survey link, comprising almost 0.2 percent of Wellington City's adult population of 150,000 in 2018.

### 3.10 Interview Data Collection

My initial plan was to interview two representatives from each organisation, on the assumption that two interviews would provide enough data to describe their procedures for selecting and promoting translated fiction. This approach, however, would have overlooked the size of the organisations, the scale of their activities, and the amount of information the interviewees could

share with a third party. Therefore, I decided to treat each organisation separately in terms of the number of interviews and to continue data collection until data saturation was reached, that is, until no new information or new perspectives were being offered by the interviewees. Two interviews proved enough to gain a reasonably comprehensive understanding of the selection and promotion of translated fiction by Unity Books and Writers Week, while WCL warranted a third interview due to the versatile nature of their work and the high degree of impact that the library has on patrons' reading habits through its selection and promotion of books.

In their critique of two qualitative studies with regards to data saturation, Fusch and Ness (2015) mention three conditions for the fulfilment of this criterion, namely when there is enough information to replicate the study, when no additional new information can be attained, and when it is no longer feasible to continue coding. Romney et al. (1986) claim that if the interviewees possess an acceptable degree of knowledge and expertise in the specific domain, sample sizes as small as four can provide almost complete information in a specific cultural context. Also, Guest et al. (2006) maintain that data saturation may be attained by conducting as few as six interviews. Coming to a decision about the achievement of data saturation involves a certain level of subjectivity from the researcher or research team. The resources available to the researcher are another important consideration.

The first organisation selected for the expert interview phase of the study was WCL. To get access to the key informants at WCL, I sent a message outlining this study to the official email address of the library, asking the recipient to put me in contact with the person(s) responsible for collection development and/or readers' advisory. I was first told that the library does not hold separate records for translated books and they were therefore unable to contribute to the project. However, after making some connections at the library and talking in more detail about the project to a few library staff, I managed to convince them that the library has an undeniable role in shaping readers' perceptions about different types of books and that their contribution would be of great importance to this research project. I was then put in touch with Deborah Olson, fiction selector, and Neil Johnson, fiction customer specialist, at WCL. It is important to note that all the potential interviewees in this study received an information sheet (Appendix E) prior to the interview session, which outlined the objectives of the study and their rights as respondents. The date and time of the interviews were planned only after I had received verbal or written consent from the interviewees.

After receiving consent from Olson and Johnson, a date was fixed for the interview and the session itself lasted about two hours. I was supposed to interview Olson, but she came to the meeting alongside Neil Johnson, one of the fiction specialists at WCL. This turned out to be a

useful arrangement, because the two complemented (and sometimes even completed) each other's responses. This session took longer than all the other expert interviews conducted for this study, because both interviewees contributed according to their area of expertise. The interviewees talked about different aspects of the selection and promotion of translated fiction at WCL. As mentioned earlier, I decided to interview a third fiction team member at WCL, because some of my questions required further clarification and data saturation had not been reached after the first two interviews.

The second institution that I approached to ask for expert participation was New Zealand Festival's Writers Week. Due to the organisational structure of the New Zealand Festival, my first point of contact was Suzy Cain, Team Experience and Executive Coordinator at Tāwhiri Festivals and Experiences. Cain put me in touch with one of the longest-standing former coordinators of Writers Week, Chris Price, as well as the coordinator of the 2020 Writers Week, Claire Mabey. In February 2019, I interviewed Price, who had coordinated Writers Week from 1992 to 2004. The main topics covered during that interview were procedures for choosing authors to invite to Writers Week, the people involved in the decision-making process, the countries and regions that were under or overrepresented at Writers Week, and the popularity of international authors among the New Zealand audience. Because of her long-term involvement with Writers Week, Price talked at length about the people and organisations who had a certain degree of influence over the decisions of the selection committee to invite international authors, as well as the evolution of the New Zealand Festival from the 1990s to the early 2000s.

In January 2020, I interviewed Mabey in her capacity as the coordinator of the 2020 Writers Week. Mabey is credited with co-founding LitCrawl Wellington in 2014 and coordinating the Verb Festival in 2020. Therefore, she could offer a unique viewpoint on the differences among Writers Week and these emerging literary events in terms of international and local focus, among others. While the first interview with Price mainly focused on the conditions of the earlier versions of Writers Week, the second interview with Mabey had a stronger focus on the Week as it exists today and its evolution in recent years. The second interview also helped clarify and further elaborate on some of the points raised in the first one.

Finally, I approached Unity Books to ask for expert interviews about the selection and promotion of translated fiction. I spoke directly to Tilly Lloyd. She agreed to "have a chat with me" in 2018 alongside Marcus Greville, a senior staff member. I also interviewed Lloyd in 2020 just before she stepped down as Unity Books' manager. Combined, these two conversations amounted to one full-length interview. For reasons unknown to me, appointments with another staff member in 2020 were repeatedly cancelled and rescheduled. Following the third cancellation message, I decided to disregard that interview and make do with the ones already conducted. In



my semi-structured interviews with Lloyd and Greville, I focused on the procedures and policies for selecting and promoting translated fiction at Unity Books. I also included a few questions about the possible link between independent bookselling and approaches towards translated fiction.

All the interview sessions were audio-recorded with the interviewees' consent. Afterwards I manually transcribed the audio recordings. While NVivo can be used to facilitate transcription, I chose manual transcription as an opportunity to further familiarise myself with the interview data. I sent the final transcripts to the interviewees and asked them to point out any part they thought was not accurate or needed clarification. Two of the interviewees approved the content straight away, two asked to be sent only the sections to be included in the thesis, and the remaining three did not respond after two reminder messages. As mentioned in the ethics approval, interviewees should be asked to comment on the transcription if they wish to do so, but the transcriptions can be included in the thesis if the interviewees decide not to comment. Only a few minor corrections were suggested by the interviewees, all of which were applied to the transcriptions.

### **3.11 Data Analysis**

The survey used for addressing the first research question consisted of a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. It resulted in both quantitative and qualitative data, which were analysed using the analytical tools available on the Qualtrics platform. A combination of descriptive statistics (i.e. frequency and mean scores) and inferential statistics (i.e. Chi-square test results) were used to analyse responses to the closed-ended questions, while the open-ended responses were thematically analysed and tagged using the 'topic creation' tool on Qualtrics.

The data collected from interviews with stakeholders in Wellington's book sector have been used to address the second research question, that is, to find out about the policies and practices of the selected institutions for selecting and promoting translated fiction. Because of their purely qualitative nature, the interview data were analysed using the thematic analysis tools available on NVivo. NVivo is helpful for identifying keywords and categorising similar lines of thought into themes, nodes, and sub-nodes, but it often fails to account for the more nuanced relationships between ideas. To compensate for this shortcoming, I performed manual coding on the interview data using the reflexive thematic analysis method. According to Braun et al. (2019), reflexive thematic analysis involves six phases, namely *familiarisation with the data*, *coding*, *generating initial themes*, *reviewing the themes*, *defining and naming the themes*, and *writing up*.

Unlike quantitative methods of data analysis, which aim to provide definitive answers to research questions, qualitative data analysis is a continuous process of reflection and revelation,

which is why I kept referring back to the interview data throughout the research process. Qualitative data analysis necessarily involves a certain level of subjectivity, but the simultaneous use of automated and manual coding was aimed to minimise as much as possible. In addition to devoting separate chapters to the presentation and discussion of interview findings (chapters five, six, and seven), I have interspersed excerpts from the interviews in the presentation of survey data in order to support, justify, and/or elaborate on the survey findings. These excerpts will also show the interconnectedness, or otherwise, between the viewpoints of readers and industry experts on literature in translation.

In addition to the survey results and interview transcripts, two other forms of data I used to help address the research questions are outlined in the following sections.

### **3.12 Spatial and Content Analyses of Unity Books' Physical and Online Stores**

As I will discuss in chapter six, my interviews with Unity Books representatives did not lead to data saturation. Therefore, I set out to conduct a spatial analysis of Unity Books store in central Wellington. Since I had paid regular visits to the store between April 2018 and June 2021, I was familiar with the store's layout. The analysis that I present in chapter six is based on my last visit in June 2021 before submitting my thesis. Anecdotal evidence from Unity Books' representatives indicate that a considerable proportion of book sales, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, take place via the online store. To account for this situation, I conducted a microanalysis of Unity's online store with an eye to the differences between the physical and online stores in terms of fiction categorisation, especially as it relates to world literature and New Zealand literature. This microanalysis also touches briefly on the website navigation and how it favours certain fiction categories over others.

### **3.13 A List of the Most Well-received Translated Titles between 2001 and 2018**

In the early stages of the research, I came across several articles that mentioned the most successful translated books in certain years (e.g. Carroll et al., 2019; Heath, 2019). However, I could not find a more comprehensive source that covered a longer period. Also, the available sources mostly relied on the opinions of a single expert or a small group of experts. To prepare for the interviews and to gain a clearer understanding of the types of books that had become popular among English-speaking readers in recent times, I set out to compile a list of the most well-received translated titles (into English) between 2001 and 2018. I compiled this list based on the degree to which a translated novel or short story collection had been received favourably by the professional and nonprofessional anglophone audience. Most of the books included in the list enjoy some balance between critical recognition and commercial success. Ordinary readers' reviews and ratings were

retrieved from several online outlets, including Goodreads and Librarything. To evaluate the critical reception of a translated title, I relied on the reviews published in *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The New York Times*, and *The Millions*. This was, by nature, a subjective endeavour, since no two critics would have the exact same opinion about the merits of any given book, but it was sufficiently robust for my purpose. In addition to book reviews, I looked at the literary awards a translated book had won. These included the awards won by both the original and the English translation.

## 4. Survey Findings

In this chapter, I will present and discuss the results pertaining to the first phase of the study separately. As discussed in chapter three above, the data for the first phase were obtained through a survey of a sample of 277 Wellington readers using a 26-item questionnaire. The questionnaire measures three separate constructs, namely general reading habits, perceptions of translated fiction, and international engagement. It also includes questions that evaluate the sample in terms of seven demographic variables. Demographic data will be presented first to give readers a sense of the make-up of the sample.

### 4.1 The Demographics of Survey Respondents

Demographic categories in the survey included gender, age, ethnicity, highest completed level of education, number of years living in Wellington, mother tongue, and second language(s) (L2). While some scholars have suggested placing demographic questions at the beginning of a questionnaire (e.g. Teclaw et al., 2012), others recommend placing them at the end (e.g. Dobosh, 2018). The most important argument from both sides is that acting in one way or another may increase or decrease the response rate. Considering the peculiar features of our survey and given the relatively sensitive nature of some of the demographic questions, I decided to place them at the end of the questionnaire. My intention was to prevent respondent alienation at the start. The first demographic variable in the survey was gender.

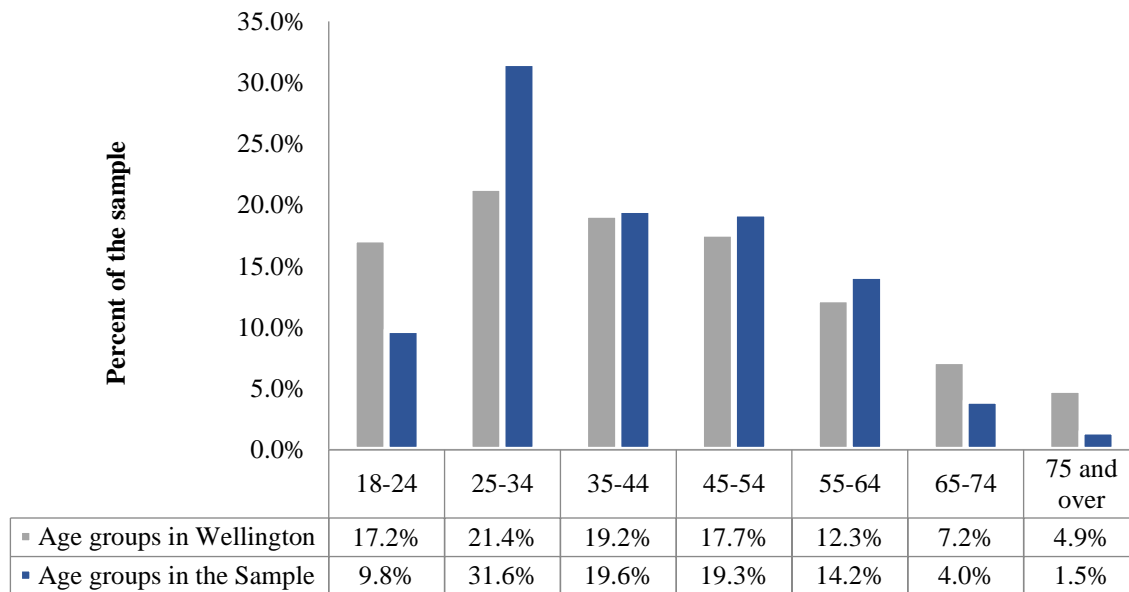
#### *Gender*

Out of the 277 participating readers, 84 percent (n=232) identified as female, 14 percent (n=38) as male, one percent (n=3) as nonbinary, and the remaining one percent (n=3) preferred not to answer. The highly disproportionate representation of male and female readers did not come as a big surprise. Over the years, several articles have mentioned the gender gap in reading. As early as 1929, Gray and Munroe stated that on average, women read more books than men. However general this statement may seem, it was the beginning of a trend followed by many scholars in later years (e.g. Yankelovich & White, 1978; Zill & Winglee, 1990). Tepper (2000) tries to explain the existing gender gap in reading fiction in the US. McEwan (2005) goes a step further and famously claims that “when women stop reading, the novel will be dead.” Not everyone agrees with arguments of this sort. Stuart (1952, p. 40), for instance, claims that “within the class of book-readers a significantly higher percentage of men than of women are reading a book at a given time.” However, a 2012 study of nationwide reading habits commissioned by NZ Book Month revealed that nearly a quarter (23 percent) of New Zealand men had not read any books in the past

year, compared to only eight percent of women (Keogh, 2012). According to the 2018 Book Reading in New Zealand Report, “69% of adults who did not read a book in the past 12 months were male, up from 62% in 2017” (New Zealand Book Council, 2018, p. 9). The gap often widens when it comes to fiction.

## Age

The survey sample largely reflects the age distribution of the Wellington population. (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1.** Comparison of age groups in Wellington and the study sample

The 25-34 age group was the largest group in the sample, with 31.6 percent of respondents falling into this category. This is the largest age group in Wellington City as well. The online administration of the survey may be one reason for this group’s even larger representation in the survey than in the general population. As seen in Figure 1, there seems to be an incongruity between the first two age categories in the sample, that is between the underrepresented 18-24 and overrepresented 25-34 categories. One explanation is that due to the sampling criteria, readers younger than 18 could not take part in the survey. As a result, the 18-24 group covered a six-year period, whereas the other categories each covered at least ten years. After the 25-34 age group, the age groups listed in decreasing order of size were: 35-44 (19.6 percent), 45-54 (19.3 percent), 55-64 (14.2 percent), 18-24 (9.8 percent), 65-74 (four percent), and 75 or over (1.5 percent).

The largely balanced representation of age groups in the sample adds to the validity and generalisability of the findings, especially when compared with similar studies of readers (e.g. Bijani et al., 2014; Campbell, 2015) where certain age groups are more starkly overrepresented. In Campbell’s (2015) study, for example, the average age of the respondents was 53.6 years, much

higher than the average age of the adult population in the UK (40.6 years). The 50-70 age group was significantly overrepresented in her sample. On the other hand, the 20-30 age group was overrepresented in Bijani et al's (2014) study of Iranian readers' translation expectancy norms. This problem has been minimised in the current study, with the sample highly representative of the adult population in Wellington.

### ***Ethnicity***

The next item in the demographic section investigated the ethnic background of the respondents. Asking about ethnicity seems to have never been easy in New Zealand, similar to other settler states like Canada and Australia. This has become more complicated in the last two decades, mainly due to multiple-ethnicity reporting and lack of consistency in how people identify with different ethnicities (Callister, 2004). Reaching a consensus regarding the term to be used for New Zealanders of European descent is the major challenge. "As a statistical term, New Zealand European first appeared in the 1991 census, then as NZ European or Pākehā in the 1996 census, reverting to NZ European in 2001" (Kukutai & Didham, 2009, p. 58).<sup>25</sup> In the most recent iterations of the census (2013 and 2018), "New Zealand European" has reverted to just "European" once again. In the 1986 Census, which directed New Zealanders of European descent to identify simply as "European", less than 1% of the population recorded a New Zealander-type ethnicity (e.g. Pākehā, Kiwi, New Zealander, New Zealand European). In 2006, by which time "European" had been expanded to "New Zealand European", the proportion who listed the alternative term "New Zealander" had jumped to 10.5% (Statistics New Zealand, 2006), "making New Zealander the third most frequent ethnic group response behind New Zealand European and Māori" (Kukutai & Didham, 2009, p. 46). Using data from the previous national censuses, Kukutai and Didham show that national naming in New Zealand was a phenomenon which mainly resonated with New Zealanders of European descent. Curiously, most of those who had previously reported a New Zealander-type ethnicity reverted to choosing European in the 2013 and 2018 censuses.

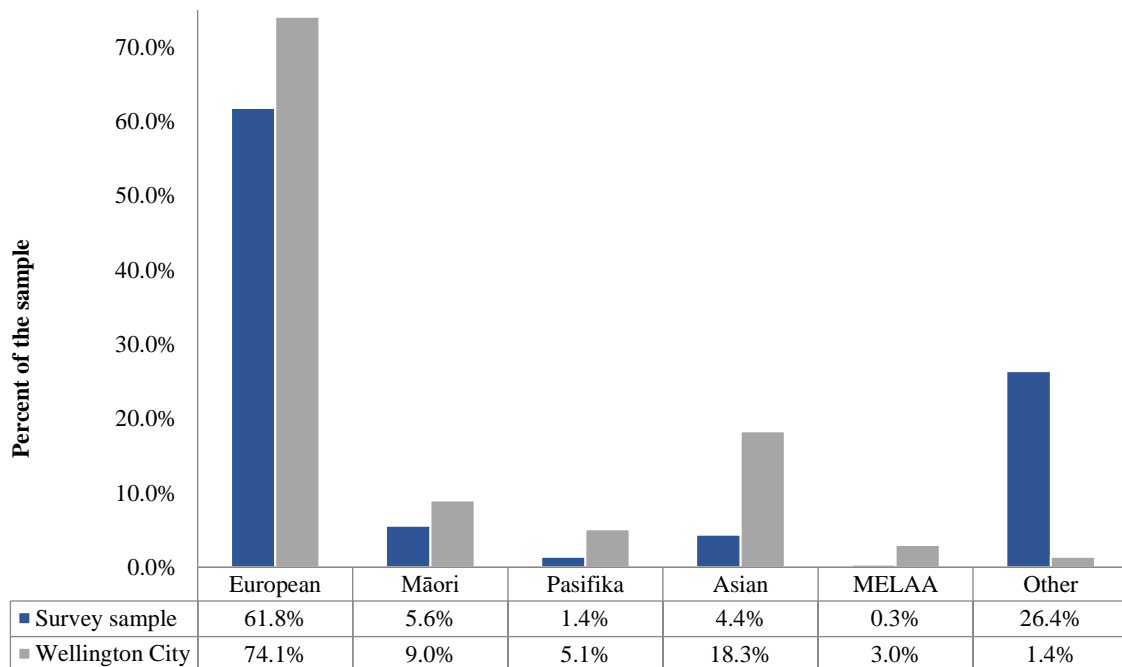
In the current survey, I used the level one ethnicity categories used in the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings (2018): European, Māori, Pasifika, Asian, African, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and an option for other ethnicities.<sup>26</sup> The respondents were asked to select one or more of the categories with which they identified. When selecting 'other', an extra

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<sup>25</sup> Pākehā is the Māori term often used for referring to New Zealanders of European descent. There has been a lot of debate around the use of the term Pākehā and whether or not it has a pejorative connotation. Ranford (2003) discusses the origins of this term, while Sibley et al. (2011) debunk some of the common myths around it by providing a systematic analysis of the social aspects of using the label Pākehā by both Europeans and Māori.

<sup>26</sup> Since only a tiny proportion of New Zealanders identify with the Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African ethnicities, these three groups are collectively designated through the abbreviation MELAA.

space was provided so the respondents could specify the ethnicity they identified with. Figure 2 presents a comparison between the ethnic composition of the current sample and that of Wellington population based on the 2018 national census.



**Figure 2.** Comparison of the study sample and the ethnic composition of Wellington

Overall, 299 responses were received for this question, which shows that some of the respondents reported more than one ethnicity. European was the most commonly selected ethnicity (61.8 percent), followed by Other (26.4 percent), Māori (5.7 percent), Asian (4.4 percent), Pasifika (1.4 percent), and Middle Eastern (0.3 percent). No respondents reported African or Latin American ethnicity. The main difference between the current sample and the Wellington population in terms of ethnicity is the number of respondents who selected the ‘Other’ option (26.4 percent in this sample; 1.4 percent in the census). Of the 79 respondents selecting ‘Other’, 72 responded with different New Zealander-type terms: Pākehā (n=24), New Zealander (n=20), New Zealand European (n=17), Pākehā New Zealander (n=6), and Kiwi (n=5). If we add these 72 responses to those who selected ‘European’, we find that 88 percent of respondents in this sample had identified (in one way or another) with the European ethnicity, almost 15 percent higher than the same figure among the Wellington population. The remaining seven respondents who chose the ‘other’ category mentioned Australian, Thai, Cornish, Lebanese, Indian, Taiwi, and American.

In a nationwide study of social issues and public policy in New Zealand, Sibley et al. (2011) found that European New Zealanders who prefer the term Pākehā to describe themselves felt more warmth toward Māori. The popularity of self-identification as Pākehā among my survey

respondents makes sense, because an admiration for Māori language and culture is known to be a characteristic of literary circles in New Zealand. In Sibley et al's (2011) study, only 9.8% of the New Zealanders of European descent preferred the label Pākehā to describe themselves, while 49.7% preferred the term New Zealander, 24.7% endorsed the term New Zealand European, and 13.8% preferred Kiwi.

Almost all ethnic groups except European are underrepresented in this sample. The most underrepresented ethnicities are Latin American and African, with zero members in the sample, followed by Middle Eastern with only one member. The other underrepresented ethnic groups are Asian, Pasifika, and Māori. While 18.3 percent of the Wellington population identified with the Asian ethnicity in 2018, only 4.4 percent of the current sample selected Asian as one of their ethnicities. Pasifika and Māori are also underrepresented in this sample, although not as significantly as the aforementioned groups. One possible explanation for the underrepresentation of these ethnicities is that they are less interested in reading. Certain evidence can be cited to support this argument. *Reading in a Digital Age*, Read NZ Te Pou Muramura's<sup>27</sup> 2019 report, contains interesting findings on the reading habits of different ethnicities in New Zealand. For instance, the report states that "Asian New Zealanders were less likely than Pākehā or Māori and Pasifika to say they grew up with books in their homes (41 percent vs 67 percent for Pākehā and 70 percent for Māori and Pasifika)" (p. 16). Asian New Zealanders also reported reading less traditional reading material than other ethnic groups in New Zealand. In addition, Māori and Pasifika respondents in that report were "more likely to associate negative emotions (bored, stressed, etc.) with reading than Pākehā respondents (21 percent vs ten percent)", emotions which can potentially lead to less time spent reading.

However, while the underrepresentation of these ethnicities in the current sample can be readily interpreted as a sign of their lower rates of recreational reading, it can equally be attributed to their degree of involvement with book-related institutions in Wellington, the platforms that I used to disseminate the survey for this study. Exploring the reasons for varied involvement levels is outside the scope of this study, but it may be related to different patterns of cultural consumption and participation more broadly, aside from the differences in reading habits already mentioned.

### ***Education***

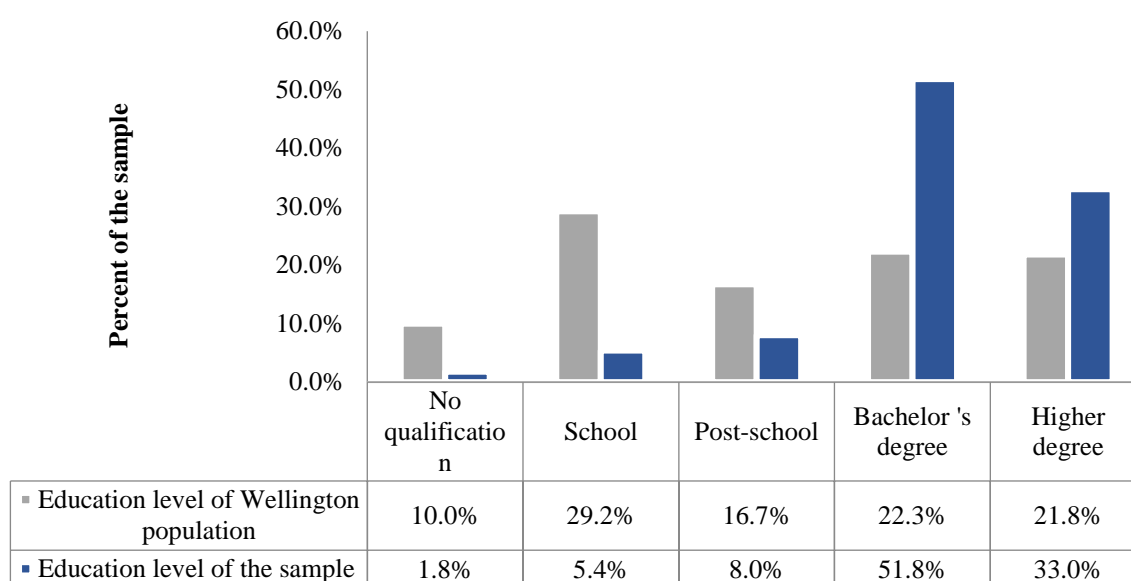
The next question in the demographic section asked about the respondents' highest completed level of education. Contrary to age and ethnicity where the sample largely reflected the

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<sup>27</sup> Formerly known as New Zealand Book Council



demographics of the Wellington population, there seems to be a large difference between the education level of the sample and that of the Wellington City population. (Fig. 3)



**Figure 3.** Comparison of the study sample and Wellington population in terms of education

Almost 85 percent of survey respondents had completed a university degree (51.8 percent bachelor's degree, 30.8 percent master's degree, and 2.2 percent doctorate degree), which is almost twice as high as the education level of the Wellington City adult population. While there is not much data available about the relationship between the previous two variables (i.e. age and ethnicity) and book-reading habits, the correlation between level of education and reading habits has been well documented (e.g. Adoni & Nossek, 2013). Readers with higher levels of education are likely to read more regularly (New Zealand Book Council, 2018) and, consequently, be more involved with book-related institutions, including bookstores and book clubs. Adoni and Nossek (2013, p. 68) found that “readers with more years of schooling revealed fewer gender-related differences in their reading habits”, which indicates that education is presumably a stronger predictor of reading habits than gender, age, and ethnicity, among others.

### ***Number of Years in Wellington***

Since the survey investigates Wellington readers' perceptions of translated fiction, I included a separate question asking how long the respondents had lived in Wellington. More than half of the respondents (51.5 percent) reported that they had lived in Wellington for more than 15 years, while only four percent had lived in Wellington for less than a year. The rest (44.5 percent) reported having lived in Wellington for one to 15 years at the time of taking the survey in early 2019. The main implication of these figures is that most of the readers in the sample had lived in Wellington

long enough to have been immersed in the cultural and social aspects of life in this city. Therefore, the findings of the survey can be meaningfully discussed in relation to the international cultural scene of Wellington as well as the activities of book-related stakeholders in the capital, including Writers Week, Unity Books, and WCL.

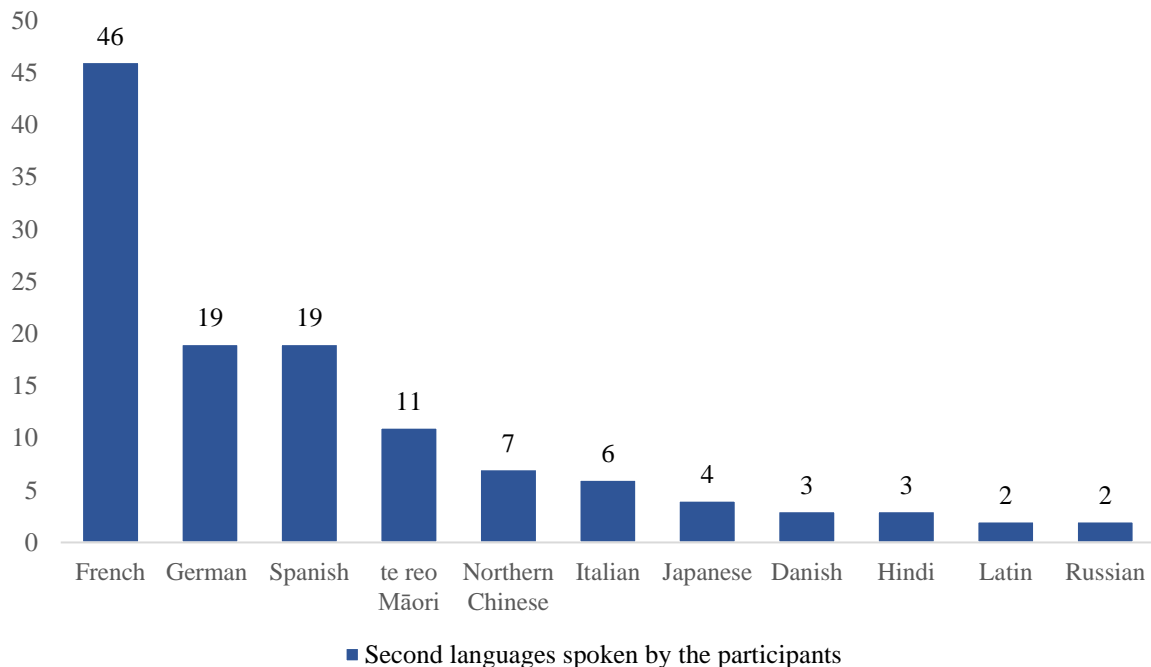
### ***First Language***

The second to last part of the demographic section had to do with the first language of the respondents and their knowledge of foreign languages. Not surprisingly for a study conducted in New Zealand, English was the first language of 94 percent (n=260) of the respondents, with 69.6 percent (n=194) speaking only English. In the 2018 Census of Population and Dwellings, 96 percent of Wellingtonians reported speaking English, with 71.5 percent speaking English only. Although this degree of monolingualism may seem very high for a capital city, especially when compared to almost all the capital cities in Europe (see Eurostat, 2015), it is still lower than the national figure for monolingualism in New Zealand, which stood at 75.4 percent in 2018. However, Wellington City does have a larger percentage of monolinguals compared to Auckland City (71.5 percent and 63 percent, respectively). Of the 17 respondents whose first language was not English, each reported a different first language.

### ***Second Language(s)***

Since one of the criteria for participating in this study was reading at least two fiction books in English a year, I assumed that all respondents have English as one of their languages. Therefore, the question for this section read as follows: ‘Except for English, do you know any languages at an intermediate to advanced level?’ A little over 30 percent (30.4 percent; n=84) of respondents reported knowing one or more second languages at an intermediate to advanced level. Of those, the majority (n=51) reported knowing one second language, followed by participants who knew two second languages (n=22), three second languages (n=10), and five second languages (n=1). The findings regarding respondents’ knowledge of second languages is largely in line with the New Zealand Census findings in 2018, where 28.5 percent of the Wellington population reported speaking a language other than English. It must be acknowledged that language proficiency is a complex construct and many different scales have been proposed for its measurement. For the purposes of this study, the focus is on the readers’ self-reported degree of familiarity with foreign languages, not on the exact level at which they comprehend or speak a certain language. On responding ‘yes’ to the first question in this section, respondents were asked to choose from a list of 13 languages, in addition to an ‘Other’ option. This list was created based on a crosscheck of global and local language popularity. Two of the languages on the list (Arabic and Samoan)

received zero responses, while some which were initially not included on the list (e.g. Danish and Latin) were mentioned more than once. Figure 4 presents the languages selected by two or more respondents.



**Figure 4.** The most common second languages of survey respondents

French was by far the most popular second language among this sample of Wellington readers, spoken by 46 respondents (16.5 percent of all respondents), followed by German and Spanish, each spoken by 19 respondents (6.9 percent each). The other languages spoken by one percent or more of the sample (three or more respondents) were te reo Māori (3.8 percent), Northern Chinese (2.5 percent), Italian (2.2 percent), Japanese (1.4 percent), and Hindi (1.1 percent). The respondents in the current sample largely resemble the Wellington City population in terms of their knowledge of second languages in general and in particular the second languages they speak, but there are some notable differences. In 2018, 3.2 percent of the Wellington population reportedly spoke French, 2.2 percent te reo Māori, two percent Northern Chinese, two percent German, and 1.9 percent Spanish (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). The other languages spoken by one percent or more of Wellingtonians were Samoan (1.8 percent), Hindi (1.7 percent), Yue (1.6 percent), Tagalog (1.2 percent), Gujarati (1.1 percent), and Semitic languages (one percent). While the census data show an almost even distribution of languages spoken in Europe and Asia, the current sample is dominated by speakers of European languages. There is, indeed, a close connection between ethnicity and language, the former often being a strong predictor of the latter. By that logic, the underrepresentation of the Asian ethnicity in this sample is the most probable

reason for the noted difference between the frequency of European and Asian languages, as it is for the absence of speakers of Yue, Tagalog, Gujarati, and Semitic languages in the current sample.

Another issue to consider with regards to respondents' knowledge of second languages is that, historically speaking, courses in European languages, especially French, German, and Spanish, have been more likely than Asian languages to be offered by schools and universities across New Zealand, perhaps similar to other English-speaking countries. Therefore, tied with above average level of education among this sample of Wellington readers, this could be an explanation for the disproportionate representation of European languages. In addition, the familial ties of many New Zealanders to non-English-speaking European countries can lead to them learning the languages of their respective countries, either as children or, later in life, as adults. With the increasing worldwide demand for learning Chinese and Japanese, and the increasing popularity of te reo Māori courses in New Zealand, future surveys of second language knowledge among Wellingtonians may reveal more balance between knowledge of European and non-European languages.

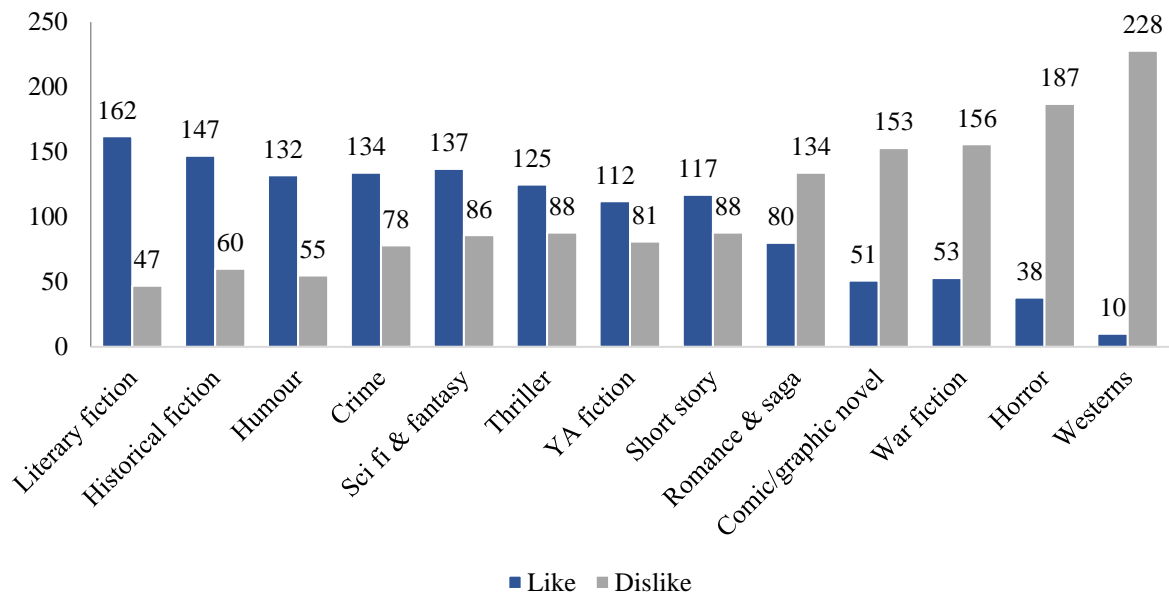
Before investigating any possible correlation between the three survey constructs (general reading habits, perceptions of translated fiction, and international engagement), I will present the data regarding each construct separately, starting with general reading habits. Whenever possible, excerpts of qualitative data obtained through the questionnaire will be provided to complement the quantitative data.

## **4.2 General Reading Habits**

Two items were designed to investigate respondents' general reading habits. The first question asked for the approximate number of fiction books the respondents read annually. Since one of the criteria for participating in this study was to read at least two fiction books in English a year, the options provided were 2-5, 6-10, 11-15, and 16 or more. In response to the first question (i.e. *How many fiction books have you read in the preceding 12 months?*), 57.6 percent of respondents reported having read 16 or more fiction books in the preceding 12 months. The other options each attracted about 14 percent of responses. On average, each respondent had read 14.1 fiction books in the preceding year. These figures are largely in line with the data found in the 2018 national Reading Report (New Zealand Book Council, 2018). In the Book Council's survey, readers reported to have each read an average of 14.4 fiction books in the 12 months preceding survey completion.

The second item in this section listed 13 major fiction genres. Respondents were asked to score each genre on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly dislike) to 5 (like a lot). The most

popular genres among the respondents were literary fiction, historical fiction, and humour, while westerns, horror, and war fiction were the least popular (Fig. 5). I subtracted the ‘strongly dislike/dislike’ responses from the ‘like a lot/like’ responses to come up with the most favourite and least favourite genres. For example, sci-fi/fantasy is liked by more respondents than crime (137 vs 134), but fewer people expressed dislike for crime fiction and so it is considered to be more popular than sci-fi/fantasy.



**Figure 5.** Most-liked and least-liked fiction genres among the respondents

As seen in Figure 5, the respondents were surer about the genres they disliked than the ones they liked. The least liked genres in the New Zealand Book Council’s Reading Report are almost identical to our findings, except for children’s literature which was not listed in the current study, because of the focus on readers over 18. As for the most popular genres, the results of the two surveys are similar, with a couple of minor differences. First, there is a slight difference in the popularity of romance and saga in the two studies. It was the fourth most liked genre in the Book Council’s report, but the ninth in the current survey. Also, in the Book Council’s survey, crime/thriller was the most popular genre, whereas crime is the fourth and thriller the sixth most popular genres in the current study.

It is also worth looking at the correlation between demographic variables and favourite genres. Gender, for example, is known to correlate with reading choices. Some literary genres are traditionally considered to be more popular among members of a particular gender. A breakdown based on the respondents’ gender profile revealed interesting trends. As expected, there were slight differences between the scores given by male and female respondents to different genres.

However, these gender-based differences were significant only for four genres: comic/graphic novel, crime, romance and saga, and young adult fiction.

The starkest difference was observed in the respondents' ranking of the romance and saga category. None of the 40 male respondents checked the 'like a lot' or 'like' options for romance and saga, with 85 percent of them expressing 'dislike' or 'strong dislike' for the genre. The percentage of female respondents who disliked or strongly disliked romance and saga dropped to 42 percent.

The next genre which seemed to appeal very differently to male and female respondents was comic/graphic novel. Forty-five percent of the male respondents in this sample liked or strongly liked comics/graphic novels, the number dropping to 14 percent for female respondents. By contrast, 47.5 percent of the male respondents disliked or strongly disliked young adult fiction, much higher than only 26 percent of female respondents. The findings regarding the popularity of comic/graphic novel and young adult fiction among male and female readers, respectively, are in line with the findings of the Book Reading in New Zealand Report.

The most surprising result in terms of gender-based genre preferences was the proportion of male and female respondents who liked or disliked the crime genre. While men are traditionally thought to have a stronger preference for this genre, 37 percent of the male respondents in this sample disliked or strongly disliked crime fiction, compared to only 27 percent of female respondents. Surveying a randomly selected sample of readers in Wellington may have yielded different findings, as shown in the comparison between the sample of the current study and New Zealand Book Council's sample in terms of genre preferences. Underwood also mentioned the difference between the perceived and actual readership of crime fiction: *"There is actually a high proportion of female readers in crime that people don't expect. Typically, if you look at the people wandering around the crime collection, they are not always what you would think of as crime readers."*

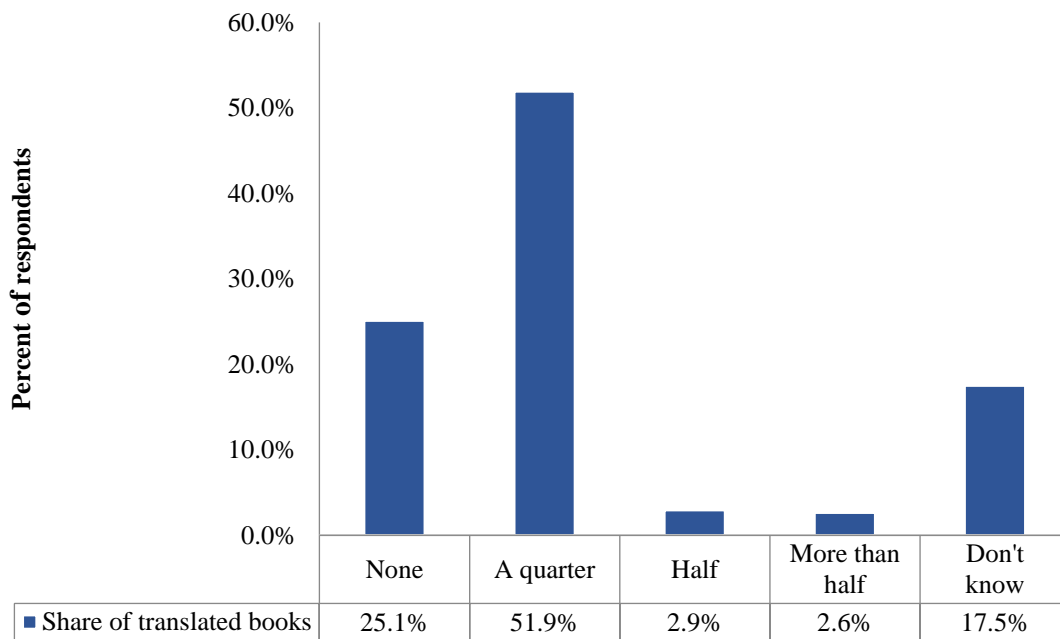
The next demographic variable which can impact reading preferences is age. To test the relationship between age and genre preferences in the current sample, I scrutinised the breakdown of the genre question based on age groups. While most genres were liked or disliked in almost equal proportions by different age groups, a few seemed to appeal more to certain age groups: crime, thriller, sci-fi/fantasy, and romance & saga. Crime novels and thrillers seemed to resonate more with older respondents. More specifically, 61 percent of the respondents over the age of 45 liked or strongly liked crime novels, a number that dropped to 40 percent for respondents between 18 and 44. Similarly, thrillers were more popular among respondents between the age of 45 and 75. By contrast, sci-fi/fantasy and romance and saga appealed more to younger respondents. For

instance, while 64 percent of the respondents aged between 18 and 34 liked or strongly liked sci-fi/fantasy books, no respondent over the age of 65 expressed an interest in this genre. The same, although to a lesser extent, was true for romance and saga, where respondents over the age of 45 seemed to dislike the genre significantly more than younger respondents.

While the first part of the questionnaire investigated two general elements of respondents' reading habits, the second and third parts focused on their perceptions of translated fiction, literary participation patterns, and international engagement. The data pertaining to these parts of the survey will be presented in the following sections of this chapter.

### **4.3 Reading Translated Fiction**

The items making up the second part of the questionnaire focused on translated fiction reading. The first item investigated the approximate share of translated fiction as a proportion of the respondents' total fiction reading in the preceding 12 months. Since the respondents may not have remembered the exact number of titles they had read, broad options were provided: none, a quarter, half, and more than half. A fifth option was also provided, *I don't know*, which aimed to account for the respondents who could not remember the share of translated books as part of their total fiction reading. Of the 270 readers who responded to this item, 25.1 percent (n=68) had read no translated fiction books in this period, 51.9 percent (n=140) reported that a quarter of the fiction books they read were translations, and only 5.5 percent (n=15) recalled that half or more than half of the fiction books they read were translations from other languages into English (Fig. 6). The remaining 47 respondents (17.5 percent) had selected *I don't know*. Based on these data, over 93 percent of the readers who did remember the share of translated books as a proportion of their total fiction reading had read more English fiction than translated fiction in this 12-month period.



**Figure 6.** Share of translated fiction as a proportion of total fiction read

Based on the results of the Chi-squared tests, age, level of education, and knowledge of second language(s) do not correlate significantly with the number of translated fiction books read ( $p=0.08^{28}$ ,  $p=0.06$ , and  $p=0.09$ , respectively). The respondents who expressed more interest in classics and war fiction reported reading more translated fiction ( $p=0.04$ ). Preference for other fiction genres did not have any significant correlation with the number of translated books read, nor did respondents' age, level of education, or knowledge of second languages, although the 18-24 age group had the highest percentage of respondents (45 percent) who had read no translated fiction books in the preceding 12 months.

The numbers presented in Figure 6 reflect the respondents' own evaluation of the ratio of translated fiction to total fiction in their reading; the actual numbers may be higher or lower than the respondents' self-reporting. Nonetheless, the aggregated results are reliable because they neutralise the outliers and therefore reflect the general pattern among the sample of readers. The results indicate that for most respondents, translated fiction is at best a marginal component of their reading. In fact, only seven readers (2.6 percent) reported having read more translated fiction than English fiction in 2018. Nonetheless, 20 of the 79 open-ended responses expressed a 'specific interest in translated literature', making this the most common response theme. Twelve of those responses contained reasons for the expressed interest, such as the ones reproduced below:

<sup>28</sup> A p-value equal to or less than 0.05 ( $\leq 0.05$ ) is considered to be statistically significant. It indicates that the likelihood of there being no correlation between the two variables (i.e. null hypothesis) is below 5%.



*“Translated works are so important to expose us to the narrative of other cultures, and countries. They are often underappreciated.”* (30, Female, Asian)

*“Translated books enrich literature.”* (33, Female, European New Zealander)

*“Different cultures have slightly differing concepts of time, possession, etc., that all become especially fascinating when injected into English translated text.”* (24, Male, European)

*“Translated books show trends in the different writing/fiction styles of different cultures. They are refreshing to read.”* (21, Female, European)

Multiple factors can influence readers’ involvement with translated fiction. Some of these relate to individual circumstances, while others operate at a wider societal level. Therefore, the findings from this question can be better understood by looking at the findings from other relevant sections of the survey, especially the open-ended responses. One of the most frequently observed themes in the open-ended responses was ‘non-recognition of whether or not a book is a translation’. Eight respondents specifically pointed out that they would not know if a book they were reading is a translation:

*“I often don't realise a book has been translated into English until I have finished it and put my review on Goodreads. Goodreads and friends and family recommendations are my major sources of fiction recommendations.”* (28, Female, Māori/Pākehā)

*“I have never really considered how many books I read are translated. I tend to pick books that are from a perspective other than my own, if it's translated or not doesn't really factor into my selection of a book.”* (33, Female, European)

While this group of responses may be optimistically interpreted as representing an “egalitarian” approach to reading which does not discriminate on the basis of original language and culture, they might also point to a certain obliviousness about the importance of language as an essential component of the world writers inhabit. A possible implication of disregard for the original language of a book is that the respondents might misevaluate the share of translated books as a proportion of their total fiction reading. The respondents might have actually read more or fewer translated books than they reported. Campbell (2015) has managed to capture how this phenomenon plays out. Interested in the soundness of readers’ own evaluations of their translation-reading habits, she asked a sample of UK readers whether they had read any translated books in the preceding year. Alongside that, she provided a list of published novels, some of which were translated, and asked the respondents if they had read any of those books. Included in this list were

bestseller translated novels like *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and *The Snowman*. It turned out that some readers who had reported not having read any translated books had actually read quite a few of the listed translated novels (Campbell, 2015, p. 100).

The degree of attention that readers pay to the original language of books relates, among other things, to their understanding of the process and product of translation. In contexts where translated literature is at the centre of the literary polysystem, readers will naturally have more appreciation for the act of translation, mainly because translation products form a significant part of their fiction reading. The opposite is true in contexts where translated literature is not a substantial part of fiction reading. Translated literature has traditionally had a peripheral position within the literary polysystem of English-speaking countries (see Venuti, 1995) and translators into English have, consequently, often operated as invisible language practitioners, also called passive re-coders (Gavronsky, 1977), rather than active cultural agents. This situation has had significant repercussions for the way translated books are produced, circulated, marketed, and, ultimately, received by English-speaking readers. It covers a wide spectrum of decisions made throughout the process of book publication, which often lead to the invisibility of both the translator and the translation process. For instance, in the rare cases where the translator's name *does* appear on the cover of an English translation, it is seldom printed in large font, unless the translator is highly renowned or has gained celebrity status in another branch of the arts.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, literary translators into English are often thought to adopt a domesticating approach, which could be in response to editors' and publishers' demands for easy-to-read translations and/or readers' preference for fluent translations (see Milton, 2008), aside from the translator's own technical decisions. Comments such as those below exemplify the impact of domestication practices on the perceptions of English-speaking readers of what constitutes a "good" translation:

*"Translations are better than they were, read more fluently, don't seem like translations these days. Which is great!"* (77, Female, European New Zealander)

*"I really admire translators whose work reads as if it was written in English. They deserve so much credit..."* (56, Female, European New Zealander)

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<sup>29</sup> Translators' names rarely appear on the cover of English-language translations. Some recent examples where the translator has not been mentioned on the cover include Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* (2019, translated by Marilyn Booth), Olga Tokarczuk's *Flight* (2018, translated by Jennifer Croft), Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2016, translated by Deborah Smith), and Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *The Shape of the Ruins* (2018, translated by Anne Mclean), all of which have won prestigious English-language literary awards.

Both comments show a strong preference for easy-to-read translations, which ties in with the previously discussed disregard for original language.

Another issue that can impact how readers incorporate translated fiction into their reading is their opinions on the treatment of translated fiction as a distinct fiction category. The current sample was quite homogenous in this respect. In response to a question which I will discuss in depth in the next section, 79 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘translated fiction is not a distinct fiction category’. This is in line with Campbell’s (2015) findings in the UK. Most readers in this category tended to talk about ‘books from other cultures’, ‘multicultural fiction’, and ‘diverse fiction’ instead of making a clear-cut distinction between fiction originally written in English and fiction translated into English. This makes some sense, because one of the major goals of promoting translated books is to introduce English-speaking readers to different worldviews and life experiences. This goal can be achieved by means other than translation. A Nigerian author, for example, may write in English but still introduce anglophone readers to a different culture and lifestyle. The following comment by a 31-year-old female respondent captures this idea:

*“I try to make an effort to read a few translated books a year, but of the 70+ books a year I do read, I probably read less than ten translated novels. Many books I read about other countries are from people who have chosen to write in English (as they have lived or studied in an English-speaking country).”* (31, Female, New Zealand European)

What is clear from both closed-ended and open-ended responses is that these readers made only a weak connection between mainstream ideas, such as multiculturalism and diversity, and an interest in other languages. Similar kinds of disconnections can be seen in other realms of practice. For instance, the Bachelor of Arts programme in International Relations at Victoria University of Wellington offers students a chance to “learn about the histories, theories and philosophies behind the political systems of different nations, from democracies to dictatorships”<sup>30</sup>. However, to major in this programme, students do not need to show any interest in, let alone knowledge of, languages other than English. This implies that the political dynamics of ‘countries around the world’ can be understood through the English language alone, which shows the level to which monolingualism has been institutionalised in New Zealand.

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<sup>30</sup> More information available at <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/explore/study-areas/international-relations-and-politics/study?subject=international-relations>

#### 4.4 Perceptions of Translated Fiction

The next part of the questionnaire consisted of six statements aimed at assessing the respondents' perceptions of translated fiction (Table 3). Respondents were asked to express their agreement/disagreement with each statement by rating it on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (Strongly agree), 2 (Agree), 3 (No opinion), 4 (Disagree), and 5 (Strongly disagree). To make the results clearer, I have merged the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses into a single category (Agree). The same has been done for the 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' categories.

**Table 3.** Statements about translated fiction

#	Statement	Agree (merged)		No opinion	Disagree (merged)	
		Strongly agree	Agree		Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Regardless of genre, I'll enjoy English fiction more than translated fiction.	1.4%	8.0%	35.1%	42.0%	13.5%
		9.4%			55.5%	
2	Translated fiction is likely to be more difficult to read than English fiction.	0.4%	7.6%	26.1%	22.1%	43.8%
		8.0%			65.9%	
3	I'm often intimidated by foreign-sounding fiction titles.	1.5%	8.6%	10.9%	31.1%	48.9%
		10.1%			79.0%	
4	Reading translated fiction brings more prestige than English fiction.	0.4%	7.6%	51.8%	7.2%	33.0%
		8.0%			40.2%	
5	Translated fiction is not a distinct fiction category to me.	25.7%	52.9%	12.0%	1.5%	7.9%
		78.6%			9.4%	
6	From my experience as a regular reader, I have trust in the abilities of most literary translators into English.	20.3%	59.8%	14.5%	0.0%	5.4%
		80.1%			5.4%	

In response to the first statement in Table 3, more than half of the respondents (55.5 percent) believed that English-original fiction is not necessarily more enjoyable to read than translated fiction. With only 9.4 percent of respondents agreeing with this statement, it is safe to say that Wellington readers in this sample do not see original language as a determinant of a fiction book's enjoyability. The monolingual respondents were 20 percent more likely to find English-language fiction inherently more enjoyable than translated fiction, regardless of genre and author.

Whereas the first statement focused on the enjoyability of original English-language fiction compared to translated fiction, the second statement concerned the potential difficulty

associated with reading translated fiction. This item was intended to serve as confirmation of the readers' stance towards English-original fiction and translated fiction. As seen in Table 3, the responses to the second item were similar to the first. Most respondents (65.9 percent) disagreed with the idea that 'translated fiction is likely to be more difficult to read than English-language fiction'. In other words, readers in this sample do not perceive translated books as inherently 'difficult reads'. Knowledge of a second language seems to be a strong predictor of the perceived difficulty associated with translated fiction. Forty-one percent of the monolingual respondents perceived translated fiction as inherently more difficult to read than English-language fiction, which is over twice the corresponding figure (19 percent) for respondents with some knowledge of a second language. The following comments came from two monolingual respondents:

*"Sometimes, if I know a book has been translated, I even, subconsciously at first, seem to mentally prepare myself for what could be a challenging read."* (20, Female, European New Zealander)

*"To me, if I am aware before reading a book that it has been translated from another language, I find myself searching for small inconsistencies in the sentences, and also for cultural themes which may be regarded as barriers if I do not know much about that particular place where the work was originally produced. In saying this though, I do always find these works rewarding."* (22, Female, European New Zealander)

In response to the third statement in Table 3, almost 79 percent of the respondents did not find foreign-sounding fiction titles intimidating. Twenty-six percent of the respondents who had expressed preference for books from their own culture (a question discussed in the next section) felt intimidated by foreign-sounding titles, while this was as low as 7.5 percent for respondents who preferred books from other cultures, and nine percent for those who liked books from their own culture and other cultures about the same. Delving into the possible implications of the correlation between preference for books from one's own culture and intimidation by foreign-sounding book titles could be a fruitful subject for future research.

Other commentators (e.g. Roxburgh, 2004; Grossman, 2010) have also pointed to the potential strangeness experienced through encountering an unknown culture. Talking about US society, Roxburgh (2004) thinks that people often "find it a little weird, uncomfortable, possibly dangerous" to encounter representations of a different culture, including in literature. The Chi-squared results point to a significant inverse relationship between knowledge of a second language and intimidation by foreign-sounding book titles ( $p=0.02$ ). While 26.5 percent of monolingual readers perceived foreign-sounding titles as intimidating, only 9.5 percent of respondents with L2

knowledge felt intimidated by foreign-sounding titles. This fits within the broader view of second-language acquisition as a tool for increasing tolerance towards the ‘other’, elsewhere referred to as “intercultural tolerance” (Gojkov-Rajić & Prtljaga, 2013, p. 811).

Respondents were divided over the prestige they associate with reading translated fiction. While very few (eight percent) of the respondents agreed that reading translated fiction brings them more prestige than English fiction, the majority (51.8 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed. The rest of the respondents (40.2 percent) did not associate any extra prestige with translated fiction. The high degree of indecision over this question could also mean that the idea of a link between reading and prestige did not make sense to the respondents in the first place. Further investigation would be required to confirm or reject this hypothesis.

Responses to the fifth item revealed that most participants (78.6 percent) do not consider translated fiction to be a separate category of books. This topic attracted a lot of interest from both sides of the spectrum, but mostly from respondents who saw no reason for thinking about translated fiction as a separate category. Of the nine open-ended responses which touched on this topic, two expressed some curiosity about treating translated fiction as a distinct fiction category, calling it “enjoyably thought-provoking” and “something worth giving a go”. The rest (n=7) voiced unanimous disagreement with this proposition. The first comment below represents the extreme end of this viewpoint, while the second one connects a personal disregard for original language with dismissal of translated fiction as a separate genre:

*“I’ve never considered ‘translated books’ as its own category - only what kind of story it is. The font and format of the text is much more important to me.”* (34, Female, European New Zealander)

*“I don’t consider translated books a separate genre as often I’m not aware the book I’m reading is a translation - I simply read whatever takes my interest irrespective of origin.”* (28, Female, European)

The final item of this section investigated respondents’ level of trust in the abilities of literary translators working into English. It is safe to assume that having trust in the abilities of practitioners in any field increases the chance of using their services or consuming a product they create. Focusing on developing a trust-based history of the practice of translation, Rizzi et al. (2019, p. 6) argue that “as a third-party player, any kind of intercultural mediator (translator, interpreter, editor, publisher, or patron) needs to build trust with at least one other party.” They continue that “even when the mediator is anonymous or invisible, trust in the third party is a ‘deal-maker’ or a ‘deal-breaker’.” To gauge the current sample’s trust in the abilities of literary translators,

I asked the respondents to think about their own experiences of reading translated fiction when responding to this question. A massive 80.1 percent of the current sample of Wellington readers have trust in the abilities of literary translators based on their experience as ‘regular fiction readers’.

Regardless of the source or target languages involved, most ordinary readers of translated books read the translation precisely because they cannot read the original. Therefore, their judgement of the abilities of the translator is mostly based on the features of the target text. It is here that translational norms (e.g., domestication vs foreignisation) become an important factor in readers’ evaluation of a translated text. In Iran, for example, where foreignisation is still largely regarded as the preferred strategy for literary translation, readers seem to have a predilection for foreignised elements in the translated text. According to Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020), the following features, most of which can be associated with a foreignising approach, were found to make a fiction translation more enjoyable for Iranian readers: “‘faithfulness to the author’s original writing style’, ‘an offer of a deeper immersion in the translation’, ‘a literal translation of proverbs in the footnote’, and ‘translation of the author’s introduction and biography in the preface’” (p. 84).

An interesting but under-researched topic is how foreignising and domesticating translations are actually received by target-language readers. Zhong and Lin (2007) used two Chinese translations of *Gone with the Wind*, one categorised as a domesticating translation and the other as a foreignising translation, in order to explore the impact of each translation strategy on readers’ understanding of the setting of the story, the country of origin, and the exoticism of the text, among others. Thirty-six participants based in Guangzhou were given an excerpt of each text alongside ten follow-up questions. Zhong and Lin did not find a clear-cut relationship between each text and the accompanying responses:

With regard to our readers, their perceptions were found to have been much more complex, inconsistent and diffuse than may have been assumed by translation theorists... on the whole, we had yet to find a consistent pattern or causal relationship between an exotic feeling and positive sociolinguistic evaluations or otherwise of a text, which could then be used to justify either a wish for or a fear of foreignised translation (p. 13).

Also interested in the actual reception of foreignised translations, Kruger (2013) used eye-tracking technology to analyse how child and adult readers in South Africa respond to foreignised elements in picture books translated from English to Afrikaans. Similar to Zhong and Lin (2007), Kruger (2013) found that the effect of foreignising strategies on readers’ comprehension of the text is

anything but straightforward, with child and adult readers showing different levels of comprehension. It is important to remember the relativity of dichotomies such as foreignisation and domestication, as well as the partially anecdotal nature of such commentaries.

Six open-ended responses touched on the importance of the work that translators do, though from different perspectives. Four of these responses are presented below:

*“I think good translators are worth their weight in gold - it’s a difficult task to do well.”* (60, Female, Pākehā New Zealander)

*“When you find books from a translator you trust (e.g. Anthea Bell) then you know it will be good. I am always a bit cautious when it’s a name I haven’t come across before.”* (46, Female, European)

*“Often a translated book’s success depends on the skill of the translator. Some of the best translated texts I’ve read though have retained a sense of an accent or a way of speaking slightly differently to English. I think it gives a book another dimension.”* (57, Female, European)

*“I wish people knew more about the ethics of translation. I have frequently compared target texts against the versions in the original language, and the translations greatly vary not only based on the culture of the translator, but also based on gender, class, and the historical moment within which the book was translated, among many other factors. I have read Gabriel García Márquez’s novel, One Hundred Years of Solitude, in three different languages, and each reading was an entirely different experience to the point of creating three separate visualizations of the narrator... Finally, I feel that it must be acknowledged that translators are artists as well, who operate perhaps at an even higher level of virtuosity than authors. They never just translate words, but entire worlds and cultural moments, with all their artistic conventions.”* (23, Female, European New Zealander)

Coming from a 23-year-old polyglot, the fourth comment illustrates how knowing several languages can impact the way readers approach literature in translation. Multilingual readers have the luxury of being able to read the original or its translations into other languages, as the comment above shows, ultimately finding a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the translation process and translation product. Even if the multilingual reader only reads the English translation, they are more likely to be aware of the problems the translator has faced due to syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic differences between the given languages, as well as the solutions opted for. This awareness can result in greater tolerance of unsmooth language in the translated text. The following is a comment by a bilingual English-French respondent:



*I approach a book in translation slightly differently than a book in its native language. When I begin reading a translated book, I pay a lot more attention to the language. I find I am more “forgiving” with books in translation; if I don't love the way it is written, I am more likely to chalk it up to the translation and continue reading, in an effort to experience a culture not my own. I enjoy reading books in translation, but I do approach them differently. (28, Female, European)*

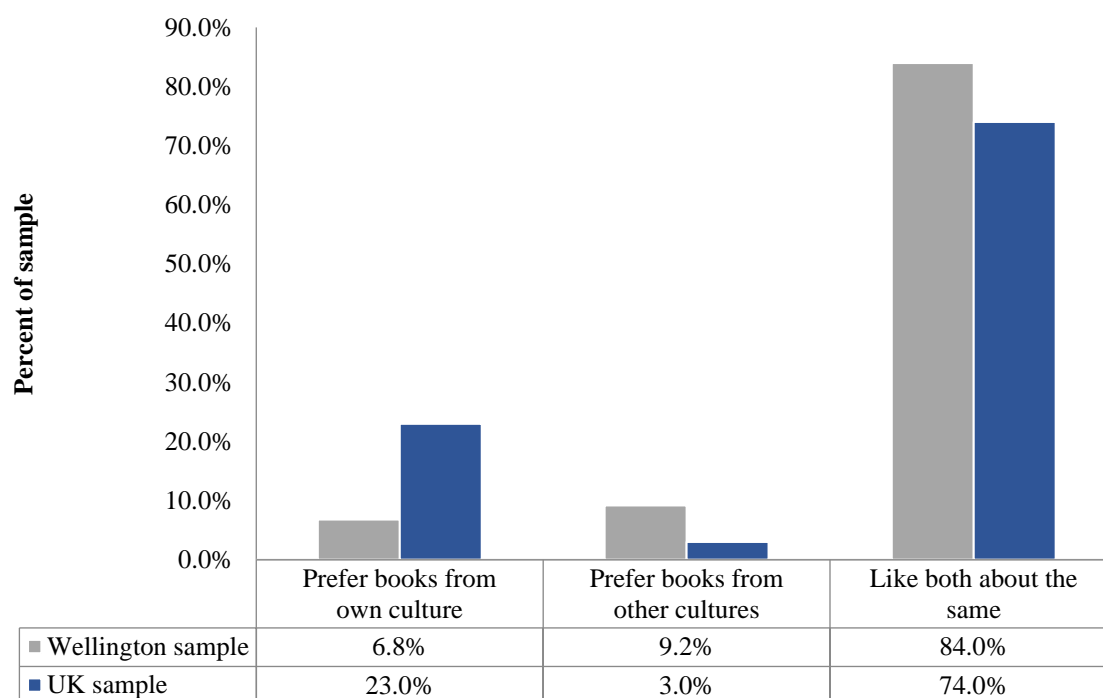
Being more forgiving with translated books accords with an often-mentioned consequence of reading translated fiction: “When you read a translated text...you’ll further develop such basically human traits as compassion, tolerance, and understanding” (Cordasco, 2015). Whereas the respondent’s comment above refers to tolerance of unsmooth language in the translated text, Cordasco’s statement refers to compassion towards a different worldview depicted in the translation.

### ***Preference for Books from One’s Own Culture and Other Cultures***

The next item of the questionnaire aimed to establish the respondents’ preference either for books from their own culture or books from other cultures. This question was taken from the Book Reading Survey developed by Campbell (2015). The options were as follows:

1. I prefer to read books from my own culture.
2. I prefer to read books from other cultures.
3. I like reading books from my own culture and books from other cultures about the same.

Since 93 percent of the respondents who had responded to a previous question reportedly read more English fiction than translated fiction in the preceding 12 months, the initial hypothesis was that the majority would prefer reading books from their own culture. The findings, however, uncovered a fascinating paradox. Almost 84 percent of the respondents (n=231) like reading books from their own culture and other cultures about the same, 9.2 percent (n=26) prefer books from other cultures, and only 6.8 percent (n=19) prefer books from their own culture. To put this finding in context, I have compared it to the findings of Campbell’s survey in the UK (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7.** Preference for fiction from own culture and other cultures

The findings of this study resemble Campbell’s survey in the UK when it comes to readers who like books from their own culture and other cultures about the same (74 percent in Campbell’s study and 83.7 percent in the present study). However, there is a major difference between the two datasets when it comes to preference for books from the readers’ own culture. Twenty-three percent of the participants in Campbell’s study preferred books from their own culture. This dropped to 6.8 percent in the current sample of Wellington readers. Readers in this sample seem to be more outward-looking in terms of fiction preferences than the British readers who participated in Campbell’s study.

However, an important point to consider when interpreting this finding is the highly relative nature of the ‘own culture/other culture’ dichotomy. The question draws on the respondents’ own conceptions of a fiction book’s culture of origin and how to relate it to their own reading preferences, rather than providing clear-cut definitions for these terms and then evaluating respondents’ answers. Respondents showed that they have different understandings of this dichotomy, with some elaborating on their views by submitting open-ended responses. Another consideration for the comparative data in Figure 7 is the UK’s rich literary tradition and its large publishing industry, often reflected in the huge popularity of British fiction among readers elsewhere in the English-speaking world, many of whom have ancestral ties to Great Britain. As a result, it is very likely that Wellington readers’ understanding of ‘books from other cultures’ overlaps significantly with UK readers’ understanding of ‘books from own culture’, in that they

both share a fondness for books from the UK. This assumption can be supported by the available stock at Wellington bookstores, the bestselling charts published in local media, and data regarding readers' favourite countries in terms of fiction. As seen in Table 4 presented in the following section, Great Britain was ranked the second-most-favourite country/region for fiction books among Wellington readers in this sample.

The Chi-squared results indicate a significant correlation between ethnicity and preference for books from other cultures ( $p=0.04$ ). The most outward-looking ethnicities in the sample were Māori and Pasifika. Of the 21 Māori/Pasifika respondents in the sample, 20 preferred books from their own culture and other cultures about the same, and one respondent preferred books from other cultures. Although age did not have a significant influence on preference for books from other cultures, readers between 35 and 44 and those above 65 seem to be the most outward-looking, while the 55-64 age group had the highest proportion who preferred books from their own culture (15 percent).

### ***Favourite Cultures, Countries, and Regions for Fiction Books***

The next item of the questionnaire asked respondents if they are interested in stories from certain cultures, countries, or regions; almost 53 percent responded positively. This group were then asked to indicate their favourite cultures, countries, or regions for fiction. Because of its open-ended structure, this question attracted highly diverse responses. The co-usage of 'cultures, countries, or regions' was a conscious decision aimed to convey inclusiveness. As shown in Campbell's (2015) study, most readers tend to "conceive of culture in a geographical way" (p. 93), but there are those who show interest in stories from/about certain social, political, religious, or ethnic groups. Although most respondents in the first group mentioned countries and regions, some were more specific about the places they enjoy reading about (e.g. "New Orleans/Louisiana"; "Paris"; "San Francisco"; "New York, Charleston, Montreal, Scotland; "Turkey and Scotland, especially Edinburgh, Venice"; "San Francisco and NYC").

Some of the comments showcasing the respondents' different interpretations of 'books from other cultures' are presented below:

*"Generally, I love contemporary fiction books about people and relationships no matter what country they're set in."* (63, Female, European New Zealander)

*"Interested in global fiction."* (19, Female, European)

*“It is not just the language but the perspectives and points of view in books from other cultures that are interesting - it’s the same as reading books from different genders and origins, the way people view things and respond are the most interesting things about books.” (43, Female, Asian)*

*“The time period is as important as the culture, as books are about exploration. For instance, we read The Radetzky March earlier this year, and the book's setting opened my eyes to the sense of gloom accompanying those loyal to an empire in decline. It was not merely the country but the time period, setting, and the themes that arose from the book that made me recommend this book. Also, when I think about it, virtually all of the books we read are set outside of New Zealand.” (27, Male, European New Zealander)*

Overall, the respondents mentioned about 30 distinct countries and regions. Table 4 below presents all responses alongside the number of times they were mentioned. The countries/regions appearing in the same row were mentioned an equal number of times. I have not merged any of the categories into larger ones, because the aim of this question was to understand how this sample of readers in Wellington perceive the relationship between fiction and place.

**Table 4.** Favourite countries and regions for fiction books among adult readers in Wellington

Country or region	Number of mentions
North America	35
Great Britain	29
Japan	27
Africa	22
India	21
Middle East	19
Europe	17
Scandinavia, Latin America	16
Greece, Asia	14
France, New Zealand	13
Ireland	12
Eastern Europe	11
Italy	10
Australia, Russia	9
China, North and South Korea, Spain	7
Germany, Māori/Pacific Islands	6
Nigeria, Scotland	4
Egypt, Mexico, Iran, Romania	2

The list presented in Table 4 is a blend of continents, regions, and countries. Three of the top five favourite countries/regions in terms of fiction belong, unambiguously, to the English-speaking world (i.e. North America, Great Britain, and India). Gender, age, and ethnicity did not seem to have any significant correlation with the respondents' favourite fiction regions, nor did knowledge of second languages. I expected multilingual respondents to express more interest in fiction from non-English-speaking countries. While they did express such interest, the difference between multilingual and monolingual respondents was not significant. A considerable proportion of multilingual respondents expressed interest in fiction from the places where those languages are spoken, but there were also considerable numbers of multilinguals for whom no connection could be drawn between second languages and favourite fiction countries/regions.

Some of the categories in Table 4 (e.g. North America, Europe, Great Britain, and Japan) predictably appear near the top of the list, while others come as something of a surprise. For instance, Africa is the fourth, India the fifth, and Middle East the sixth most popular literatures for adult readers in Wellington, while the seemingly popular Scandinavian and Latin American literatures come eighth equal. Part of this rather unexpected ranking of favourite literatures may be attributed to the genres towards which readers incline. Taking Scandinavian literature as an example, a great deal of translated fiction from that part of the world has come in the form of crime novels and thrillers. As reported previously in the thesis, crime and thriller were the fourth and sixth most popular genres for the current sample of readers, but the most popular genres for the Book Council's sample. I assume that a sample of readers with greater interest in crime/thriller novels would have probably gravitated more towards Scandinavian literature. It is also important to look at original language/culture as only one of the criteria that readers consider for choosing to read or not read a book, and probably not the number-one criterion for many readers, as reflected in the survey responses.

The appearance of countries like Japan, India, and Greece alongside continents and larger regions is a significant finding. This indicates a perception of Japanese fiction as a stand-alone category. The same is true for India and European countries such as Greece, France, Italy, and Spain. On the other hand, only few respondents pointed to specific countries in the Middle East, Africa, Scandinavia, and Latin America, which may imply that they associate similar characteristics with fiction produced in these regions. Examples mentioned by the respondents are “(post)war stories from the Middle East”, “magical realism in Latin American fiction”, and “Scandinavian thrillers”.

In some cases, the popularity of one or two authors writing in a specific language may result in that language being placed as one of the favourites, such as Elena Ferrante for Italian, Haruki Murakami for Japanese, and Jose Saramago for Portuguese. In other cases, the popularity of fiction written in a language associated with a specific country or region cannot be attributed to one or two writers, but a group of writers who often happen to write in the same genre(s). A clear instance is the long-standing enthusiasm among English-language readers for Scandinavian thrillers and crime novels. According to Neil Johnson, one of the interviewed librarians, “people read Scandinavian noir because they like crime books, not because they’re particularly interested in Sweden. It’s because Swedish authors write great crime books. It could be Germany, just as easily.” This comment echoes the view that genre and writing style are far more important than the original language of a book in predicting the successful reception of that book in translation.

This view might be critiqued for failing to consider that the language in which a book is written is inseparable from the writing style.

While most respondents expressed their favourite cultures in terms of geographical areas, some expressed interest in fiction from/about certain ethnic, religious, social, and political groups. In this sense, the respondents stretched the scope of foreign fiction to fit it to their own viewpoints. These responses were thematically analysed and categorised into broader groups with shared themes. The ones mentioned by five or more respondents have been presented in Figure 8.



**Figure 8.** Social, political, ethnic, and religious groups popular among respondents

Some of the themes presented in Figure 8 echo the opinions of readers surveyed by Campbell (2015), while others are unique to this study. As the residents of a country with a recent history of colonisation, and in which discussions about indigenous rights are at the heart of political and social discourse, Wellington readers in this sample seem to be especially interested in stories which touch on the notion of interactions between colonisers and colonised, and the perceived power imbalance among certain social groups. Also evident in the participants' open-ended responses is a preference for fiction written by or about underrepresented/misrepresented groups,

including Native Americans, African Americans, and Muslims. These types of responses reflect the perceived relationship between place and reading preferences discussed in the introduction. Another common theme recurring in the responses is escapism through reading about unfamiliar people and places. Along the same lines, White (2012) and Davidson and Cave (1990) found that some New Zealanders do not read New Zealand literature because they dislike reading about familiar people living in familiar places.

As mentioned previously, the rise of star authors writing in a specific language may result in the popularity of stories originating in that language or culture, such as Elena Ferrante for Italian, Haruki Murakami for Japanese, and Karl Ove Knausgård and Stieg Larsson for Scandinavian languages. The Nielsen Book survey in the UK shows that in 2015, fiction books translated from French, Italian, Japanese, Swedish, and German were most popular, while in 2001, the most popular languages for translation had been French, Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, and Mandarin. The appearance of Italian, Japanese, and Swedish on the list could be partly attributed to the popularity of the aforementioned authors. Elena Ferrante was mentioned by two of the respondents in my survey, for different reasons:

*“I think of the Elena Ferrante books in which although the story is compelling the language sometimes seems flat, not alive.”* (56, Female, European)

*“I love reading all good fiction, enjoyed reading Elena Ferrante.”* (54, Female, European New Zealander)

Another possible reason for the popularity of stories from certain countries or regions is the wide coverage of that country or region in the media. Recent examples are the huge success of novels from post-war Iraq (e.g. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi), Afghanistan (e.g. *Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini), and the Korean Peninsula (e.g. *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, and *Please Look After Mother* by Kyung-Sook Shin).

It should be noted that the data presented in this section function as no more than a general indication of favourite literatures for adult readers in Wellington. It may or may not align with the sales figures of bookshops or borrowing records of public libraries, two of the most reliable sources of evidence about reading habits. Interest is only one factor affecting reading habits, others being accessibility and readability (Asheim, 1953, p. 458).

#### **4.5 International Engagement**

The final part of the survey was designed to investigate the level of ‘international engagement’ of the respondents and its possible correlation with perceptions of translated fiction. For the present

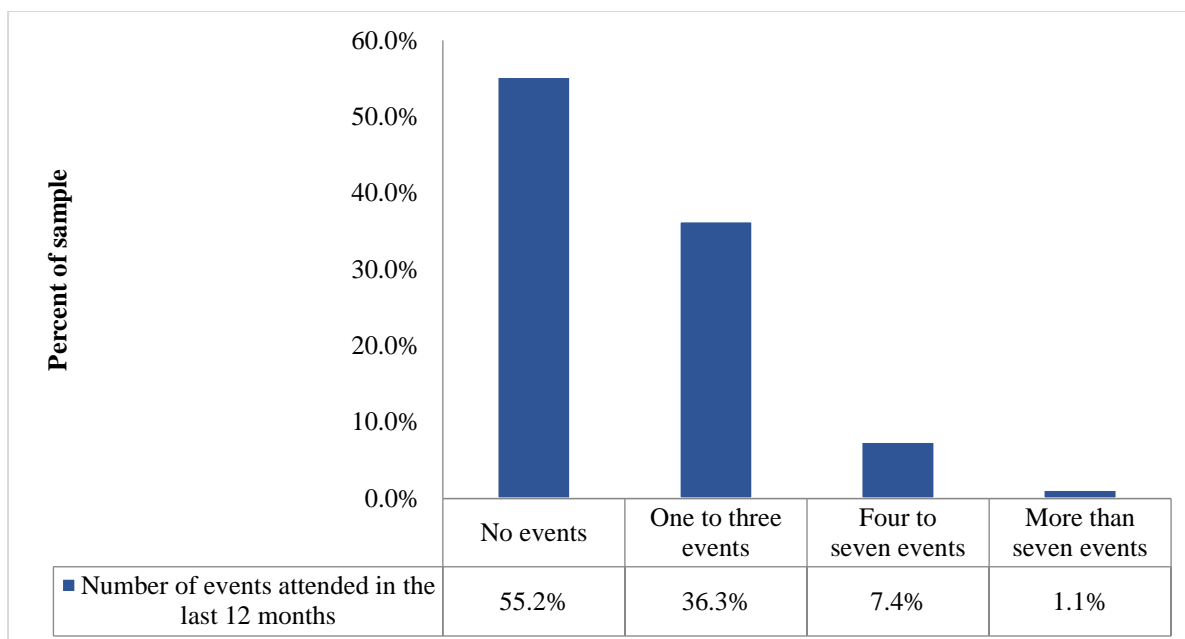


study, this construct was measured using three items: Participation in international cultural events, participation in Writers Week Wellington, and overseas travel. One of the aims of this study is to investigate the potential correlation between ‘international engagement’ and ‘perceptions of translated fiction’. My initial hypothesis was that the respondents who score higher on the ‘international engagement’ scale will have more positive perceptions of books from other cultures in general and translated fiction books in particular. But first, the data regarding the three items measuring international engagement will be presented separately.

### ***Participation in International Cultural Events***

As mentioned in the introduction, Wellington is New Zealand’s centre of government and known for its vibrant arts and culture scene. Most international cultural associations have their headquarters in this city. These centres hold regular events which are often open to the public. Moreover, many ethnic groups have annual celebrations at venues around the Wellington region. These events are usually supported and promoted quite generously by Wellington City Council and sometimes covered by major media outlets. This diversity is reinforced by the blend of cultures and languages that people encounter in their daily lives. The first question of the ‘international engagement’ section read as follows: *Off the top of your head, how many times have you attended the events held by embassies/high commissions/international cultural associations in Wellington (e.g. Goethe Institute, Confucius Institute, Alliance Française Wellington, Polish Association of New Zealand) in the last 12 months?*

Descriptive analysis of the data obtained through this item indicated that 55 percent (n=149) of respondents had not attended any such events in the preceding 12 months. Out of the remaining 121 respondents, 98 had attended one to three events, 20 attended four to seven events, and only three respondents had attended more than seven events (Fig. 10). Sixty-one percent of respondents with some knowledge of a second language had attended at least one international event in the preceding 12 months. This number dropped quite significantly to 30 percent for monolingual respondents.



**Figure 9.** Participation in international cultural events

It was something of a surprise to find that 55 percent of a sample of regular fiction readers with university degrees had not participated in any international cultural events in the preceding 12 months. However, when compared to the New Zealand Cultural Experiences Survey (2002), this section of the current survey is very limited in its scope and only captures the events which were supported by international organisations in one way or another. Therefore, it may exclude some of the mainstream cultural events held in Wellington.

The next question was only displayed for respondents who had attended at least one international cultural event in the preceding 12 months. This group were asked to share the highlights of some of the events they had attended. In total, 95 out of the 121 respondents responded to this open-ended question. All the responses were analysed using the reflexive thematic analysis (TA) method (Braun et al., 2019). As a result, five main themes were generated. In Table 5, each theme is accompanied by five sample responses. The themes have been ordered top-to-bottom from the most to the least frequent.

**Table 5.** Highlights of the international events for the respondents

Theme	Sample responses
<b>Film</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The French Film Festival: a variety of genres and many different parts of and views on French culture. A good way to avoid the stereotypes</li> <li>• Seeing Lotte Reiniger's "Adventures of Prince Achmed" on the big screen. Teac Damsa's "Swan Lake"</li> <li>• Film screening at High Commission of Brazil</li> <li>• French and Italian film festivals</li> <li>• The Ghibli film festival</li> </ul>
<b>Food</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tasting a wide array of Indonesian dishes during the 2018 Indonesian Food Festival and taking part in the tea ceremony during a Japanese Festival.</li> <li>• Italian food festival run by Italian embassy</li> <li>• French food festival on the waterfront</li> <li>• Enjoyed sampling sake at the Japanese embassy</li> <li>• Pierogi at Polish festival!</li> </ul>
<b>Music and Performing Arts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dancing styles from other countries, international component of Fringe and Arts festivals</li> <li>• Some classical music at a Goethe Institute event</li> <li>• Ballet performance Voix de Femmes</li> <li>• Dancing at Africa day event</li> <li>• Italian Jewish music hosted by Italian embassy. Polish musician hosted at Meow by Polish embassy</li> </ul>
<b>Experiencing new cultures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to immerse yourself in another culture for a little while and sample their food and customs.</li> <li>• I went to Africa Day in May where there was an immediacy of experience in cultural performance, and there were a lot of important speeches about securing the prosperity and safety of the African community in Wellington in the face of discrimination. The highlight for me is seeing cultural pride.</li> <li>• Being exposed to other cultures, their traditions / protocols both formal and informal.</li> <li>• Sitting in the Dell listening to discussions around climate change</li> <li>• Dia de Los Muertos @ Mexican Embassy</li> </ul>
<b>Literature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readers and Writers talks were very good, great writers!</li> <li>• Book launch at Italian Embassy, Writers Week</li> <li>• NZ book festival- author Tara Westover, Laneway Festival (The war on drugs), XX Auckland, The Select (the sun also rises)</li> <li>• Book Sale at Alliance Francaise</li> <li>• Palestinian spoken word poet, &amp; poetry openings/launches at Unity</li> </ul>

In addition to the responses which fell into these five categories, many respondents pointed out a specific event which they had particularly enjoyed. The most frequently mentioned events were the New Zealand International Film Festival, French Film Festival, Chinese New Year festivities, Diwali, and Africa Day.

### ***Participation in Writers Week Events***

The second item of the ‘international engagement’ construct dealt with participation in the Writers Week events. According to the New Zealand Festival’s summary report for investors (New Zealand Festival, 2018), 31 percent of Wellington City residents attended at least one event at the 2018 Festival, of which Writers Week is part. However, it is not known what proportion attended a Writers Week event. The survey respondents were first asked if they had ever attended Writers Week events. More than half (52.2 percent) had attended at least one event in the past. The results of Chi-squared test revealed a significant positive correlation between participation in Writers Week events and three of the demographic variables, namely age ( $df=6$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), number of years living in Wellington ( $df=4$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), and number of fiction books read ( $df=4$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Older respondents, those who had lived in Wellington for longer, and avid readers seem to be more likely than others to attend Writers Week events.

When asked if there were any international speakers at the events they attended, 89 percent of the respondents answered ‘yes’. The respondents reported that most of the international speakers in those events were from North America and the UK (65 respondents each), followed by Australia (48 respondents), Europe (42 respondents), Asia (23 respondents), and Africa (20 respondents). These numbers show a perception of English-speaking writers being most strongly represented at Writers Week, even among international speakers. Note that since they are based on the experiences of individual readers and some of those experiences date back to years before, these figures do not represent the actual composition of international authors.

To determine the actual number of international authors attending Writers Week since 1986, I went through documents available at the national archives section of the Alexander Turnbull Library<sup>31</sup> and material accessible at the headquarters of the New Zealand Festival in Wellington. I finished compiling the list of international authors in December 2018. This list includes novelists, poets, short story writers, and a few literary scholars from around the world. Given New Zealand’s close historical and political ties to the other major English-speaking countries, especially the UK and Australia, and the huge presence of books published by UK and

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<sup>31</sup> The Alexander Turnbull Library holds New Zealand’s national documentary heritage collections.

US publishers in New Zealand's libraries and bookstores, I expected to see a large proportion of guests from these countries. To test this assumption, I analysed the full programmes of Writers Week and came up with a break-down of the nationalities of international guests. In cases where two nationalities were mentioned for a writer, I added both to the database. The most common second nationalities of binational writers were British, American, Canadian, Australian, or New Zealander, all of which fall within the English-speaking world. The data presented in Table 6 covers the period between the first Writers Week in 1986 and the most recent one in March 2018.

**Table 6.** Nationalities of the international guests invited to Writers Week from 1986 to 2018

<b>Country or region<sup>32</sup></b>	<b>No. of invited authors</b>
UK	68
US	43
Australia	34
Canada	19
Europe	24
Pacific Islands	12
Asia	11
Africa	10
Middle East	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>

The data presented in Table 6 confirm the initial hypothesis about the strong bias towards English-speaking writers at the New Zealand Festival's Writers Week. More than 73 percent of the international authors invited to Writers Week in the last 32 years came from the 'Big Four' countries of the Anglosphere. This is not to mention the writers who were born in non-English-

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<sup>32</sup> Countries with fewer than ten guests were merged into larger categories

speaking countries but were raised and educated in an English-speaking country and therefore write in English. Apart from the previously mentioned factors including historical and political ties and publishing influence, shared language and similar cultural background make it easier for festival organisers to communicate with English-speaking writers before, during, and after the festival.

Given the underrepresentation of non-English-speaking guests at Writers Week, it seems unlikely for this biennial festival to have a notable impact on the way readers in New Zealand approach literature in translation. To put this hypothesis to test, I analysed the participants' responses to a question about how attending Writers Week has influenced their reading choices. Another way to look at the short-term impact of Writers Week on the book choices of the respondents would be to analyse the sales records of booksellers, both during and after the festival. I gave up on this idea for two reasons. First, most booksellers in Wellington seemed reluctant to disclose their sales data. Second, such data could at best reflect the immediate impact of attending an event on the audience, without revealing its long-term impact on their reading habits. That is why I decided to put this question to the respondents themselves. What follows is a summary of the findings.

### ***Impact of Writers Week on the Respondents' Reading Choices***

Weber (2015) criticises the overly simplistic conceptualisation of festival audience as a homogenous group of likeminded people. She also questions the usefulness of surveys administered following festival events, mainly because of "the fact that these surveys focus on one event only... which "prevents this kind of research from addressing broader, more complex assumptions about festivals' social function, and the audiences who attend them" (p. 85). To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Writers Week on the short-term and long-term reading choices of the attendees, I inserted the following as the final question of the Writers Week section: *How did attending Writers Week events influence your subsequent book choices?*

Since this was an open-ended question and no options were provided, no categories could be coded beforehand. One-hundred and one responses were received for this question, which means over 70 percent of the festivalgoers submitted some kind of open-ended response. To categorise the responses, I went through all the open-ended comments and placed the ones with the same theme together in one table. I repeated this procedure twice more, making sure all the thematically similar responses had been grouped together. This process resulted in four response

groups. Some of the responses could be placed in more than one category, but I considered their core argument for categorisation purposes.

The first group of responses (n=34) pointed to the direct impact of Writers Week events on the participants' subsequent book-buying and book-reading choices. While most respondents in this group mentioned how attending an event had impacted their subsequent choices, some felt that even just seeing an author's name on the programme had made them curious about that author's work. The following are sample responses from this category:

- *"Would often end up buying the author's book."*
- *"I bought a couple of books by speakers at events in the pop-up bookstore (run by Unity I think) after the events; for other sessions, I made a mental note of the author's name to follow up on their work later."*
- *"I bought that author's novel - which had been translated."*
- *"I bought everything Nnedi Okorafor wrote that was available in NZ after hearing her speak. Similar for Korean graphic novel writer. I might never have read these books (loved them) if I hadn't heard authors speaking first."*
- *"Yes, I have read several books by the authors featured (even though I didn't always make it to their event)."*

This was the most frequent response category. Book sales are an important part of a literary festival, and the combination of author talks followed by book sales has proven to help sales even after the festival comes to an end. This effect was mentioned by Unity Book's Tilly Lloyd in our interview for this study.

The second group of responses (n=18) discussed the role of Writers Week in broadening the respondents' reading interests and introducing them to new authors/genres, which has traditionally been one of the main objectives of literary festivals. Both expert interviewees in this study also mentioned 'broadening the reading horizons of the audience' as an important mission of Writers Week. Some of the responses belonging to this category are presented below:

- *"It exposed me to new authors, and serendipitously to new forms/works."*
- *"Expanded my choices into different authors and genres."*
- *"Intrigue into the books was heightened after the events."*
- *"I often go to hear authors speak whom I've never read, and if I enjoy their session will buy their books. If I have signed up to the whole week, I'll be more experimental in my selection of speakers and step outside of my general reading comfort zone."*

- *“Read more e.g. Indian or Caribbean writing.”*

While some of the responses in this category draw a direct line between attending an event and becoming interested in the works of a certain author, others point to broader influences such as interest in an entire genre or curiosity to read books from certain countries. The latter group of responses indicate the importance of writer selection not only in attracting a larger audience and influencing their short-term reading choices, but also in creating long-term interest in books that the audience might otherwise have ignored. The responses also showed a high level of awareness among a considerable group of festivalgoers regarding the gaps in their reading and their conscious effort to fill some of those gaps by attending Writers Week events.

For a third group of respondents, Writers Week was more about the chance to see and hear the authors whose books they had already read and enjoyed (n=13). In most cases, it was the respondents’ previous reading which had guided their selection of events and the events often cemented their interest in certain types of books. The following are some of the responses from this category:

- *“I was already interested in Nordic Noir for several years and then I had the opportunity to see Jo Nesbo. It hasn’t increased my interest in Nordic writing but has confirmed it.”*
- *“I already knew the books of the authors who were speaking.”*
- *“I usually pick events based on my reading preferences.”*
- *“Was already a fan. Made more so.”*

In contrast to the second response category which portrayed encounters with the literary unknown, the third category highlights an instinctive desire in many readers to see and hear the writers they already admire. While this encounter can, occasionally, lead to a loss of interest in the previously loved writer, it is more likely to reinforce that interest, as seen in the above comments. Anecdotally speaking, this group of audience members are likely to contribute the most to a literary festival’s box office. This factor was mentioned during my interviews with Writers Week coordinators.

A fourth group of respondents (n=16) believed that attending the Writers Week events had had no effect on their subsequent book choices. This was expressed through statements like *“it didn’t influence me at all,” “no impact, but was interesting,”* and *“no influence, but enjoyed all the same.”* As will be explained later, a biennial literary festival cannot be expected to have a significant impact on every attendee. Festivals, literary or otherwise, are ultimately a form of entertainment primarily designed to provide an enjoyable experience for the audience. Also, the



impact of attending a Writers Week event may not be noticed until months or years after the actual event, which is why longitudinal studies are critical.

The remaining responses (n=20) could not be fitted into any of the above categories, but that does not make them any less important. These include the peculiar impacts of attending the Writers Week events on some of the respondents:

- *“Putting a face to a name - got to know more local authors.”*
- *“Looked at NZ authors more.”*
- *“There’s no obvious cause and effect for me, all choices are just part of keeping an open mind in reading and social/cultural activities.”*
- *“Hearing authors talk about their work is a lot different than blurb and NBIs, so it made me consider some books that I had heard of but had dismissed due to a quick perusal.”*
- *“Positively - not only those particular authors, but other authors they spoke of as influences and inspiration.”*
- *“In the same way that subscribing to reading blogs does.”*

Finally, here is what one respondent had to say about the impact of attending a Writers Week event featuring one of his favourite authors:

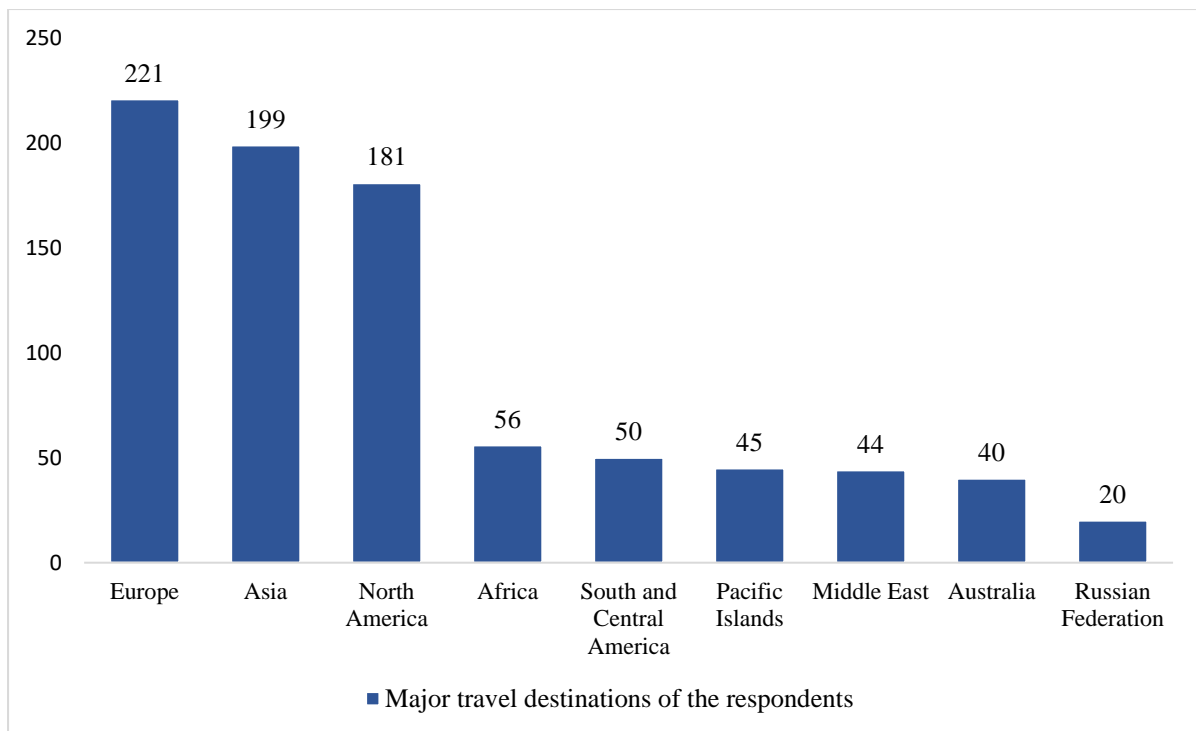
- *“I decided not to buy their book.”*

While many of the respondents referred to the impact of Writers Week on broadening their reading in terms of author/genre, very few respondents specifically commented on Writer Week’s role in introducing them to foreign literatures. Considering the clear underrepresentation of non-English-speaking writers at the festival, this finding is unsurprising.

There is no doubt that a biennial festival can only have so much impact on people’s reading interests, but it seems like Writers Week is doing a far better job at introducing new authors and avant-garde writing styles within the English-speaking world than showcasing non-English literary productions that have found their way into English through translation.

### ***Travelling Overseas***

The last item of the ‘international engagement’ construct dealt with the respondents’ overseas travel. In addition to the previously mentioned factors (rise of influential authors and media coverage), travelling abroad can create an interest in the cultural production of a certain country or region, in this case stories originating in other languages and cultures. The respondents were first asked about the countries and regions they had visited (Fig. 11).



**Figure 10.** Major travel destinations of the respondents

About 98.5 percent had travelled outside New Zealand. Europe was the most frequently visited region by the survey respondents, followed closely by Asia and North America. The appearance of Australia close to the bottom of this list was surprising at first, as the 2018 data provided by Skyscanner<sup>33</sup> shows that Australia is by far the most popular travel destination for New Zealanders. However, when looking at the survey items more closely, I noticed that Australia had not been listed as a response option for this question. This absence was unintended, and it probably came about during the survey creation stage on Qualtrics. The 40 respondents who reported having visited Australia are perhaps part of a larger group of respondents who had visited New Zealand's north-western neighbour.

In response to a follow-up question, 82 percent of the respondents who had travelled abroad believed they had become interested in reading stories from/about the places they visited. It is hard to imagine a one-to-one correspondence between travel destinations and reading interests, simply because multiple events may spark an interest or intensify an already-existing interest in a specific genre or type of books, some of which cannot be pinpointed at all. Nonetheless, this finding remains significant. Some of the respondents added a comment to their response:

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.skyscanner.co.nz/news/most-popular-international-holidays>

*“I specifically buy a small book from the area as my main travel memento - France, Ireland, Quebec (French), USA.”* (32, Female, European New Zealander)

*“I have travelled to 70+ countries, and have read books from/about many of them (some fiction, some non-fiction).”* (39, Female, European)

*“Népal, Malaysia, Japan, India, Spain and more. I make a point of reading fiction from and about different countries I visit, especially when I’m there.”* (49, Female, European New Zealander)

*“Any place I’ve visited.”* (55, Female, European New Zealander)

The correlation between travelling abroad and reading interests could have implications for the marketing of translated books. While most brick-and-mortar bookstores have a separate shelf for travel guides as a popular non-fiction topic, the survey findings point to the potential for marketing translated fiction as a guide to another country or culture. This could take the form of using travel data (e.g. popular destinations) as a guide for highlighting books from/about certain countries or regions at any given time. This is a common phenomenon in many countries, where bookshops have on offer the English translations of books written by authors from that country. These books are largely aimed at tourists who would like to buy a book written by a local author as their travel memento (see the first comment above by a 32-year-old female respondent).

On responding ‘yes’ to the previous question (i.e. *Have you become interested in reading stories from any of the countries/regions that you visited?*), respondents were asked to name the countries or regions with the most influence on their reading interests. Sixty-nine distinct countries and regions were mentioned in response to this question. Table 7 presents a full list of these places alongside the number of times they were mentioned. The countries/regions appearing in the same row were mentioned an equal number of times by the respondents. For instance, Canada, Europe, and Scotland were each mentioned eight times, whereas China and Russia were mentioned five times each. Similar to Table 4, the responses presented in Table 7 have not been merged into larger categories, because the aim of the question was to see how the respondents articulate the countries/regions with the most influence on their reading interest.

**Table 7.** Countries and regions mentioned by the respondents as having influenced their fiction-reading interests

#	Country or region	Number of mentions
1	France	25
2	Japan	21
3	Australia	17
4	Africa	15
5	Asia, Italy, Spain, United States	14
6	India	13
7	Middle East, Pacific Islands, South America, Vietnam	9
8	Canada, Europe, Scotland	8
9	Ireland	7
10	UK	6
11	China, Russia	5
12	Argentina, Cambodia, Germany, Korea, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand	4
13	Brazil, Czech Republic, Indonesia, Israel, Sri Lanka	3
14	Chile, Colombia, Eastern Europe, Egypt, Greece, Guatemala, Iceland, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Morocco, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Scandinavia, Tibet, Turkey	2
15	Antarctica, Austria, Bolivia, Bhutan, Caribbean, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Hungary, Iran, Laos, Latvia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Tahiti, Taiwan, The Netherlands	1

Note that the data in Table 4 reflect the respondents' favourite countries or regions for fiction, whereas Table 7 represents the countries or regions which have had the most impact on the respondents' reading interests *after* they had visited those places. Therefore, Table 4 data provide a more accurate picture of favourite countries and regions for fiction, while Table 7 data show the feasibility of a correlation between travelling and reading interests. Comparing the results in Table 7 and those in Table 4 revealed some similarities, but also notable differences between the two datasets.

First of all, respondents went into more detail when asked to name the countries or regions that had sparked their reading interest. This was reflected in 69 separate categories in Table 7,

compared to only 30 categories in Table 4. When asked earlier about their favourite countries or regions in terms of fiction, 64 of the respondents had mentioned North America (n=35) and Great Britain (n=29), making them the most popular regions (without counting mentions of individual countries within the UK). However, when asked to think of countries or regions they had visited with the most impact on their reading interests, respondents' top two answers were France and Japan, while the US and Great Britain placed only fifth and tenth, respectively. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that in their home country, New Zealanders are already active consumers of cultural products from the UK and US. Therefore, they do not necessarily need to visit those places to find an appreciation of the culture and develop an interest in their cultural products. The opposite is likely to be true for non-anglophone countries or regions (e.g. France, Japan, and much of Africa). As well as these differences, important similarities can also be observed between the two tables. For instance, Japan, Africa, and India are in roughly equivalent positions on both.

Some respondents were even more specific about the places which had influenced their reading interests, as in the following case:

*"After visiting the Tower of London at age 13, I thereafter became immensely interested in fiction (and non-fiction) based on histories of the European monarchies."* (23, Female, European New Zealander)

While most respondents elaborated on how they think travelling affects their reading choices, two of the respondents talked about the possible impact of reading books from other cultures on their choice of travel destinations. A 27-year-old respondent said the following:

*"Translated fiction is wonderful and such an important part of literary fiction and culture. I wish that I was able to speak another language and visit some of the countries that I encountered in some of my favourite books to get a greater appreciation for the culture and translation process."* (27, Female, European New Zealander)

The idea of a possible connection between reading interests and travel destinations is well established and has given rise to literary tours. Most such tours take enthusiasts to places where their beloved authors lived, spent time, or found inspiration. For instance, visitors to Sweden can go on a Millennium tour which takes them through some of the fictional sites mentioned in Stieg Larsson's hugely popular *Millennium* trilogy, including "Blomkvist's home, his local cafe, Salander's favourite tattoo parlour, Inspector Bublanski's synagogue, Millennium magazine's offices and, finally, Salander's luxury apartment" (Richards, 2014).

The findings of the survey of Wellington readers would have been more representative of the total population of readers if the sample were randomly chosen. The current sample is clearly above average in terms of level of education, with 85% of the respondents having completed some type of university degree. Also, the distribution of the survey through the book clubs and a local bookstore's social media could mean that avid readers are over-represented in the sample. As inherent in any reception study of this kind, it is impossible to measure the exact representativeness of the captured data in terms of the broader category of Wellington readers. Future research can uncover the perceptions and attitudes of readers with lower socioeconomic status towards translated literature. Studies of reader attitudes in other parts of New Zealand can also add an interesting comparative side to this topic.

## 5. Writers Week Findings

In this and the two chapters that follow, I will present and discuss the data collected through my semi-structured interviews with representatives of three book-related institutions in Wellington: Writers Week, Unity Books, and WCL. I will start off by presenting the findings of my interviews with two Writers Week coordinators, which will be followed by the findings of the interviews with staff members at Unity Books and WCL.

Although the common, overall objective of the interviews was to generate data on the policies and practices of these institutions for selecting and promoting translated fiction, the distinctive natures of the institutions meant that each interview had a different focus (see chapter three for more details about the interview data collection process). Chapters five, six, and seven devote more space to *describing* the practices of the selected entities with regards to translated fiction than *evaluating* them. The reasons for this primarily descriptive approach have been outlined earlier in the thesis, the main one being “the sparseness of previous research in the area.” However, I will finish off each chapter with a discussion of the findings where I evaluate the practices of the respective institution and compare them to those of the other two. Chapter eight (conclusion) will contain a more holistic evaluation of the survey and interview findings.

While the interviews themselves are the focus of this phase of the study, documented instances of the selection and promotion of translated fiction by these institutions will also be incorporated. These come in different forms for each institution. For Writers Week, for example, final festival programmes will be used to complement the interviews with coordinators. In the case of WCL, physical displays and blogs that promote translated fiction are of interest, similar to the way in which categorisations and displays in Unity Books’ physical and online stores are useful tools for complementing interview findings. Certain open-ended responses from the survey of Wellington readers will also be presented where they provide useful comparisons with interview excerpts.

Writers Week was chosen as one of the three institutions that contribute to shaping Wellingtonians’ reading habits and, by extension, influencing their perceptions of different types of books. In my interviews with two coordinators of Writers Week, Chris Price (1996-2006) and Claire Mabey (2020-ongoing), I sought to focus on how, and to what extent, writers in translation have been incorporated into the festival’s programme over the years. I was also interested in possible impediments to bringing non-English-speaking writers to Wellington for Writers Week, both in terms of logistics and reception by the local audience. This helps explain why the

interviews with Writers Week staff covered a broader range of topics compared to those with representatives from the other two institutions.

In some parts of the interviews, the focus on translated books and writers in translation gave way to more general aspects of organising a literary festival. I did my best not to interrupt the flow of conversation and to allow the interviewees to answer the questions from their own viewpoints and based on their experiences, rather than directing them towards a certain response. It is important to remember that writers in translation are only one of the categories considered by Writers Week coordinators when curating a programme. Therefore, a conversation solely about this category would have been neither practical nor constructive, especially given the plummeting number of international guests in recent editions of Writers Week. Moreover, considering translated fiction in the wider context of Writers Week results in a more realistic evaluation of the status quo and helps illuminate future directions.

### **5.1 General Format of Writers Week from 1986 to 2020**

Writers Week has been part of the biennial New Zealand Festival of the Arts since 1986. As one of the three major literary festivals in New Zealand alongside Word Christchurch and Auckland Writers' Festival, Wellington's Writers Week is still the most important literary event in the capital, drawing the highest number of celebrated international writers into New Zealand. Its status has been challenged in recent years by the likes of Verb Festival and LitCrawl, although these newly established festivals mostly focus on showcasing New Zealand-based writers.<sup>34</sup> Before presenting the main themes that emerged from the interviews, I will briefly discuss two major changes that Writers Week has undergone since its first edition in 1986: the shift from a literary focus to a thematic one and the shift from international writers towards New Zealand writers.

#### ***From Literary Fiction to Nonfiction***

Writers Week has gradually moved away from an author-based literary outlook towards a thematic approach. Whereas earlier versions of Writers Week mostly focused on the works of individual authors and Q&A sessions through a moderator, its recent editions have seen a rise in thematic group sessions, or occasionally individual author sessions aligned with the overall theme of the Week. This change has resulted in greater representation of nonfiction writers. The theme-based approach to writer selection has previously been adopted by writers' weeks in Sydney, Melbourne,

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<sup>34</sup> In one of our email exchanges, Claire Mabey, the co-founder of LitCrawl, described it as follows: "LitCrawl is a one-night celebration of writers, ideas, and Wellington's indie spaces. We programme 26 events across 26 venues in three phases. Starting at 6pm and finishing at 9.15pm, audiences have approximately eight events to choose from in each phase. The experience is a little like a pick-a-path of interesting events. All events are entry by donation, so it is as accessible as possible."



and Auckland, among others. Not all stakeholders view this approach positively. Writing in support of Adelaide Festival's "literary focus", Lurie (2004, p. 11) states that

Adelaide also boasts a Festival of Ideas in the years between Arts Festivals. This means that Writers' Week can focus on the genuinely literary - poetry, fiction, essays, works in translation - rather than including books on "topics", which both Melbourne and Sydney festivals rely on to keep their own audience numbers up.

Although the term "genuinely literary" can be critiqued for exclusivising literature, the statement usefully highlights one side of the debate. In her interview for this study, Price also compared the literary focus of Writers Week in its past and current editions:

*There was a strong literary emphasis to the Wellington festival over that time. It was not so much the festival of ideas. I think the rise of nonfiction came after this period. Certainly, while I was there, there was a strong emphasis on literary fiction, poetry, and biography, and much less on current affairs that you might find now at a typical writers' festival.*

Price's statement is supported by archival evidence. The impact of this trend on the representation of writers in translation remains to be studied, but it is likely to have marginalised translated writers even further. The main reason for this marginalisation is the lower share of translations in nonfiction compared to fiction in the English-language book market. The Translation Database hosts diachronic data regarding translated titles published for the first time in English in the US. According to this Database, 2577 translated titles were published in the fiction category between 2008 and 2014, compared to only 586 titles in nonfiction. This difference grew larger in subsequent years. From 2015 to 2020, an impressive 3049 translated fiction titles were published, over six times the number of published nonfiction titles (n=492). I tried WorldCat's advanced search to find some data about the total number of published books in the US during those periods. While WorldCat does not provide country-specific data, it does provide a general overview of the publishing landscape in any language. For example, around four million nonfiction titles were published in English between 2008 and 2014, which is almost ten times the number of fiction titles published in the same period. This data is by no means accurate, but it shows that nonfiction titles in English far outnumber fiction titles, which again highlights the disproportionately low number of nonfiction titles in translation.

### ***Shift Towards New Zealand Writers***

Since its first edition in 1986, Writers Week has gradually shifted from a predominantly international outlook towards a New Zealand focus. The former approach is most visible in the

1994 edition, whereas the latter has continued to grow up to the present day. A closer look at the programme for the 1994 Writers Week indicated that only six of the 26 authors/poets (i.e. 23 percent) appearing on the final programme were based in New Zealand, the remaining 20 coming from overseas and falling into the ‘international writers’ category. Of these overseas guests, seven came from the UK, four from Australia, four from the US, one from Canada, one from Lebanon, and three had dual nationalities.<sup>35</sup> Price remarked:

*If you measured it by writers from outside the Anglosphere, numbers would be pretty low, but if we include in the Anglosphere former colonial countries where there has been an English-speaking education, you would include writers from Nigeria, Tonga, Fiji, and India. Carrol Philips, for example, was British-African.*

Price also pointed to the importance of how the invited writers, especially international ones, related to each other:

*There was a kind of camaraderie amongst the writers which we worked hard to create. You cannot know what chemistry there is going to be between the writers before they hit the ground. We did make sure that they would have the opportunity to meet each other outside of the events. In the early days of the committee, they went up to Patricia Grace’s marae at Pukerua Bay, and it was something that many of them found quite memorable and moving.*

This comment reflects the extremely diverse composition of Writers Week in its earlier editions, which warranted such rapport-building practices. A look at the programmes from 1994 to 2020 shows a steady increase in the number of New Zealand writers. In 1998, for example, almost half of the guests were New Zealanders. From 2004 onwards, New Zealand guests began to outnumber international guests, a trend which peaked in the 2018 and 2020 editions, where 83 percent and 89 percent of guest writers were New Zealand-based, respectively. Of the 152 guest writers and thinkers featured at the 2018 edition of Writers Week, 130 were representing New Zealand. Only five guest writers from non-English-speaking countries attended the festival in 2018.

As mentioned above, I interviewed two individuals from Writers Week: Chris Price and Claire Mabey. While roughly the same questions were put to both interviewees, each of them focused on certain questions more than others, with some themes touched on by both. In the

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<sup>35</sup> As mentioned elsewhere in the thesis, some writers who appear on the final programme may not have attended the festival. For instance, the Australian poet and educator, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, appeared on the 1994 programme, but passed away in September 1993 and therefore did not make it to Wellington. However, the programmes are still good indicators of the balance of participants in each edition.

following sections, I will discuss some of these shared themes with an eye to the research question: *What are the policies and practices of Writers Week for selecting and promoting translated fiction?*

## **5.2 General Considerations for Selecting Writers**

Early in the interviews, I put the following question to Price and Mabey: *Can you please walk me through the process of selecting guest writers?* Both interviewees started by describing general considerations for selecting guest writers. These considerations may or may not apply to the selection of writers in translation. I will present the issues specific to writers in translation later in this section. The first consideration discussed by the interviewees was Wellington's literary landscape.

### ***Wellington's Literary Landscape***

In response to a question about what distinguishes the literary landscape of Wellington from the rest of New Zealand, Mabey outlined the following features:

*In Wellington, there is a particularly rich poetry community. So, there are a lot of poets working and writing here and a lot of great publishing here for poetry. I always try and have at least one international poet and a showcase of New Zealand poetry...I think because of the connection with the International Institute of Modern Letters, and the writing schools at Victoria University, Whitireia, and Massey University, as well as the publishing coming out of Victoria University Press, we have a strong literary fiction audience and also heritage through the Writers Week. I think Writers Week has been good at showcasing literary fiction. Also, those interesting writers who are pushing form and technique in writing. So, I look at literary fiction writers and what would serve a well-read audience.*

Mabey's statement about Wellington's poetry scene aligns with available book sales figures. Since June 2018, Unity Books has been publishing its weekly bestseller charts in *The Spinoff*. The data for Unity Auckland and Unity Wellington are presented separately, making it possible to compare the popular titles in each store. The bestsellers list in Wellington almost always includes one or two poetry collections, whereas the Auckland list is populated by general fiction and nonfiction. In November 2020, for example, Karlo Mila's *Goddess Muscle* and Bill Manhire's *Wow*, both poetry collections, topped the charts for Unity Books Wellington. In the same period, a nonfiction book about climate change was the bestseller at Unity Books Auckland. The caption for "The Unity Books bestseller chart for the week ending 11 June 2021" reads, "Poetry at number one,

again.” A closer look will indicate that a New Zealand novel was the bestseller at Unity Books Auckland, whereas Unity Wellington’s bestselling title was a poetry collection. The data for other weeks reflect more or less the same pattern. While the importance of local literary trends cannot be overstated, one should keep in mind the small size of New Zealand’s book market and the impact that that can have on shaping bestseller lists. In some cases, selling a few hundred copies during or immediately after launch events can place a book on the list. Price put this as follows:

*The dirty little secret of NZ bestseller lists is that the numbers are not that high. It’s possible for a poet who has a launch, and I say this as someone who has had this happen to me, to appear on the bestseller list. I think a couple of hundred books can get you up to the bottom of the bestsellers list in any given week.*

An interesting connection can be made between Mabey’s earlier commentary on the poetry scene and Price’s comment below. A published poet herself, Price made several references to the high status of poetry in Wellington, and by extension at Writers Week. She recalled Writers Week’s emphasis on poetry, especially international poetry, as a competitive advantage that has faded in recent years. In response to a question about her favourite editions of Writers Week during her time as executive coordinator, Price said:

*I have a few personal favourites. Just numbers-wise, there was an astonishing number of writers and poets in 1994. We used to be able to have an international poetry event called ‘poetry international’ with four or five international poets, now the maximum would be one or two international poets at the Writers Week in Wellington. So, for me personally, the emphasis on poetry made it a golden year... I do think that was a distinct emphasis of this festival that has not been reproduced elsewhere and has not been reproduced since this time either.*

Price also mentioned the impact of the presence of international poets on the development and writing style of a specific group of New Zealand poets:

*I do think maybe the poets are an interesting case, because you hardly ever got to see international poets at any other time. I do think there were poets who might be thought of as disproportionately influential on New Zealand writing, simply because we had seen them in person. One example would be the Canadian poet, Phyllis Webb, who I think was a significant influence both on Andrew Johnston and Diana Walker as a result of that visit. They may or may not have encountered her work before that, but they were both heavily*

*influenced. So, it's not just the general reading public, it feeds through the local writers' community as well.*

The impact of writers' festivals on the development of aspiring writers has been discussed in past research, too. Johanson and Freeman (2012, p. 311), for example, interviewed a sample of attendees at the 2009 Eye of the Storm Writers' Festival in Alice Springs, a remote town in Australia's Northern Territory, asking them about their motivation(s) for attending that festival. A few respondents mentioned the festival's positive influence on illuminating their writing journeys:

Two respondents confessed, somewhat shyly, to considering themselves to be writers and to seeking insight into the writing process, and confirmation of the validity of their own writing practices at the festival. 'Just trying to get some kind of insight into what other people write and read ... and how they go about it; what their motivation is for writing,' one participant said.

This comment and Price's statement both point to the potential for literary festivals to broaden the literary horizons of the receiving society by displaying fresh writing styles and new ways of looking at the world. This role was also one of the factors most frequently mentioned by survey respondents in the current study when asked about the immediate and long-term impacts of attending Writers Week.

### ***Catering to the Wellington Audience***

Like most other public events, literary festivals will benefit from catering to as wide-ranging an audience as possible. So, it was no surprise that "Writers Week's overarching goal of catering to the Wellington audience" was another theme in both interviews. This means curating a programme that would resonate with an audience predominantly consisting of English-speaking monolinguals who are above the national averages for socioeconomic status and cultural participation. Also, living in the capital city means higher exposure to policymaking and policymakers, which can lead to an enhanced interest in political topics, among others. Early in the interview, Mabey mentioned the importance of considering the Wellington audience in curating any local arts and literary festival. Later, I asked her the following question: "Can you please explain a bit about your perception of the Wellington audience and how you get to know what the audience wants to see and hear?" Mabey's response was twofold. In the first part, she described her efforts to cater to different reading tastes through a balanced Writers programme:

*What happens is I have a list of writers who I think would resonate well with Wellington audiences; and that's across a range of genres and subject matter...It's about trying to*

*balance out fiction and nonfiction, and then within those two big categories, balancing out, say, poetry and novels, memoir, history, and politics, trying to balance out interests, so that there is something for all segments of an audience, most particularly in Wellington, but also throughout New Zealand and also overseas, so that we have a sense of many voices.*

This comment reflects efforts to make the programme appealing to diverse audiences. The important point is festival organisers' perception of *audience*, in particular the distinction between established and potential audiences. Catering for the former is mostly about replicating a tested recipe, whereas appealing to the latter would involve, potentially costly, trial and error. Writers Week's strategy in this respect could be revealed through a content analysis of recent programmes in conjunction with the demographic data of the audience.

The second part of Mabey's response touched on some of the more general topics that might interest the Wellington audience:

*I look at the concerns that are facing our society, including climate change, matters of indigenous worldviews and politics. I had a big think about construction and engineering in Wellington, but actually the authors I really wanted here to talk about cityscaping and building, and particularly for a future of climate uncertainty, weren't able to come...I try to think about what concerns Wellingtonians, particularly as a place where government is right up the road. There is a lot of policymakers here, a lot of people who are interested in public service; so, I think about that.*

An interesting aspect of this comment is the broad range of topics Mabey considers when thinking about potential invitees. Among other things, the comment shows the degree of local knowledge required to curate an arts or literary programme. However, important aspects of Wellington's status as a multicultural capital city are missing not only from this comment, but also more generally from the interviews with Price and Mabey. I will mention some of those aspects in the discussion of findings below.

### ***Consultation with Stakeholders***

Both interviewees pointed to their consultation with libraries, booksellers, and other book-industry stakeholders in compiling a list of writers. Price, for instance, described the involvement of libraries and booksellers as follows:

*When there was a librarian on the committee, the librarian would have an anecdotal sense of borrowing records at the library. The bookseller would also have their own sense of*

*“Well, we sell a lot of this person, but we don’t even stock that person” ...By the time I left the committee, the bookseller, which was by that stage Unity Books, would come along right from the beginning and feed in their knowledge about who was interesting out there in the world and who their customers were asking them for.*

Mabey similarly emphasised ongoing consultation with certain book-related institutions:

*I have a lot of conversation with our bookseller, Unity Books. They are at the forefront of book sales, and they know very intimately what their audiences are buying...I also talk to the libraries about what books are popular. I have a Nielsen data login, so I can look up authors and forthcoming books and things like that, but I also do talk to the libraries about the books that are repeatedly checked out...I talk to publishers all the time about what’s coming and what they think is interesting, because they have such a wealth of knowledge and they know their forthcoming lists and their authors. Not only do they know what they’re publishing, but they know their availability as well...So, I do quite a lot of research across different ways of trying to figure out who we need to be serving with a programme like this.*

This comment entails an interesting mix of local and international sources of information, that is, Wellington bookshops and libraries on the one hand, and publishers on the other. It also reflects the close-knit nature of Wellington’s literary scene and vindicates the decision to interview representatives from three separate book-related institutions for this study. Changes to the structure of Writers Week mean that consultations with other stakeholders often take place informally whereas in its earlier versions, representatives from Unity Books and WCL were present at the meetings of the executive committee. The above comments also show the tension between what the audience is likely to enjoy and what selection committees want to present. While these two can overlap, they are sometimes divergent. Bookstores, libraries, and online book sales databases can provide extensive information about the types of books that are popular with readers, but they are of little help in furthering trend-setting efforts.

The last point of interest in Mabey’s comment is the last sentence: *“I do quite a lot of research across different ways of trying to figure out who we need to be serving with a programme like this”*. Based on this and other excerpts in the current section, Mabey’s research appears to aim primarily at identifying books that have already been shown to resonate with the anglophone audience and at inviting some of those authors to Writers Week, as well as introducing emerging writers to the Wellington audience.

Mabey also described another form of indirect consultation. In response to one of my questions (i.e. *Can you please walk me through the process of selecting guest writers?*), she said: *“I did a lot of invitations based on the ideas that the guest curators were putting forward with their own multidisciplinary programmes”*. She had previously explained the role of guest curators in planning the 2020 New Zealand Festival:

*For 2020, there are three guest curators for the festival programme. Lemi Ponifasio in week one, Laurie Anderson in week two, and Bret McKenzie in week three. So, for the first time, the Writers programme had to somewhat interact and respond to those three different programmes... I had a lot of conversations with Marnie Karmelita, the festival’s creative director, about what those three people were thinking and what themes, subjects, and artists they were most interested in, so that I could think about what conversations and writers might interact with those ideas.*

Although this structure was introduced for the first time in 2020, it reflects longer-standing efforts to create synergy between different segments of the New Zealand Festival. While the programmers’ visions and ideas ultimately shape the format of each edition of Writers Week, the influence of outside forces should not be overlooked.

### ***Outside Influences***

Both Mabey and Price emphasised that final decisions for inviting guests to Writers Week are made by the programme manager and in earlier editions, by the executive committee. However, programme managers do consider suggestions on a case-by-case basis. It seems that the extent and form of these suggestions have changed throughout the years. In earlier editions where Price served as executive coordinator, Writers Week had official relationships with several international cultural institutes and foreign embassies in Wellington. These relationships played a role in the committee’s decisions to invite writers, as reflected in Price’s comment: *“There would occasionally be suggestions from festival management for writers to come and that might have emerged out of diplomatic connections that were being made.”* In another part of our talk, Price mentioned the generous sponsorship from New Zealand Post and how it facilitated the invitation process:

*One of the things that was extraordinary about the festival in that period was that because it had significant sponsorship from New Zealand Post for a good portion of that time, it meant that we were not going cap in hand to individual publishers for every writer that we wanted to bring.*



However, she followed by mentioning the need to receive support from other entities as well:

*We did also look for support from institutions like the British Council and Goethe-Institut, and I guess in terms of writer selection, if we had funding for a German writer, then we were more likely to bring a German writer. Similarly, if the British Council was interested in supporting two or three writers, which they were at one stage, then we would look at two or three writers from there. I think the choices were autonomous to the committee... One year Carla van Zon went to Singapore to scope out potential artists for the festival and I'm guessing that might have been funded by the Singapore government or embassy.*

During the interview, Price mentioned the British Council, Goethe-Institut, Canada Council, and Alliance Française as the major supporters of Writers Week. In response to my question, *Did these institutes suggest specific writers to the committee?*, Price said:

*Yes, sometimes they made suggestions. The Goethe-Institut absolutely did, because we were not familiar with a lot of German writers, and also had no idea which German writers possessed good English, which was one of the major considerations.*

Because of its direct correlation with the appearance of international writers and possibly writers in translation at Writers Week, the support from embassies and international cultural institutes is of importance in the wider context of this research. Writers Week's collaboration with international institutes was one factor contributing to the high number of non-New Zealand guests in the earlier editions of the New Zealand Festival. Mabey, on the other hand, did not speak of official collaboration with any such entities. Instead, she mentioned taking suggestions from emerging New Zealand writers and poets, some of whom have close working relationships with their Australian counterparts. The best way to gauge the impact of these different approaches on the composition of writers at Writers Week would be a comprehensive study of the final programmes alongside additional qualitative data through interviews.

### **5.3 Focusing on Works in Translation**

Aside from mentioning Writers Week's overarching goal of "catering to different reading interests", both Price and Mabey commented on the specific objective of "introducing the New Zealand audience to writers in translation." For instance, Mabey said the following regarding the need to incorporate translated literature into Writers Week's programme:

*I think it's really the work of a programmer, like I really do think it's my job and the festival's job to make audiences more comfortable and aware of writers in translation. I*

*just think, as much as we can, we should be inviting writers in translation. That might mean that the format of the event is a writer and a chairperson and a translator, which I have seen done.*

At face value, this comment acknowledges the importance of translated fiction and expresses a desire to invite more writers in translation to Writers Week. However, it is difficult to reconcile with the actual numbers of non-English-speaking guests at recent editions of Writers Week. The programmes for the last 18 editions show that non-English-speaking writers have appeared less frequently at Writers Week proportionate to New Zealand writers. In the 2020 edition, Jokha Alharthi was the only translated writer on the final programme. As seen in the comment below, Mabey was pleased that Alharthi had accepted Writers Week's invitation:

*You probably know that Jokha Alharthi is coming...She was part of a big round of invitations I sent to a lot of writers in translation and I was thrilled that she said yes to that...I feel very comfortable that the audience will find her fascinating and that they will encounter her book through this, if they haven't already. I hope that it will show that writers in translation can give very Euro-centric readers an opportunity just to discover other stories from other parts of the world that we don't really encounter very often. I'm really happy that she's coming.*

There is no doubt that Jokha Alharthi was one of the most sought-after writers in 2019 and 2020, thanks to her award-winning translated novel *Celestial Bodies*, and that bringing her to Wellington was an achievement for Writers Week's organisers.

However, as discussed before, the big picture is much less impressive in terms of the representation of writers in translation. Viewing this trend in relation to the broader status of translated literature in the Anglosphere during the same period (ca. 2000-2020) can reveal similarities or discrepancies between the treatment of translated literature in New Zealand and elsewhere in the anglophone world. It is generally accepted that the status of translated literature has improved among anglophone critics and ordinary readers over the last two decades, largely thanks to the establishment of new prizes for literature in translation and the emergence of publishers specialising in translated literature. The reasons for this prominence, and the forms it takes, have already been discussed in this thesis. It seems reasonable to think that such enhanced visibility would result in a greater representation of writers in translation at English-language literary festivals, including ones in New Zealand. Data from the previous editions of Writers Week point to the opposite.

Apart from the overall underrepresentation of writers from non-English-speaking backgrounds, writers from certain countries and regions seem to be more underrepresented than others. For instance, not a single Latin American writer has appeared in the last 17 editions of Writers Week. Also, only four writers from the Middle East have made it to Writers Week to date, including Jokha Alharthi's attendance in 2020. The following excerpt is taken from Price's response to the following question about underrepresented regions at Writers Week: "*Now that you think back, are there regions, countries and cultures that you feel have been underrepresented at Writers Week?*"

*Latin America, I think. We were trying to remedy that towards the end of my time, but it feels like Latin America is a pretty big hole and as was Spain. France is underrepresented, so is Africa, so big holes there. Middle East, as well... New Zealand is still a monolingual country. Even the readers and the smart people are often utterly monolingual, so we were working within our own limitations here, linguistically and politically I suspect, in terms of who got invited.*

A likely explanation for the underrepresentation of writers in translation is the imperative to promote national culture in general and literature in particular in New Zealand. As a result, organising literary festivals can turn into a patriotic activity, just like reading and promoting books written by New Zealand authors. The same phenomenon has been shown to have played out in other countries, including Iran (Kafi, 2021). Even at the earlier editions of Writers Week where international guests significantly outnumbered New Zealand ones, organisers felt the responsibility to promote national literature. Price put this as follows:

*I have the sense that we were kind of in the business of growing an audience for New Zealand writers. Sometimes we were successful and sometimes not that much. Generally, the number of New Zealand writers was lower and audience numbers for New Zealand writers were lower than the international writers.*

Even though attempts at nationalising literature in New Zealand have caused challenges for producing and disseminating translated fiction, importing books from larger English-speaking countries has continued unabated. In fact, most books in New Zealand libraries and bookshops are still imports from the UK and US (see Siebeck, 2014 for a detailed account of the impact of nationalisation efforts on translated children's fiction in New Zealand).

The imperative to nationalise culture and literature is just one hypothesis for explaining the discrepancy between the international and local contexts in terms of the production,

circulation, and promotion of translated fiction. I put the following question to both Price and Mabey: *In your opinion, what are the reasons for the disproportionate underrepresentation of writers in translation compared to English-speaking writers at Wellington's Writers Week?* What follows is an outline of their answers alongside relevant excerpts from the interviews.

### ***Disparity between Invitee and Attendee Lists***

One topic discussed by both interviewees was the disparity between the list of writers who are invited to Writers Week and those who attend. This issue was raised in response to questions about the underrepresentation of writers from certain non-English-speaking countries. Those questions were based on data collected from the list of attendees at previous editions of Writers Week, which showed that English-speaking writers far outweighed non-English-speaking ones. This underrepresentation was especially evident for writers from South America. When I put this point to Mabey, she immediately pointed out the disparity between the invitees and attendees list:

*You see the final programme, but that doesn't show the authors that were invited. It shows the authors who were invited and were able to come. There are usually several hundred invitations before that where the invitations were not able to be accepted. So, I mean I know, because I worked on previous Writers festivals, that we have invited South American authors, but they haven't been able to come... There is such a long round of ongoing invitations issued and the acceptance rate is quite low. It's just very difficult for people to make the journey.*

In subsequent email correspondence, Mabey specified that, among others, she had invited Khaled Khalifa, Annie Ernaux, Olga Tokarczuk, and Han Kang for the 2020 Writers Week, none of whom could accept the invitation. She did emphasise that low acceptance rate is normal in the festival context. Price too mentioned a few writers who were invited but could not accept the festival's invitation for varied reasons:

*I can remember a kind of hilarious message that came back from Carlos Fuentes that said something like "I can't imagine ever finding the time to travel to New Zealand." Or Alan Bennett, who said something like "if I could come on a bicycle, I would come."*

For obvious reasons, New Zealand-based invitees are more likely than non-New Zealand invitees to accept the festival's invitation. However, this does not explain why the number of English-speaking guests far outweighs non-anglophone ones. In response to a statistic I mentioned during the interview ("Over 80 percent of the non-New Zealand authors who attended the previous 18 editions of Writers Week came from the UK, US, Canada, and Australia"), Mabey said the following:

*I would suggest that that statistic probably does reflect the fact that most invitations do go to writers from English-speaking countries. There is growing interest in the South American market, which matches an increase in translation into English. So, I would hope that over time that changes, but I think that probably does reflect where the invitations are directed at this point in time.*

The current global public health crisis is likely to influence this process in many ways. The COVID-19 pandemic has already devastated many business sectors worldwide, the cultural sector being no exception (Jeannotte, 2021). More specifically, literary production and promotion have had to adapt to the unprecedented circumstances resulting from the lockdowns imposed in many countries (see Kafi, 2021 for a case study in the Iranian context). Although the 2020 edition of Writers Week was not heavily impacted by the circumstances arising from the pandemic (except for the cancellation of two events at the end of March), the global situation has negatively impacted New Zealand's creative sector, especially in terms of the prospect of international collaborations.

Based on my talks with Claire Mabey, the curator and manager of New Zealand Festival's Writers Programme, the 2022 edition of Writers Week is projected to be held in a virtual-in person format, with the prospect of most international guests having to join virtually. The introduction of virtual formats will eliminate the difficulties associated with "having to make the journey" faced historically by many writers in translation, leaving little excuse for the underrepresentation of such writers at the festival.

### ***Global Translation Publication Context***

A common theme in both interviews was the impact of the global translation publication context on the ability of festival organisers in New Zealand to bring in more writers in translation. An argument made by both interviewees was that a sizable proportion of non-English-language writers never get translated into English, which is a deal-breaker when it comes to appearing at a literary festival in a predominantly anglophone country. Price remarked:

*There might be fabulous poets in the former Yugoslavia, but either they are not translated and we do not have access to them in a language that we understand, or they're not being translated at all...I was thinking about the business of selecting non-English-speaking writers and I guess there was only one criterion about which we were quite firm, which was that they had to have a work in translation in English for people to read, if they were going to be invited.*

Mabey made a similar argument in response to a point I raised about the absence of South American writers from Writers Week:

*I think with South America, there is not a high rate of translation into English. So, the readership here is very low of South American writers. We are working on a basis upon which we want to make sure that if we bring a writer here, there would be an audience. So, I think that's sometimes a tricky equation ... We do kind of rely on publishers translating and selling the rights in this territory so that we know people can actually access the books, whether that's in the library or in the bookshops. I do think that there is a growing international market for South American authors in translation. So, I hope that in the future you will see South American authors on the programme. I, for 2020, did invite at least two, but they weren't able to come.*

Both statements above end with an optimism that the interviewees expressed in other parts of the interview as well, especially with regards to the impact of international literary prizes on enhancing the status of translated literature. Mabey said:

*I am very interested in the fact that the Man Booker Prize International, which is really translated works, is doing a lot to shine a light on non-English fiction writers, and those books are doing incredibly well... I think South America is one market that the Man Booker International is starting to shed a light on. There were a couple of South American writers on the 2019 shortlist. I think that prize in particular is doing quite a lot of good work.*

Of the non-anglophone writers who do get translated into English, only a small proportion end up achieving critical and public acclaim in the English-speaking world. This is the same for English-language writers, with the difference that under current conditions a small proportion of English-language writers is likely to be much larger than a small proportion of writers in translation. It logically follows that those successful writers in translation will be in high demand for at least a year or two after publication of their books. Underwood, one of the interviewed librarians in this study, also made the following comment about the impact of the universal translation publication context:

*I think one of the other things is that translated works we often receive late. Sometimes it can be after an author's death, sometimes it can be ten years and they have moved on and so when it comes time to do the book tours and the engagement with the subject, the authors are kind of like, "maybe not."*

It is also likely that literary festivals in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia receive more positive responses from invitees. According to the interviewees, this has to do with such factors as the need to take ‘long-haul flights’ to New Zealand, ‘fewer opportunities for touring,’ and ‘potentially smaller audience due to New Zealand’s comparatively low population.’ Mabey also mentioned climate change concerns as the reason several authors gave for declining the Writers Week’s invitation in 2019. Specifically, they preferred not to fly to New Zealand because of the carbon emission resulting from the long-haul flight. Therefore, any discussion of the composition of writers at literary festivals needs to account for logistical factors alongside literary ones.

### ***Non-anglophone Writers with No Spoken English***

While having a published book in English translation seems to be a prerequisite for any non-anglophone writer to be invited to Writers Week, it is only one of the factors considered by festival organisers. In response to a question about the other boxes that an international writer needs to tick, both Price and Mabey referred to the writer’s ability to converse in English. While both acknowledged that writers in translation may have various levels of English proficiency, they pointed out that having a writer on stage who cannot hold a conversation in English is somewhat problematic.

Due to the format of Writers Week, invited guests are likely to be asked to attend a few sessions, either in conversation with a moderator or as part of a group of writers in themed sessions.<sup>36</sup> This might also involve responding to audience questions. Non-English-speaking writers with limited English proficiency may need an interpreter. While community interpreting in medical and legal settings has been common in New Zealand since the 1980s, the idea of having an interpreter on stage with a non-English-speaking writer has mostly been rejected by Writers Week committees, with one or two exceptions, including Yūko Tsushima’s appearance in the 1998 edition alongside her translator, Geraldine Harcourt. According to Price,

*There was a bit of a feeling among the committee that New Zealand audiences would struggle to connect with somebody who had no English and could only work through an interpreter. That was something that was actively resisted; the idea that we might invite a brilliant writer who could not in any way converse in English... However, having seen some festivals in Germany where they do a mix of languages, having seen very good*

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<sup>36</sup> More details regarding the format of the 2020 Writers events available at <https://www.festival.nz/events/all/col-lection/writers/>

*interpreters in action, I now have a different picture of what's possible with non-English-speaking writers.*

The use of hedging phrases (e.g. “a bit of a feeling”) in the above comment points to an effort by Price to soften the force of the intended message. She continued as follows: “*If I were involved now, I might have been inclined to contemplate actually doing that [i.e. inviting an author who had no English], which I think we were quite resistant to back then.*” The same topic was discussed by Mabey, providing an interesting comparison:

*I actually just think, as much as we can, we should be inviting writers in translation. That might mean that the format of the event is a writer, a chairperson, and a translator, which I have seen done. I haven't seen it done very much, but I think it is happening a little more often, particularly in Europe and the UK, where those authors interact with each other a lot more, or the audiences and the authors interact more. I think we are starting to have conversations here about that a little more, but I feel like it is something that will become increasingly common.*

Whereas Price referred to the committee's active resistance to the idea of interpreter-mediated author talks, Mabey mentioned the possibility of inviting writers who cannot converse in English. However, Mabey too used several hedging phrases. This hedging language can be partly attributed to the speaker's uncertainty or conservatism about the topic in question, but the impact of personal linguistic style and sociolinguistic norms are not to be overlooked.<sup>37</sup>

Both Mabey and Price maintained that a more optimistic view of the potentials of professional language transfer can help mitigate these reservations. Still, a predominantly monolingual audience can be a significant barrier to the effective communication of ideas, even if the interpreting is performed at a high level. I asked Mabey how she thinks the audience in Wellington would respond to interpreter-mediated author talks. She responded:

*I guess I would have to assume that some people might find that difficult, because the flow of the conversation is obviously different. However, at the end of last year, I went to an event with a Japanese writer who had a translator on stage...as soon as I heard her through her translator and heard her work read by the translator, I was so delighted. So, for me, that was a really good example of how we can make a discovery and connect with*

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<sup>37</sup> Janet Holmes has conducted a wealth of research on the unique elements of New Zealand English, with a focus on language in the workplace. Of most relevance to this discussion is her research on the heavy use of hedging and fencing in New Zealand speech (Holmes, 1987) as well as her analysis of the strategies for modifying the force of speech acts (Holmes, 1984).



*someone who doesn't necessarily speak our language, but her work is translated and is accessible too...Some people might not enjoy it as much and look past that into the opportunity that it would provide, but I do think that we have an open-minded audience here. I don't think that would be a barrier for many people.*

A connection emerges here to the survey results discussed earlier in this thesis. Open-mindedness in general, and in particular openness towards literary products of non-anglophone countries, was a frequent theme in the open-ended responses. When asked about their views of translated books, almost all respondents expressed a high level of positivity. These responses contrasted sharply to the place of translated fiction in the respondents' actual reading, which was shown to be mostly marginal. In the last statement, Mabey uses 'open-mindedness' to account for the audience's likely acceptance of an interpreter-author format. It remains to be seen, however, whether Mabey's positivity reflects reality any more accurately than the survey respondents' positivity about literature in translation. Further trialling of the interpreter-author format in future editions of Writers Week and evaluating audiences' reactions would be a true test.

#### **5.4 Discussion of Writers Week Interview Findings**

The results presented in the preceding section offer a wide-ranging account of the practices for selecting and promoting writers in translation at Writers Week. However, some parts need further elaboration in order to be understood within the context of this study. More specifically, I will now bring translated fiction to the forefront of the discussion, either by elaborating on the interviewees' comments or pointing out the absence of translated fiction from their responses. In the context of expert interviews, less-talked-about topics can be as illuminating as frequently discussed ones – or even more so.

One recurring theme in both interviews was the goal to cater to as wide an audience as possible. Neither Price nor Mabey specifically mentioned the possible role of writers in translation for reaching this objective. However, it is not hard to see the potential for attracting new audience groups by bringing more writers in translation to the festival. Indeed, this form of audience attraction can be the most feasible within the boundaries of a literary festival. First of all, regardless of their level of engagement with literature, members of a diaspora are more likely to attend a Writers Week event if the speaker is from their own home country. Another consideration is the different types of relationships that the public has with writers in different countries. A nuanced understanding of these differences is difficult to achieve, but this kind of knowledge could empower festival curators not only to diversify the audience, but also to enrich the experiences of the existing audience.

Both interviewees touched on Wellington's unique literary scene and how it factors into programming decisions for Writers Week. However, missing from the interview with the current coordinator was any reference to one of the key features that distinguishes Wellington from the rest of New Zealand: the visible presence of foreign embassies, high commissions, and international cultural organisations, which often translates into cultural nights, movie nights at embassies, national day ceremonies, and other such events that highlight the 'foreign.' This factor is likely to influence Wellingtonians' reading interests, as shown in chapter four. Dali and Alsabbagh (2014) mention the same effect with reference to metropolitan cities in Canada. What makes this absence more significant is the interviewees' recurring references to other characteristics of Wellington, including the unmissable presence of policymakers and public service enthusiasts, literary fiction coming out of Victoria University Press, and the rich poetry scene. The findings also indicate that Writers Week had, in earlier editions, established fruitful collaborations with the cultural section of foreign embassies in Wellington. As described by Price, these collaborations often resulted in financial and logistical support for bringing overseas writers to New Zealand. This support is likely to make the trip more feasible for overseas writers. Given the recent decline in the proportion of writers in translation at Writers Week, reestablishing relationships with international cultural organisations and foreign embassies could be a step towards lifting the number again. Comparative studies of Wellington's Writers Week and Writers Weeks in Auckland and Christchurch could further illuminate the practices of each with regards to showcasing writers in translation.

Another theme to emerge from the interviews was the active search for trending authors, but also an attempt to contribute to shaping future literary trends by inviting innovative writers. This is where translated fiction could play a significant role. Although neither Price nor Mabey singled out translated fiction as a source of creative inspiration, it clearly has potential to fulfill this role. The presence of a non-English-speaking writer on stage at a literary festival in a dominantly English-speaking country would add another layer to the "otherness" experienced through reading a translated book, which connects to the interviewees' comments about the potential usefulness of an author-interpreter format on stage.

Not only can international writers bring these fresh perspectives to literary festivals, but they can also attract larger and more diverse audiences. Examples of this effect can be found in previous editions of Writers Week, including the well-received international poetry events mentioned by Price and certain international writers' events, like Jokha Alharthi's solo panel in 2020, which saw over 400 audience members at the packed Renouf Foyer in Wellington's Michael Fowler Centre. This phenomenon has also been noted at literary festivals elsewhere. Commenting

on the gradual growth of Adelaide's writers' week over the years, Lurie (2004, p. 10) mentions "a sudden leap in attendance between 1994 and 1996." She quotes Rose Wright, the director of the writers' week at the time, who attributes this leap to a combination of "exceptionally fine weather" and

A stellar group of overseas writers, including Jostein Gaarder at the height of his *Sophie's World* fame, Barry Lopez, J.M. Coetzee, E. Annie Proulx, Vikram Chandra, Malcolm Bradbury and James Ellroy, who all related exceptionally well and sparked off each other in discussion.

In light of the 20-year gap between their roles at Writers Week, Price and Mabey also touched on the changes over the years concerning the representation of non-English-speaking writers. In general, Price spoke proudly of the international presence at earlier editions of Writers Week, whereas Mabey mentioned the representation of young writers, new voices, and indigenous perspectives as a strong point of recent editions: "those interesting writers who are pushing form and technique in writing." From a New Zealand literature perspective, Mabey's focus on showcasing young New Zealand writers contributes to efforts towards nationalising culture and literature in New Zealand, whereas Price's focus on showcasing international writers is of more interest from a world literature perspective, since it is more likely to result in the incorporation of writers in translation.

## 6. Unity Books Findings

In this study, Unity Books was chosen as the representative of the bookselling community in Wellington. The reasons for this selection have been outlined in the methodology chapter. Whereas the Writers Week and Wellington City Libraries' finding chapters mostly rely on interview data, the current chapter is based primarily on the spatial analysis of Unity Books Wellington and the content analysis of Unity Books' online store. Excerpts from semi-structured interviews with Lloyd and Greville will also be presented and discussed in a separate section.

### 6.1 Analyses of Unity Books' Physical and Online Stores

The relationship between the commercial practice of a bookstore and the interests of its customers is one of reciprocal influence. Although the spatial arrangement of the store therefore largely reflects customer interest, it can also be an indication of the store's approach to different categories of books. Since the beginning of my PhD research in early 2018, I paid frequent visits to Unity Books Wellington. Except for slight changes due to Covid-19 restrictions, the spatial format of the store has remained the same over the past three years. The spatial analysis that follows is based on my last visit in June 2021, just days before submitting my thesis for examination. In addition to the physical store, Unity Books operates a fully functioning online store which is regularly updated and well-maintained. In some respects, the online store mirrors the categorisation of the physical store. However, the two differ in certain aspects, which is why I conducted a microanalysis of Unity's online store as well, paying particular attention to the representation of translated literature and world literature, and the arrangement of other elements which can influence reader choices. Wherever necessary, insights gained from this microanalysis will be shared during this chapter.

#### *New Releases and New Zealand Literature*

The first category that visitors come across on entering Unity Books Wellington is New Releases, featuring recently published books from New Zealand and overseas. To the right of New Releases is NZ Nonfiction. Beside NZ Nonfiction is a small stand labelled BWB Texts, which features titles published by Wellington-based publisher BWB (Bridget Williams Books), and a column that features award-winning titles and literary magazines.

Right behind New Releases is a stand featuring NZ Fiction and NZ Poetry. These three are the sections closest to the entrance and are therefore the most visible. This arrangement is a clear statement of Unity's dedication to promoting New Zealand literature. As discussed in chapter five above, Wellington enjoys a rich poetry scene, not least in terms of the number of poetry collections

coming out of local publishing houses. Unity Books' special treatment of New Zealand poetry is therefore unsurprising. New Zealand fiction receives the same treatment, which is reflected in customers' reading interests. Wellington-based Victoria University Press (VUP) is one of the main publishers of literary fiction in New Zealand and the only publishing house to appear on the list of top ten popular tags on Unity Books' website, which shows its popularity amongst Unity customers. Unity Books' online store mirrors the physical store's approach with regards to its special treatment of New Zealand literature.

While some of Unity's methods for highlighting its New Zealand titles are quite conspicuous, others (especially in the online store) are more subtle. One I found particularly fascinating was the functioning of the Browse Books tab in the online store. As with most user-friendly online platforms, the user needs to scroll to a specific tab for the subtabs to appear. The subtabs of Browse Books consist of all the categories of books available at Unity Books, most of which I will mention in this chapter. The curious thing is that all the subtabs have been ordered alphabetically from top to bottom except NZ Fiction and NZ Nonfiction, both of which appear at the very top. Since users cannot click on the main tab itself to search for books, they need to click on one of the subtabs to start browsing. It is not hard to see the rationale for this design: enhancing the visibility of New Zealand literature.

### ***Fiction***

Almost the entire left-hand wall of Unity Books Wellington is labelled Fiction. Ordered alphabetically, this section holds non-New Zealand English-language originals as well as translated fiction titles. There is no distinction between translated and untranslated books, nor is there a separate section for international fiction. This is an important point in the wider context of this study. Several survey respondents (mostly Unity customers) used the terms 'international fiction', 'world fiction', and 'global fiction' when speaking about their perceptions of literature in translation. An even greater number associated these terms with 'literature written in languages other than English'. This contrasts with Unity Books' approach of placing UK, US, and Australian fiction alongside translated works and presenting them as Fiction.

Another shelf on the left-hand wall has been dedicated to NZ Fiction, making this the only category with two separate shelves. Unity Books' online store also distinguishes between New Zealand and non-New Zealand fiction. World Fiction is the online store's equivalent of the physical store's Fiction shelf and it is one of the subcategories of Fiction and Poetry, the other five being Crime, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Short Stories, and World Poetry. It holds the most titles in the Fiction and Poetry category: 1325 as of June 2021. Based on my title-by-title analysis of the

books categorised under World Fiction, translated fiction has an unexpectedly high share in the category. Specifically, around 225 of the 1325 titles are translations into English, which amounts to 17 percent.

World Fiction, however, is not the only category that holds translated books in Unity's Fiction collection. The Crime, Science Fiction, and Fantasy collections also contain translated titles, and those titles need to be considered for reaching a more accurate estimate of the share of translated fiction. Based on my analysis in June 2021, 76 of the 362 titles (21 percent) in the Crime collection were translations into English. Science Fiction (n=277) and Fantasy (n=238) had a 14 percent and 13 percent share of translated books, respectively. Considering the size of these collections, the share of translated fiction in the entire Fiction category remains unchanged at about 17 percent. Due to the presence of multiple editions and different translations of certain titles, the actual share of translated fiction might be a bit higher or lower than 17 percent, but the margin of error is likely below two percent. This means that Unity's translated fiction collection (n=355) is larger than its heavily promoted collection of New Zealand fiction (n=280).

### ***The (In)visibility of Translated Fiction***

The findings of my survey of Wellington readers placed crime, science fiction, and fantasy amongst the top five favourite genres. This popularity is reflected in Unity Books' fiction categorisation. Alongside short stories, these are the only fiction genres treated as discrete categories, not only in Unity Books' online store, but also in its physical store. In the latter, the wall at the back is shared by Crime, Science Fiction, and Middle Readers, which is Unity Books' term for young adult fiction. There is a striking similarity between the positioning of Science Fiction at Unity Books and WCL. In both cases, it is placed the farthest from the entrance. Underwood, one of the librarians I interviewed at WCL, commented on this arrangement. Describing the backlash after the Central Library's science fiction collection was moved "*from the back of the library up into the centre,*" she said: "*There were people who actually went 'I feel exposed'. They liked the science fiction to be in the back canals of the library and shunted up to the harbour.*" Aside from shining light on a certain stigma some readers attach to science fiction books, this statement highlights the impact of spatial arrangement on the customer experience of a book-related facility. It also signals a potential similarity between the treatment of science fiction and translated fiction.

A telling way of describing an encounter with the supposed unknown, 'feeling exposed', is similar to the way some of my survey respondents described their encounters with translated fiction. Although most respondents did not associate an extra level of difficulty with reading

translated fiction, around 20 percent of monolingual respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the phrase *Translated fiction is likely to be more difficult to read than English fiction*. Could Unity Books' reluctance to treat translated fiction as a discrete category reflect concerns about alienating some customers? This reluctance is expressed not only in the practice of mixing translated books with untranslated ones in the Fiction (physical) and World Fiction (online) categories, but also in the absence of basic information about original language and translator in the online store, due to which translated titles often cannot be distinguished from English-language originals.

Apart from reproducing the invisibility of translation, this practice proved to be an obstacle for determining the share of translated fiction in Unity's World Fiction category. My first count, which was based solely on the bibliographic information provided by Unity Books, indicated a ten percent share for translated books. My second, more thorough count, involving crosschecking with other sources, produced a 17 percent share for translated fiction across all genres. In other words, the translatedness of about 40 percent of the translated fiction titles in Unity's online store was unrecognizable, even for a user like me with a relatively high sensitivity to translation. For readers with low translation awareness, far more translated titles are likely to remain unrecognised. The low visibility of translations at Unity relates to the self-reported unconcern among some survey respondents about whether a book they are reading is an English original or translation, with certain respondents assigning more importance to the size and font of the text than its language of origin.

In her opening remark of our 2020 interview, Lloyd said, "*Our shelves may be full of translated books, but we do not necessarily know that they have been translated.*" It seems that the 'invisibilisation of translation', often initiated through the omission of translators' names from book covers, creates a cycle of unawareness among stakeholders. Lloyd's remark encapsulates the way translated books are presented and categorised in Unity Books' physical and online stores. The status of translated crime fiction in English is another classic example of the invisibility of translation.

### ***Translated Crime Fiction***

The categorisation of certain shelves in a bookstore can be indicative of its approach towards different types of books, including translated fiction. The Crime shelf at Unity Books is one such case. Mainly thanks to the monumental success of Scandinavian crime novels, translated crime books have long found their way into bookshops and libraries in anglophone countries. Unity Books is no exception. Its Crime shelf holds a significant number of translated titles, mainly English translations of Scandinavian noir. However, even this level of popularity has not resulted

in any special treatment of translated crime fiction through shelving structure, markings, or displays. Added to the absence of translators' names on the cover of most translated crime novels, this style of shelving reinforces the invisibility of translation and the translator.

### ***International Poetry***

Placed next to NZ Fiction on the left-hand wall is International Poetry. At the time of writing this segment in June 2021, most of the 200 or so titles in the International Poetry collection were by contemporary American poets, with some British and Nigerian poets also featured. Translated poetry books had only a tiny share in this collection. Most of the poets in translation whose works appear on this shelf are household names like Homer, Pablo Neruda, Jorge Luis Borges, and Gibran Khalil Gibran. The Nicaraguan poet Blanca Castellón is one of the few contemporary poets represented on Unity's International Poetry shelf with her selection *Water for Days of Thirst*.

### ***Nonfiction***

The central area of Unity Books Wellington belongs to nonfiction, as does the right-hand wall. Containing around 6,700 titles, Unity Books' nonfiction collection is a little over three times the size of its fiction collection, which comprises about 2,200 titles across all genres. Children's fiction and nonfiction titles have not been included in either count.<sup>38</sup> Unlike fiction, which is largely uncategorised, nonfiction is divided into numerous categories. The following nonfiction categories can be found in the area between the left and right-hand walls: Science, Social Sciences and Economics, History, Politics, Biography, Arts and Photography, Design and Architecture, Film and Music, Essays and Languages, and Cookery. The right-hand wall hosts the following nonfiction categories: Health, Feminism, LGBTQIA+, Travel Guides, NZ Travel, and Travel Writing.

The allocation of a separate shelf to each of these categories reflects Unity Books' forward approach towards them, but it is also a practical strategy for accommodating the 6,700 nonfiction titles held by the store (note that this figure represents the titles listed on Unity Books' online store, some of which might not appear on the shelves at the physical store). In addition to its practical benefit, separate shelving is likely to increase the visibility of the featured titles, leading to larger sales.

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<sup>38</sup> Early in the study, I decided to focus on translated literature aimed at adult readers, which explains the limit imposed on the survey respondents' age (+18). As explained in chapter two above, Wellington-based publisher Gecko Press has been actively publishing translated children's books since the early 2000s, and local bookstores including Unity Books stock most of its publications. Siebeck (2014) conducted an important study on the production of translated children's literature in New Zealand.



### ***Comparison of Staff Picks at Unity Books and Whitcoulls Wellington***

Three sides of a column standing beside the right-hand wall at Unity Books feature Staff Picks. The books selected for this section cover a wide range of fiction and nonfiction genres (see Appendix F). At the time of my last visit in June 2021, several translated books featured among the staff picks, including Annie Ernaux's *The Years*, Samanta Schweblin's *Little Eyes*, Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings*, and Haruki Murakami's *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. On the same day that I took these notes and photos at Unity Books, I went to Whitcoulls on Wellington's Lambton Quay to compare the staff picks at the two bookstores.

The Staff Picks shelf at Whitcoulls featured fewer titles than that at Unity. The only book shared between the two was Brit Bennet's historical novel *The Vanishing Half*. Whitcoulls' Staff Picks was dominated by action, thriller, and fantasy novels, but it also featured a few historical novels, nonfiction titles, and children's books. Perhaps the main reason for the relatively small size of Whitcoulls' Staff Picks shelf is that the store has more than one way of recommending books to its customers. An adjoining section at Whitcoulls Lambton Quay was labelled Joan's Picks.

Joan's Picks featured around 60 books selected by Joan McKenzie, Whitcoulls' national book manager. Each book was accompanied by a standing blurb to its side. Similar to Unity Books' Staff Picks, Joan's Picks featured books from a wide range of categories and genres. However, Joan's Picks and Unity's Staff Picks had no titles in common. Joan's selection included widely popular English-original books like the biographies of Elton John, Tiger Woods, and Mariah Carey, but it also featured an impressive number of translated books, including Lan Yan's *The House of Yan*, Nino Haratischvili's *The Eighth Life*, Sandrone Dazieri's *Kill the Angel and Kill the Father*, and Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque*, respectively translated from Mandarin, Georgian, Italian, and Farsi. I was pleasantly surprised to see this many translated books on display at Whitcoulls.

Another initiative which is promoted heavily by Whitcoulls is the Top 100 Books. Launched in 1996, this initiative relies on New Zealanders' votes for their favourite books. The Top 100 Books are then labelled and showcased in a separate section in the physical and online stores (see Appendix G). As of June 2021, only two of the Top 100 Books were translated works: David Lagercrantz's *The Girl in the Spider's Web* and Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. The appearance of only two translated titles on this list demonstrates, among other things, the challenge that translated books face for appealing to the average English-speaking reader. The responses I received to my survey of Wellington readers, most of whom were Unity customers, suggest that the same poll would be unlikely to yield significantly different results at Unity.

## 6.2 Interviews with Unity Books' Representatives

Initially, I had planned to conduct a full one-hour interview with Tilly Lloyd and another with a senior staff member. However, I only managed to conduct two half-hour interviews, one with Lloyd and Marcus Greville in 2018, and another with Lloyd in late 2020 (reasons for this have been outlined in chapter three). As I was unlikely to have achieved data saturation through these two short interviews, I attempted to complete the picture by complementing the interviews with spatial and content analyses of Unity Books' physical and online stores, the results of which I have presented above. Moreover, Lloyd occasionally sent me emails containing information relevant to this research. In June 2018, for instance, she informed me of the launch of Unity Books' weekly bestsellers list on *The Spinoff's* Books page, and later that year she shared a photo of a recently held translation display at Unity Books Wellington. The combination of these datasets helped fill the gap in interview data.

The first topic discussed by the interviewees was Unity's contribution to the literary community in Wellington.

### *Being Part of a Literary Culture*

As will be discussed later in chapter seven, the librarians I interviewed mentioned "lack of commercial pressure" as a factor allowing them to broaden the library's collection. For bookstores, by contrast, commercial considerations are paramount. Lloyd believed that Unity Books is different from chain booksellers in that it sees "literature as an art form" as well as a commercial asset:

*We are more literary because we see literature as an art form as well as an asset, whereas a chain store, say like Whitcoulls...they are not part of a literary culture. We are struggling to comprehend our world and be wise...Of course we are commercial, but we value the literary kaupapa of the authors and publishers.*

The idea of 'being part of a literary culture' is the key element here. Although the claim that Whitcoulls, or any other bookstore for that matter, "is not part of a literary culture" is in a strict sense paradoxical and certainly warrants more nuanced analysis, it is fair to say that Unity Books is one of the most active contributors to Wellington's literary scene. In chapter three above, where I outlined the reasons for selecting Unity Books as the booksellers' representative, I pointed out its contributions to the literary community in Wellington and in New Zealand more widely through hosting book launches and regular author talks, providing book reviews for national radio, and taking part as bookseller in local literary festivals. In May and June 2021 alone, Unity Books

hosted five book launches and six lunchtime author talks (see Appendix H). The popular tags section on Unity's website indicates the topics that are of most interest to visitors, although it also reflects the nature of the available content. As of June 2021, 'Event' and 'Launch' followed 'Advertising' and 'NZ Book Trade' as the most popular tags (see Appendix I). 'Book Launch', 'Launched at Unity', and 'Lunchtime Event' appeared further down the list.

Unity Books' active contribution to book reviews on Radio New Zealand's Nine to Noon programme is another important element of its involvement in the literary community. From 1 May 2020 to 1 May 2021, representatives from Unity Books appeared 23 times on Nine to Noon to review books.<sup>39</sup> While Lloyd appeared most frequently, seven other staff members also reviewed books on this programme. These appearances form over ten percent of the total book reviews on Nine to Noon during this one-year period. Of all the books reviewed by Unity Books staff on this programme, only one title is a translation: Cho Nam-Too's *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*. Mieko Kawakami's translated novel, *Breasts and Eggs*, was also introduced as one of the top recent reads by Unity staff member John Duke. Translated books form 17 percent of Unity Books' Fiction collection, but their representation on this radio programme is disproportionately low. The neglect of translated books on this radio programme reflects a wider disregard for translated fiction in the media. One of my survey respondents, a published translator, submitted the following response: "*I'm a translator. It's difficult to get coverage of my books in NZ media, perhaps because they aren't published in NZ, though they are available in some local bookshops*" (70, Female, European).

Most of the books reviewed by Unity staff are US publications, with a fine balance between fiction and nonfiction. Surprisingly, only two New Zealand publications were featured in these reviews. However, books in Unity's NZ Fiction category are highlighted by different means throughout its physical and online stores, whereas its translated titles are hardly recognisable for the average reader. Combined with data on translation publication in English, the representation of translated books on Nine to Noon's Book Reviews over a longer period could be used to gain a deeper understanding of translation promotion in New Zealand.

Although the analysis of the spatial formation and content of Unity Books' physical and online stores, as well as its contributions to the wider literary community, provided some insight

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<sup>39</sup> Although it is called Book Review, this section of Nine to Noon is most accurately described as *book recommendation*, because the reviewers choose which book to review and, in almost all cases, they highly recommend the chosen title. In fact, of the 100 or so book reviews I listened to, not even one contained a negative comment about the reviewed publication. Therefore, book reviews by Unity Books can be considered as staff picks presented in a different medium.

into its overall approach towards translated fiction, the picture is not complete without considering the viewpoints of the people behind selection and promotion decisions.

### **6.3 Unity Books' Treatment of Translated Fiction**

#### ***Selecting Translated Fiction***

In addition to more general remarks about Unity's literary outlook, Lloyd commented on the impact of this outlook on the store's approach to selecting translated fiction:

*In terms of multiple voices and multiple nationalities, it is really important to Unity that we have them. Our shelves are full of translated books...I mean, think of all the foreign authors who are writing in their own language and we have got them here in English...but they do have to be a little bit commercial because we've got payroll and rent.*

Lloyd's claim is supported by data presented earlier in this chapter, which showed that as of June 2021, 17 percent of the total fiction titles in stock at Unity Books were translations. Aside from translated fiction, Unity Books holds an impressive range of fiction by anglophone writers from Asian and African backgrounds. Unity's positive approach towards international fiction has certainly played a role in shaping this collection, but one must not forget the impact of global literary trends as well. In recent years, stories written by African and Asian writers, translated or otherwise, have received critical and popular acclaim in the anglophone world. This situation has made international fiction more commercially viable for both publishers and bookselling outlets.

One factor distinguishing Unity Books from chain booksellers is that it holds many lesser-known translated titles as well as prize winners. The above statement captures this balance between the literary and the commercial. Lloyd then outlined reasons for the proportionately high representation of translated fiction at Unity Books: *"The reason why we have more work in translation is that we are bigger, indie, and more literary. It might also be that our customers are more interested."* The last three reasons are worth expanding on.

In the early stages of this research, I had several conversations with stakeholders and experts in Wellington's book sector, including the owner of a second-hand bookshop in Wellington, two humanities professors, and a published local writer. One of the topics we discussed was the choice of a bookstore for my study. Most experts discouraged me from including Whitcoulls, because they believed it is a gift shop that also sells books, or as Lloyd put it, a "chain store". Therefore, its approach to selecting and promoting translated fiction is likely to be driven by commercial gain more than anything else. The experts I spoke with unanimously suggested the inclusion of Unity Books on the grounds that as an independent and literary bookstore, it is likely

to order more works in translation compared to other Wellington bookstores. This is a prerequisite for any discussion about potential policies and practices for selecting and promoting translated fiction. The advice I received about Unity Books proved to be helpful, considering that it holds such a high proportion of translated books. However, my analysis of some of the promotional practices of Whitcoulls Wellington challenged the simplistic perceptions of Whitcoulls' approach to books.

Similar to the Writers Week and library interviewees, Lloyd underlined the importance of consulting a broad range of information sources. She maintained that Unity's supply chain structure contributes to the visible presence of translated books on its shelves:

*We're buying from a lot of indie publishers around the world...Because we have got a much bigger supply base than any other bookshop in New Zealand, we are automatically receiving feed from all of those indie and multinational publishers, who want us to take notice of their stuff and buy it...Because of the width and depth of our supply, the chances of us having more translated works in stock is much higher, which is good.*

'Indie publishers around the world' and 'multinational publishers' are key phrases in this statement. Regardless of their specialty, indie publishers are more likely to publish literature in translation, although the landscape has recently changed dramatically with the emergence of corporate translation publishers like Amazon Crossing. Nonetheless, the impact of the "width and depth" of Unity's supply can be seen in the range of translated fiction it has in stock.

In response to a question about Unity's strategies for gauging public reading interests, Lloyd said: *"In terms of customer appetite, we are just riding on that wave and intuiting it, and we're buying ahead of it in case that is what they're going to be interested in."* She continued by providing the instance of one of their most recently purchased books, *The Book of Eels*, translated from Swedish: *"I don't think you will find anyone else in New Zealand who has gone to the trouble of importing a very expensive hardback."* Lloyd then explained the symbolic value of eels to the Māori, and through this explanation, demonstrated the local knowledge required to make selections for her bookstore. Ordering *The Book of Eels* can be interpreted as an effort *"to comprehend our world and be wise"*, as Lloyd said in an earlier statement.

Lloyd also mentioned Unity's support of locally published translations. The most visible form of support is hosting the launch of translated poetry collections at Unity Wellington. This support can also take the shape of buying copies of those translated publications. During our interview in 2020, Lloyd showed me a few translated books that were published by local publishing houses and available at Unity Books Wellington. Most of these publications were

poetry collections translated into English, but also some translated from English into other languages. Two of them were translations of the Best New Zealand Poems 2016 and 2018 into Samoan and Farsi, respectively, published by Wai-te-ata Press.

Lloyd also demonstrated awareness of the international literary landscape, especially literary awards. In response to my question about Unity Books' approach to selecting translated fiction, Lloyd provided the following example:

*In two days' time, the National Book Awards will be announced. This is the biggest American book awards. We've got all the shortlisted titles. Some of them are in stock, some of them are on their way. On the afternoon of 19 November, I'll be listening for the announcement, and I will order accordingly. Don't you think it's really important that the National Book Awards, which is way bigger than the Pulitzer, HAS a section for work in translation?*

A separate section in Unity Wellington is dedicated to showcasing literary prize winners. In its online store, too, visitors can filter through several international prizes, namely Booker International, Booker Prize, Costa Prize, Crime Writers' Award, Hugo and Nebula Awards, Nobel Prize, US National Book Awards, and Women's Prize. The same structure has been set up for highlighting the winners of New Zealand literary awards.

### ***Promoting Translated Fiction***

In the context of brick-and-mortar bookstores, promotion can take many different forms, including the physical layout of the store, categorisations, special displays, staff recommendations, and newsletters. I have presented a snapshot of some of these elements earlier in the chapter. Here, I will present excerpts from the interviews in as much as they illuminate Unity's approach to promoting translated fiction.

During my first interview with Greville and Lloyd, Greville commented on the general attitude of Unity customers towards translated books:

*Readers do not look specifically for translated books, apart from professional readers who read a lot. Also, translators are not very well-known among readers, which is why most readers select a book based on their past experiences with a certain type of literature.*

This comment represents a partial understanding of customer interests. In fact, 'interest in translated fiction' was the most frequent open-ended response theme in my survey of Wellington readers, most of whom were Unity customers. A group of 20 respondents demonstrated extensive knowledge of translated fiction through their open-ended responses, while a larger group

expressed interest in or past experience of “looking specifically for translated books.” One respondent, for instance, said: “I will generally take the time to research and discover what is considered a good translation before reading/buying.”

Based on the interviewees’ remarks, the only specific showcase of translated fiction at Unity Books Wellington was a 2017 wall display called “Found in Translation” (see Figure 11 below).



Figure 11. Found in Translation display at Unity Books Wellington (2017)

Featuring both classics and recent publications, the promotion “*was there for a month, and it positively affected the sales of translated books*”, Lloyd said. However, she was quick to make the following comment:

*We have at least 60 different types of books that we want to sell. Our mission is not to promote certain types of books. We would like to get our business going. If translated books can do that for us, it's good. If not, we don't feel an obligation to promote books written in English or otherwise.*

This statement contains a couple of key points. The first is Lloyd's reference to "60 different types of books", which suggests that translated books are part of a larger literary system and they are not to be treated differently. Lloyd then made the following statement: "*Our mission is not to promote certain types of books.*" This comment is remarkable because it contradicts the findings of my spatial analysis of Unity Books Wellington and content analysis of Unity Books' online store presented above, which demonstrate the store's interest in privileging categories pertaining to New Zealand literature. Whether Unity Books' promotion of New Zealand literature is an official policy or simply established practice is an open question. Its normativity is perhaps one reason why it can slip from view in moments such as Lloyd's assertion that Unity's "*mission is not to promote certain types of books.*"

Another interesting aspect of the above comment is the following sentence: "*We would like to get our business going. If translated books can do that for us, it's good. If not, we don't feel an obligation to promote books written in English or otherwise.*" Although in and of itself, the statement sounds reasonable coming from a bookseller, it runs counter to Lloyd's criticism of the "commodification of translation" during our first talk in 2018. The tension between these two positions is a reminder of the dual nature of books as both commodities and repositories of cultural value that booksellers are forced to negotiate.

#### **6.4 Discussion of Unity Books Findings**

The findings from the semi-structured interviews with Unity Books' Lloyd and Greville, in combination with the spatial and content analysis of Unity's physical and online stores, provided sufficient data for addressing the research question: *What are the policies and practices of Unity Books Wellington for selecting and promoting translated fiction?* The analysis of the share of translated fiction in Unity Books' Fiction collection indicates a forward approach towards literature in translation. About one-sixth of this collection comprises translated books, which exceeded my initial expectations by a significant margin.

While Writers Week and Wellington City Libraries' strategies for *selecting* translated fiction aligned, to a great extent, with their strategies for *promoting* it, Unity Books' strategies for each stage seem to differ significantly. More specifically, Unity's eclectic selection strategy is reflected in the large number of translated fiction titles on the shelf labelled either Fiction



(physical) or World Fiction (online) (17 percent of the entire category), but it has adopted a mostly passive strategy towards promoting those titles.

Based on the interview findings, Unity's passive approach to promoting translated fiction attests, among other things, to an underlying perception of translated fiction as a non-discrete fiction category. This perception is expressed in Unity's presentation of translated fiction alongside English-original fiction under World Fiction. Although the store does not do much to promote its translated fiction collection, the fact that translated fiction forms 17 percent of Unity's fiction collection is, in itself, a kind of promotion. Unity draws little attention to the translatedness of the translated books, but at the same time stocks so many of them in different fiction categories.

One of the simplest ways to highlight a certain section of a collection is by allocating a separate shelf to it. In an anglophone context, labelling a shelf as 'translated fiction' might be too radical from a commercial perspective, but introducing an 'international fiction' or 'world fiction' section to bookshops and libraries might be a more palatable starting point, especially because many Wellington readers expressed interest in this type of categorisation. Even the current format of Unity Books' online store could easily be made more accommodating of translated fiction. For instance, Unity could follow WCL's lead in presenting 'original language' and 'translator's name' alongside other bibliographic information for translated titles in its catalogue.

## 7. Wellington City Libraries Findings

Three staff members from Wellington City Libraries were interviewed for this study. In February 2019, I interviewed fiction selector Deborah Olson and fiction specialist Neil Johnson during a two-hour meeting at the former Central Library in Wellington. Although that session produced important data, it did not lead to data saturation, meaning some questions needed further elaboration and/or clarification. For this reason, I interviewed a third librarian, Cathy Underwood, in May 2020. At the time of the interview, Underwood was one of the collection coordinators for the newly opened Te Awe Library in Wellington CBD and a former Central Library fiction team member with over ten years' experience. Not only did this interview provide further information on some of the points raised by Olson and Johnson, but it also responded to some of the findings from my survey of Wellington readers. Whereas the interview with Olson and Johnson had a stronger focus on the selection and promotion stages, Underwood's interview mostly dealt with the reception of translated fiction at WCL.

In contrast to the interviews with Writers Week's coordinators, which touched on a wide range of issues relating to the festival's inner dynamics and outside factors affecting its operation, interviews with library staff focused on the libraries' practices for selecting and promoting translated fiction. However, the library interviewees did briefly mention some outside factors that affect the library's capability to select and promote translated books. Another notable difference between Writers Week interviews and library interviews was that all three interviewed librarians were actively working in WCL at the time of the interviews. Therefore, not only could they describe the status quo with regards to the selection and reception of translated fiction, but they could also discuss changes over time. For Writers Week, this comparative perspective was generated by conducting separate interviews with former and current coordinators.

The transcripts of interviews with library staff were first coded manually, followed by automated coding through NVivo. The combination of manual and automated coding minimised the risk of overlooking themes. Although the questions were formulated specifically to find out about the policies and practices of WCL for selecting and promoting translated fiction, it was unsurprising to hear the interviewees talk about more general aspects of their work as well. WCL holds the largest collection of books and multimedia items in Wellington, only one category of which is translated fiction. I allowed the interviews to flow as naturally as possible, interrupting only if a point warranted further elaboration or clarification.

This section has been organised as follows. First, I will present the general themes concerning fiction selection at WCL. Many of these relate also to the selection of translated fiction,

but a separate section has been dedicated to themes pertaining specifically to the selection, promotion, and reception of translated fiction. For each theme, I will present relevant excerpts from one or more of the interviews and elaborate on points of interest.

### **7.1 General Considerations for Fiction Selection at WCL**

In an introductory email message sent to the interviewees, I had outlined the main themes of the interview, one of which was the generic process for selecting and ordering fiction. On the day of the interview, before any questions were asked, Olson started off by “*describing the fiction selection process at the library.*” This was useful because it facilitated a general-to-specific interview structure. Johnson and Underwood also commented on different aspects of fiction selection at WCL, including standard procedures, impediments, and selection criteria. These comments have been placed into the following three categories: suppliers and sources of information, importance of publisher reputation, and prioritising patrons’ interests.

#### ***Suppliers and Sources of Information***

Olson mentioned Baker & Taylor and James Bennet, based in the US and Australia respectively, as the major suppliers of books to WCL. However, she was quick to add: “*We’re not absolutely tied into buying an American book from Baker & Taylor or buying a published English book from James Bennet.*” Although not a fiction selector herself, Underwood said that “*as much as the selectors will try and provide balance for what’s out there at the moment... it’s pretty much through the filter of two main suppliers.*” Olson subsequently explained that the lists sent out by these suppliers are too general, necessitating a significant level of discretion by the library’s own selectors:

*They send us big files. They aren’t sorted out particularly. James Bennet are very mechanised and they can’t be flexible like that. When I’m looking at titles, particularly with Baker & Taylor, because they send a lot of interesting material, if I see something that has been published by Oneworld that is translated fiction, or by Serpent’s Tail, I will think to myself, “this is a good bid.” It’s very difficult, it’s very complicated, and there are so many factors that come into selecting.*

The multifaceted nature of item selection was mentioned several times during the interviews. Johnson followed up on Olson’s comment by pointing out the specialist knowledge needed for selection:

*There is also another thing that Deborah and I will read an awful lot of authors. There will be authors that we’ll know about, but we’ll also be aware of authors who may not be*

*our cup of tea, but we need to know about them and about what they write... As a librarian, you must totally separate your personal taste and preferences away from what you buy.*

Later in the interview, Olson and Johnson mentioned some of the additional sources they consult aside from the lists provided by the contracted book suppliers. Johnson, for example, said the following:

*We will also be looking at the PEN National Awards, at The Guardian, and if anything is becoming very popular or just featured in The Guardian or something like that which has got a big coverage, we'll get hold of it for two reasons. First, because we know that our readers read The Guardian and somebody will come and ask us, so we are just meeting the demands of the public. Second, if something is getting coverage in The Guardian, it's going to be a good book, because it already has passed several filters...Part of the job is knowing reliable information sources based on which you can make informed decisions.*

Olson added:

*Radio New Zealand is another very big influence on people's reading choices. They're pretty eclectic. They do review all sorts of books. They have a multicultural point of view...If a book gets a great review in RNZ, we will be asked for it the next morning...Generally speaking, The Dominion Post, The Sunday Star Times, The Listener, all those media which have good book corners and who are interested in reviewing books, they're good sources for people.*

Underwood echoed Olson and Johnson's views on the importance of local media: "You know something is going to be hot, even if it's a five-year-old book, if someone has reviewed it on national radio over the weekend; there is going to be interest in it again." There is little surprise that the interviewees unanimously mentioned Radio New Zealand as an important influence on people's reading choices. As discussed in chapter six above, one of RNZ's programmes which has a reputable book review section is Nine to Noon. Intrigued by the interviewees' comments, I did some research on the past episodes of this 3-hour programme. It turned out that Nine to Noon had featured 210 book review episodes from 1 May 2020 to 1 May 2021, an arbitrary period that I chose for reasons of recency. This number excludes around 100 author interviews, most of which feature a recent book by the interviewed author. Literary critics, writers, and representatives from bookshops across New Zealand are the regular reviewers on Nine to Noon.

The three interviewed librarians mentioned a combination of local and global sources of information. Consulting these popular platforms not only ensures that books under consideration

are of a certain quality due to having passed several filters, but it can also help selectors “*be aware of what the public is being prompted to be interested in,*” to use Underwood’s words. A comprehensive report by New Zealand Book Council (2018) showed that an increasing number of New Zealanders refer to international websites when choosing what books to read, although most readers still rely heavily on local sources of information as well. One of the questions in my survey was: “what are your main local sources of information about books?” Several options were provided alongside space for other answers. According to the findings, *The Spinoff* website, Radio New Zealand, the websites and social media pages of local bookstores, and *The Listener* magazine were the most popular local sources in my sample. In this study, I did not consider the popularity of international sources, because the New Zealand Book Council’s report had covered that already. Overall, these findings align with Olson and Johnson’s remarks above.

### ***Importance of Publisher Reputation***

Both Olson and Johnson referred to the importance of publisher reputation when deciding to order a book. Johnson said:

*It’s really difficult to have a book published by a major publisher. There are so many hoops you have to go through, even if you’ve written a very good book. So, by the time they come to us, they’ve already passed certain filters... We do not need to worry too much.*

The interviewees named several publishers with varying reputations. Johnson, for instance, mentioned Harvill Secker as an example of a reputable publisher, to which Olson responded: “*they don’t publish rubbish. Random House is different. They [Random House] publish a huge continuum, from very low quality down here to high quality up there.*” She then named a few less reputable publishers, including a US-based religious fiction publisher and a well-known publisher of science fiction:

*We know that there are a few publishers that we won’t get their kind of material. Say, for instance, if I’m choosing religious fiction, there are quite a few publishers in the US that I would say “no”, because their quality is low. They publish some material in their literature that would not really be acceptable in the public library context, if you see what I mean. They’re advancing agendas that you think, “maybe not”... And that’s my role. For instance, a publisher called Tor, which is a science fiction publisher; if they’ve published something in a paperback which is six and a half inches high, I’ll think to myself, “that’s hardly worth it.”*

Olson's last point about production standards is important in the public library context where books are expected to stand up to heavy use. This requirement is mentioned in the library's collection policy as well (Wellington City Libraries, 2016, p. 6): "high quality and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental."

Both selectors expressed appreciation for the discernment exercised by specialist publishers. In the following statement, Olson focuses on the quality difference between English-language books and translated books, arguing that published translated books are likely to be of higher quality, both in terms of content and production standards:

*I think because translated books which have made their way into our book suppliers' stock have been pre-selected by the publishers, we're pretty sure about what we're selecting, and we don't really have to worry about the quality of the book...You'll find that the publishers that publish translated literature specifically have been quite discerning in choosing those titles, so when I go to those more specialist publishers, you know that you're going to get a good product.*

The above comment indicates that, in general, WCL fiction selectors think highly of the quality and production standards of translated books, mainly because most of those books are published by specialist publishers who "have been quite discerning in choosing those titles."

### ***Prioritising Patrons' Interests***

Halfway through the interview, Olson mentioned one factor that distinguishes WCL from most other public libraries in New Zealand, that is the presence of an in-house specialist collection team:

*Wellington City Libraries is one of the few libraries left in New Zealand that has a specialist collection team, where we do all our selection. We don't do any outsourcing...There has always been a very big commitment by our management to keep it in-house, because they think we are closest to our patrons, who buy material only in the interest of our patrons, not like a company who functions as a wholesaler. The wholesalers will select books that they could get hold of easily, whereas we will search our material. I think we have a very good knowledge of our customer base, and it is only their interest that we are serving. We don't have any commercial interests.*

Olson believes that having an in-house collection team allows the library to curate a collection that is more responsive to the needs and interests of the Wellington audience. Interview excerpts shared throughout this chapter will show that WCL librarians indeed "have a very good knowledge of their customer base."

Making a comparison between public libraries and bookstores in terms of item selection, Olson said: “*we would buy a lot bigger range than Unity ever would...We want depth in our collections.*” Johnson believed that this situation allows fiction selectors at the library to order highbrow literature in addition to commercial fiction like Scandinavian noir:

*The big difference is, if you're in a bookshop, it's all about commercials, and translated books, just like any other type of book, come in all sorts of flavours. So, you can get very commercial like Scandinavian crime books which are popular everywhere, or you might get a book by someone like Elena Ferrante. So, there is also literary high-brow fiction which we would definitely try to get, because we would like to hold a comprehensive range of books, whereas a bookshop would think twice about that...We at the library don't have those sorts of concerns. What we want to do is to ...*

Olson interrupted here to complete Johnson's statement:

*...to engage our readers, and our readers want a huge range. Also, they come to the library because they know there would be a huge range here. They know they won't find that book at Unity, so they'll come here. Or they won't find that range of literature at Unity.*

The non-commercial nature of WCL's activities was emphasised several times by Olson and Johnson, mainly in relation to its positive impact on enhancing the breadth and depth of the collection through the selection of material that best suits the target audience. Wellington City Libraries' collection policy echoes UNESCO's Public Library Manifesto in forbidding any commercial pressure on public libraries: “collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressure.” However, even the rejection of commercial pressure does not preclude the need to function within a budget. As stated in its collection policy document, “the library ensures the best value for Wellington ratepayers by exercising fiscal responsibility in collection development” (Wellington City Libraries, 2016, p. 2). One part of the collection that is likely to benefit from the library's noncommercial functioning is translated fiction.

A quarter of the way into the interview, I shifted the discussion towards translated books. Although some of the issues already discussed apply to the selection of translated fiction as well, I was interested to see if the team at WCL has a specific approach towards selecting and promoting translated material. I also asked some questions about the reception of translated fiction by library patrons.

## 7.2 Selection of Translated Fiction

As discussed above, early in my interview with Olson and Johnson, Olson mentioned the major suppliers of books to WCL. Although the selectors emphasised that they are not limited to the lists presented by these suppliers, Underwood believed that “*it’s pretty much through the filter of two main suppliers.*” She then explained the negative impact of this exclusiveness on the breadth and depth of the library’s fiction collection in general, and its translated fiction collection in particular:

*I think translated fiction is treated differently, because it is harder to discover. Every few months we do a blog post of our new translated works, and if you look at the volumes, sometimes it was hard to scratch up seven books. That’s because the two major places that we buy our books from are one American and one Australian supplier, so you’re not going to get a very global view.*

As mentioned by the Writers Week interviewees, this situation might in part result from the often-cited reluctance of English-language publishers to publish translated books (see chapter two). Underwood, however, attributed the sparseness of new translated titles at WCL to a restricted viewpoint arising from an overdependence on the two major suppliers. Whereas the former issue is outside the control of public libraries, the latter can be alleviated through certain strategies, some of which have been outlined in the discussion of findings below.

Apart from Underwood’s comment above, the interviewed librarians did not see any differences between the strategies used for selecting English-original fiction and translated fiction. In response to my question, “*can you think of any special criteria for selecting translated books?*”, Olson said:

*No. I think because translated books which have made their way into our book suppliers’ stock have been pre-selected by the publishers, we’re pretty sure about what we’re selecting, and we don’t really have to worry about the quality of the book.*

Significantly, Underwood described recent library initiatives intended to make translated fiction more visible within its collection. In particular, she mentioned the introduction of new tools made to enhance the discoverability of translated fiction at WCL:

*Translated fiction is more discoverable for our library audience through headings that we have given it in the catalogue; So, if people do want to explore a particular author, language, translated material in a particular subject, I definitely think for a library audience it is more discoverable, but again it’s using the tools which is going to become more and more important.*



This excerpt represents a series of comments that outline the actual steps taken by fiction selectors and specialists at WCL to enhance the breadth, visibility, and discoverability of the translated fiction collection. One such step is providing comprehensive bibliographic information for each translated title in the library's online catalogue. In most cases, this information includes the name of the translator as 'contributor' and highlights translatedness through the subject heading 'translated novels.' 'Translated novels' is followed by the original language of publication. For instance, the bibliographic information of the novel *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk contains the following information (verbatim): Creator: Tokarczuk, Olga, 1962; Contributor(s): Croft, Jennifer (Translator) translator; Subject(s): Travel Fiction, Translated novels Polish. The Notes section contains the original title as well as a reminder that the novel was originally written in a language other than English: Translation of *Bieguni*; Translated from the Polish by Jennifer Croft.

WCL's proactive approach to highlighting translated fiction is not an isolated effort. Rather, it is part of a wider effort to showcase translated fiction in public libraries. Established in the US, the Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLI) aims to "raise the visibility of books beyond the traditional Anglophone space in libraries" and "help librarians locate, program, and feature books in translation" (Nawotka, 2019). This approach contrasts with that of certain other stakeholders, including Unity Books. Whereas WCL highlights the *translatedness* of the translated titles it holds, Unity Books camouflages this aspect of its translated fiction collection. Although the three selected entities differ in terms of their stated missions and activities, it is fair to say that WCL has adopted the most distinct approach for curating and promoting its translated fiction collection.

### **7.3 Promotion of Translated Fiction**

Several participants in my survey mentioned the impact of library promotions and displays on their reading choices. The following comment represents this response group:

*"Most of the translated books I have read have been picked up at the library because they were displayed in some way. If I enjoy a book, I will then look at other books by that author."* (56, Female, European New Zealander)

This influence is not surprising given the proven popularity of public libraries in New Zealand. Prior to conducting the interviews with WCL librarians, I paid several visits to the former Central Library which, at the time, hosted the largest collection of books and multimedia items across WCL. During those visits, I took detailed notes as well as photos of ongoing fiction displays and enquired about past displays featuring translated books. The Library Blog section on WCL's website

has also featured translated works on different occasions. I will briefly describe some of these promotional activities as background for the interview excerpts that follow.

### ***Instances of Translation Promotion at WCL***

In 2018 alone, Wellington Central Library hosted two physical showcases of translated fiction. One was called ‘Not Lost in Translation’. In addition to 11 crime novels in translation, 45 translated novels across other genres were included in the list of recommended books. The list included foreign-fiction classics such as *Don Quixote*, *The Alchemist*, and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, as well as a range of newly published titles. The description attached to this showcase (Appendix J) reads as follows:

One of the biggest trends in fiction in 2018 was the strong emergence of voices from across the globe including cultures not often heard from. And we thought that we should celebrate this by doing a fiction showcase on what we consider to be some of the best translated novels both old and new.

Another promotion of translated fiction at the former Central Library was an introduction to 80 authors from around the world. In a homage to Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*, this promotion was named ‘Around the World with Eighty Authors’ and it contained a list of 80 authors alongside their nationalities. The list features writers from all over the world, including countries not often heard from. According to Johnson, the fiction customer specialist responsible for curating these displays, the circulation of the books and authors featured almost tripled as a result of the promotion.

Aside from hosting physical showcases, from 2012 to 2019 WCL consistently featured translated books on Library Blog, a part of its website dedicated to “*monthly checks on what’s popular and what’s issuing, which is a big way that people pick up on current trends*”, to use Underwood’s words. Of most relevance to this section are blogs that feature literature in translation. After searching through Library Blog, I noticed that the tags used for literature in translation are ‘translated novels’ and ‘translated fiction’. My search yielded several blogs dedicated to translated fiction, in addition to multiple newsletters which featured translated works alongside other fiction categories. More specifically, the search yielded seven blog posts with the tags ‘translated fiction’ and/or ‘translated novels.’ The titles of these blogs alongside their dates of publication are as follows:

- New Translated Fiction: A Way with Words (November 2019)
- Novel pursuits: new translated fiction (September 2019)

- The Man Booker International and Translated Fiction! (June 2019)
- Fresh words from far off places (December 2018)
- Translated works of fiction new to Wellington City Libraries (August 2018)
- Read around the globe: New translated fiction (October 2017)
- New ‘Other Genres’ this month featuring translated novels (January 2017)

I did not find any translation-focused blog published before 2017, nor did I find any published after 2019. Given that translated fiction is only one of the many categories in WCL’s fiction collection, the publication of seven blog posts focused on introducing new translated works is impressive. As mentioned above, literature in translation has also been regularly featured in the fiction newsletters posted on WCL’s Library Blog. It seems that the last of these newsletters, the aim of which was to present readers with “the best of the best fiction recently received by Wellington City Libraries,” went online in 2016. Eight fiction newsletters were published between 2012 and 2016, all of which devoted a separate section to showcasing translated novels. In fact, each newsletter was split into five sections, namely “contemporary fiction, graphic novels, mysteries, science fiction/fantasy, and other genres.” In all the newsletters, the ‘other genres’ exclusively features new translated titles. In a 2015 newsletter, ‘other genres’ is described as follows:

Translated novels are the feature in this month’s ‘Other Genres’ selection. Showcasing some brilliant writing from around the world, from China to Portugal, France to Sweden, Saudi Arabia to Ireland, all give a new perspective of life and an exciting reading experience.

Again, given the vast range of fiction categories that exist within the library’s collection, the regular inclusion of translated fiction in these newsletters is a sign of efforts by fiction selectors at WCL to reflect the growing attention to translated fiction in the anglophone literary landscape. However, the naming of the category is somewhat curious, given that it only featured translated books. In other words, translated fiction was relegated to the “other genres” category. A more reasonable name for this category would have been “translated books”.

Note that the list of promotions presented here is not necessarily exhaustive, as some displays might have slipped under my radar. Gauging the actual impact of these promotions on the circulation of the featured books or the wider category of translated fiction is outside the scope of this study, but as discussed earlier in this section, the librarians themselves attest to higher

circulation rates resulting from physical and online displays. What follows are the interviewees' reflections on the promotion of translated fiction at WCL.

### ***Interviewees' Perspectives on Translation Promotion***

Halfway through my interview with Olson and Johnson, the discussion shifted to the library's promotional activities. Johnson first made a general comment about the business of running regular showcases at WCL:

*Thinking about the way we do that, we're trying to show the balance of the collection and that it's all encompassing. We try to cover everything from every place, culture and genre, range and depth-wise. That's the difference between us and Unity Books, because we've got that huge range.*

Following this comment, I mentioned the translated fiction promotions I had seen at WCL. Since Johnson had been responsible for those promotions, he described the circumstances:

*Those two promotions are the only ones that I have done in the last 12 months that are specifically about translation. We have done things that are small ones...and we will include books in translation in the other promotions. So, when I'm doing science fiction promotion, there are Chinese authors in there, there are Russian authors, they are big names, but it wouldn't be specifically because they're translated, but because they're good and they tick the box to be in that promotion.*

He then reiterated the description of the 'Not Lost in Translation' promotion by saying that "*in 2018, there was a big trend for translated books, so it was an easy option to make such a showcase.*" Johnson's reference to 2018 as an exceptional year for literature in translation might reflect the hugely successful reception of certain translated books, including Olga Tokarczuk's Booker Prize winning novel *Flights*, as well as shortlisted titles like *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Go, Went, Gone*. The interviewees' mention of these three books in different parts of the interviews strengthens this hypothesis. Johnson's emphasis on 2018 is also likely to have stemmed from the publicity around the establishment of the National Book Award for Translated Literature and the EBRD Literature Prize that year.

Following up on discussions from earlier in the interview, Johnson pointed out that translation showcases are often well received by Wellington readers:

*Translation promotions are very popular; there are several reasons for that. First of all, it's really hard to get published, and it's doubly hard to publish a book in English*

*translation. The quality of books in translation is incredibly high. The other thing is that people do like to read widely.*

Similar comments were made by Underwood in response to my question, “to what extent do you think library promotions influence people’s reading choices?”:

*I do think they affect them, yes...we made sure that there are lists for some people as well as it’s on a blog if they are willing to have the list on their phone and go around more remotely. We could definitely see from borrowing figures, you know if we promoted a particular area, that it would go up...and just having to replenish the stock and the fact that people would ask for the lists further down the track.*

Underwood also shared her views on theme-based fiction displays and the promotion of translated materials at the library, although her response focused more on the positive reception of literature in translation by New Zealand readers and possible reasons for that:

*Were we were doing fiction thematically? Yes, you could say in the larger themes, like around LGBTQ. If you’re looking at queer works, then you can find a raft of them in every subject, and then if someone likes to do reading around the world, which would tie into translated works, not only translations but also people writing in English from different places. Our library, Te Matapihi Ki te Ao Nui, is a Window on the World, and I think often in New Zealand, people feel the geographic remoteness, and so that connection and that feeling of when you are reading something that is right on the page and it’s a mental stream, you really do feel connected.*

#### **7.4 Reception of Translated Fiction**

Another important theme that emerged out of the interview data was Wellingtonians’ reading preferences, and by extension the reception of translated literature at WCL. In the context of these interviews, ‘Wellingtonians’ refers primarily to public library patrons, because the interviewed librarians were mainly reflecting on their experiences of interacting with this group of readers. WCL seems to be committed to receiving regular feedback from patrons. This feedback comes from different channels, starting from the issue and returns desk all the way to feedback forms attached to library books and a newly introduced online rating system. In the opening part of our interview, Underwood mentioned her role in the circulation team at the former Central Library. She then mentioned an important aspect of her role:

*One of the benefits before the library was physically changed was that we had direct contact when people were returning their items, so that meant we got a lot of feedback about what people liked about certain items, things they'd recommend, and things that they thought were not worth it. That customer contact point at returns, which has now changed, used to be a great point to gather responses.*

As with her other responses, Underwood provided some examples to put her point across:

*It's a totally different response if someone is handing back a whole section of books and going "my husband picked that up and he really liked it" or "the children loved this but hated that one". Some of that smaller anecdotal stuff really informs us in order to help readers find what they want.*

Not only does patron feedback inform curatorial and promotional decisions at WCL, but it is also used as a recommendation tool. In 2018, the Readers' Choice shelf stood next to the Librarians' Choice shelf at Wellington Central Library (see Appendix K). Considering the extensive work experience of Olson, Johnson, and Underwood at WCL, I was not surprised to hear them share their opinions about patrons' reading preferences, occasionally referring to borrowing figures and circulation statistics in support. These opinion statements ranged from general commentaries to specific observations at branch level. Underwood's comment below exemplifies the latter:

*You don't like to think so, but the suburban libraries, each of the suburbs have their own taste. So, in one area, a historical romance would be really appreciated and would get a great response, whereas in other sections, they would just go "maybe not".*

Amongst all the interviewees in this study, Underwood provided the most detailed account of Wellingtonians' reading preferences. When I asked her to elaborate, she said:

*In some areas, for example, there has been this new rash of the Amish romance novels, and the suburb of Tawa, for some reason, it loves domestic fiction, and because that's out in the north, that influenced the selection choice when they opened the new library at Johnsonville. And they really bought a lot of American domestic fiction authors...because they believed it satisfied the tastes of the northern suburbs. Also, they went through the electoral rolls and the census to see the ethnic make-up of the Johnsonville area as well when they were curating that collection. But then you get areas where there is an older population and where people read through series. When I started, the first branch I worked*

*at was in Ngaio library, in Cummings Park. For some bizarre reason, there was a rush of westerns. There were a group of older men that really enjoyed westerns.*

Here Underwood demonstrates an impressive understanding of readers' preferences, which is not limited to individual libraries, because she provides examples from across the library network. In micro contexts such as suburbs and branch libraries, differences in reading tastes likely relate to demographic variables including age, ethnicity, and gender, in addition to individual reading tastes. Demographic influence is reflected in two parts of Underwood's comment, first where she mentions "*areas where there is an older population and where people read through series,*" and second in her reflection on the popularity of Westerns at a branch library in Wellington. My own survey findings also showed certain connections between age, gender, and reading preferences (see chapter four). In macro contexts like towns, cities, and countries, the characteristics and social dynamics of a locale can also influence people's reading tastes (see chapter one). Establishing the precise influence of each of these elements on readers' preferences is extremely difficult, but acknowledging their role at all is already an important step towards incorporating them into curatorial practice.

Another significant aspect of the same comment is the consideration of census data in curating branch library collections. This reflects efforts to make the library collection as responsive as possible to the probable interests of the target audience. While different portions of census data can inform the selectors' decisions, some demographic variables are more useful than others. For instance, given the documented correlation between age and reading preferences, the age-group composition of an area can be an important factor in curatorial decisions. Data on ethnicity and knowledge of languages can also be useful, in particular for curating the 'world languages' collection (see below).

As well as general reading trends, the interviewed librarians made specific comments about the reception of literature in translation. Underwood, for example, mentioned certain trends relating to the reception of translated fiction at WCL, most of which reflect global literary trends:

*When 1Q84 came out, there was a lot of interest, like Murakami in general. There are particular ones that have become darlings and so people are interested in that. Also, in response to that, there have been some really good short novels by Japanese female writers, like Convenience Store Women... Amos Oz was a whole other one... There tend to be more people that are more interested in Italy, Paris, and that Japanese one was the odd one in the basket. I have noticed more interest in European translated works in Wellington.*

Johnson too mentioned the popularity of Haruki Murakami in response to a question about the reception of translated fiction at WCL:

*One of the most heavily borrowed authors is Murakami. The interesting thing about Murakami is that the interest in a lot of these books reflects a global culture, and also a lot of technological and cultural ideas feed into Japan, and that would give him a distinctive angle...He is a great writer, and then it's that kind of global themes that have got a Japanese touch to them which makes them very popular.*

Johnson's reference to 'global culture' reiterates an idea he had shared earlier in the interview: "really good books are about the shared human experience, which is not really to do with cultures." To underline this point, he provided a few recent examples of translated novels that were received favourably by WCL patrons:

*Actually, there are a lot of books translated which did really well. You will be hard-pushed to find a common thread amongst them. There was a couple about conflicts in the Middle East, Red Birds and Frankenstein in Baghdad, which became hugely successful for all different sorts of reasons. It's very modern and kind of a horror story at the same time, it's allegorical but it's also magical realism.*

Olson also commented on the reception of international literature by Wellington readers. I asked her if stories from certain cultures and countries are more popular among library patrons, to which she responded:

*I don't think they are. It is genre driven. This debut novel by the Iraqi author that I was talking about; I'm expecting it to be very popular because of its brilliant reviews, and a really good story. You've also got Scandinavian noir, and a lot of people who read Scandinavian thrillers and mysteries might not be interested in reading this Iraqi woman's books. There are people who actually really like literature, from the Middle East, from India. If we can bring those books in, I'm sure people will love them.*

Olson also paid attention to the bigger picture with regards to the reception of translated fiction. In the following statement, she is responding to my question about the most notable reading trends among Wellington readers, in particular those involving translated fiction:

*New Zealand is a huge polyglot particularly in the big cities, so I think my impression is that New Zealanders like reading widely. If they see a novel that is set in Japan and it grips them, they'll borrow it, and they will be interested to see what the cultural aspect of it is.*



*But when they next come into the library and they see a Persian translated novel, and they open it and feel that it sounds interesting, they'll take that out, too. And the next time they'll take out a New Zealand novel.*

A notable aspect of this comment is the nationalisation of international reading taste. The interviewed librarians, including Olson, made frequent mentions of “global culture” that transcends national boundaries, but here an interest in that culture is presented as a national trait. The first part of this comment entails another important point, that is the possible relationship between multiculturalism/multilingualism and reading preferences. The existence of such a relationship is one of the underlying assumptions of the current study, but one that was hardly mentioned by the expert interviewees representing Writers Week and Unity Books. Although a one-to-one connection cannot be drawn between multiculturalism and reading interests, it is telling that the interviewed librarians found this issue important enough to mention it in response to a question about reading tastes. All three library interviewees briefly touched on this aspect of Wellington. Olson continued her argument as follows:

*I think if something is well-written and is translated, and it gives people a cultural perspective, whether it's a cultural perspective of Iraq, Japan, or actually South America, Spanish stuff that has been translated from Spanish that is set in Latin America, people will read them. New Zealand people, I think, are very outward-looking. We are a small country, down at the end of nowhere, but people here are very outward-looking. Do you find that?*

I responded by sharing some of my survey findings which showed that the selected sample of Wellington readers were passionate about reading world literature. In fact, Olson's idea of New Zealanders being cosmopolitan readers reiterates the respondents' self-reported cosmopolitanism in reading. However, as shown throughout chapter four, the perceived image of a cosmopolitan reader does not necessarily translate into actual cosmopolitan reading. Underwood put it like this: “*I think people like the label of being more cosmopolitan, but when it comes to the follow through, they are like, I have read two translated books this year, tick.*”

To support her argument, Olson shared a conversation she had had prior to our interview:

*I was talking to a woman about a month ago and she works in the Department of Internal Affairs. She said that New Zealand is the most diverse culture in the world, because we have so many cultures here. We have Nepalese, Burmese, Iraqis, Syrians, Germans, French, Americans, Canadians, Australians, and South Africans, among others.*

Again, the degree to which living in a multicultural society impacts one's reading interests is debatable. However, Olson's decision to focus on *this* aspect of Wellington, instead of any other, can be seen as indicative of the library's goal of catering to diverse audiences. This goal is made explicit in WCL's Collection Policy of 2016: "Wellington enjoys a rich cultural and social diversity, and the library's ongoing goal is to remain responsive to all areas of our communities."

Underwood too commented on the connection between Wellington's diversity and Wellingtonians' reading habits, although her stance is more critical compared to Olson's.

*I want to be able to tell you that Wellington readers are eclectic, and that they have an appetite for translated fiction. Wellington itself does have a very diverse population; I mean, it's not parochial, but there are certain catches, particularly the European languages, that are translated pretty much in our collection. We have more European translations in our collections. A lot of French translations, for example, like people that have idealised Paris.*

Like certain comments in the Writers Week interviews, this comment uses indirect language. However, instead of using hedging words and phrases, Underwood expresses her meaning by implication. In the beginning of the statement, she describes "what she would have wanted to be able to tell me" about Wellington readers, instead of what she thinks is the case. She implies that Wellington readers are *not* eclectic, and that they do *not* have an appetite for translated fiction. Underwood then mentions the diversity that is characteristic of Wellington, followed by a sentence which is likely to be a response to what she was thinking at that moment: "*I mean, it's not parochial.*"

Underwood's reference to the disproportionate representation of translations from European languages explains her use of *parochial* earlier in the comment. While she believed that this disparity is not best described as parochial, she did consider it important enough to raise it with respect to the library's translated fiction collection. Apart from reflecting global translation trends, the disproportionate representation of translations from European languages might reflect the receiving society's reading interests. One way to gauge the influence of global and local reading trends on the composition of WCL's translated fiction collection would be to analyse the library's collection in terms of number of translations from different languages and compare those numbers with global translation publication trends, which is what Siebeck (2014) has done for translated children's literature at the National Library of New Zealand.

### ***Availability and Circulation of Translated Fiction at WCL***

Although I have not attempted to map local translation trends onto global ones, I have extrapolated the number of copies and cumulative circulation of a selected group of translated fiction books using Wellington City Libraries' online catalogue. This group comprised the list of 'the most well-received translated titles between 2001 and 2018,' which I had compiled in 2019.

Almost 90 percent of the selected titles (133 out of 148) appeared on the WCL catalogue, meaning the library held at least one copy of those titles. The items differed significantly in terms of number of copies and cumulative circulation. WCL held one or two copies of one-third of the items, while it held ten or more copies of only ten percent. The rest of the items (approximately 55 percent) were represented by three to nine copies on WCL's catalogue. Most of the translated books with more than ten copies were originally written in Swedish or Norwegian, although the library held more than ten copies of novels by Haruki Murakami and Elena Ferrante, translated from Japanese and Italian respectively, and two books translated from German, too.

The average cumulative circulation of these translated fiction books across the WCL network was 215. At the time of compiling this list in mid-2020, 48 items had a cumulative circulation of 200 or more, 43 were circulated between 100 and 200 times, and the remaining 42 items were circulated less than 100 times. Similar to some of the evidence presented in other parts of the thesis (see chapter two), novels translated from Swedish, Norwegian, and Japanese had the highest scores both in terms of number of copies and cumulative circulation. This reflects global translation trends over the last 20 years and echoes some of the observations of the interviewed librarians about well-received translated books.

### ***'World Languages' Collection***

Another topic that was brought up by the interviewees was the provision of foreign-language books at the library. Initially, I had titled this section "foreign languages collection". However, I changed it to the current one after coming across Underwood's comment: "*recently, the library changed its vocabulary to 'world languages' rather than 'other languages', which is interesting.*" Although not directly linked to the research question, some points raised in this section relate indirectly to the selection and promotion of translated fiction.

In my interview with Underwood, I asked: "*do you think fiction selectors at WCL consult specialised platforms such as Rochester University's Open Letter Books when they want to order translated literature?*" Underwood's response merged into the topic of world languages:

*I really doubt it...Also, because we have foreign language, which I know doesn't relate to translated, but in some cases, they [fiction selectors] think if we have a really good Spanish*

*fiction collection, which has a good amount of contemporary as well as classical authors in it, in some way they have catered to that section of the audience.*

Although foreign language books and translated books are categorised under different headings, they are sometimes perceived as serving similar audiences. The survey for this study provided interesting insights on this topic. Compared to monolingual participants, multilinguals were shown to have a more positive perception of translated fiction. We might extrapolate from this finding that such people are likely to borrow books from the World Languages collection for languages they know, but they are also likely to borrow translations for languages they do not. In both cases, such people are cultivating a perspective on literature that encompasses diverse cultures and language communities. From this perspective, foreign-language books and translated books do serve similar audiences. Also, for obvious reasons, the titles featured in these two collections overlap to a certain extent.

Another intersection between foreign-language literature and translated literature in the present context is the influence of outside forces in distributing and promoting them. As mentioned in chapter five, embassies and cultural organisations sometimes impact the choices of writers to be invited to the New Zealand Festival. A similar process is at play for the provision of world literature at public libraries. Here, foreign embassies in Wellington seem to have taken an active approach. Before the closure of Wellington's Central Library in 2019, two corners of the library were dedicated to books and audiovisual material in Chinese and Korean. The promotional brochure for the Korean Corner read as follows:

The Korean Corner is the generous donation by the Embassy of Korea to Wellington City Libraries... You can listen to CDs of popular bands and groups, read popular and classic Korean fiction and find out about Korean language and culture. All free to borrow.

This is an instance of what Dalle Nogare and Bertacchini (2015) describe as “government intervention in the market of cultural goods and services.” In other words, if the Korean embassy had not approached WCL, Korean-language items might not have been assigned a separate corner. The creation of this corner aligns with the growing international demand for Korean cultural products. In the last decade, Korean literature, film, and popular music has resonated with many people outside Korea, including anglophone audiences. This popularity might also have influenced WCL's decision to assign a separate section to Korean-language material. Underwood commented on the topic of embassy-sponsored collections:

*Embassy libraries are also havens for readers. The South Korean embassy, for example, has a really good library. We had gifted collections at the Central Library. They were embassy donated. There was a more political background to those, things like sister cities and that sort of thing.*

Across from the Korean-language corner at the former Central Library was the Chinese-language corner. Chinese literature is perhaps not as popular as Korean literature among anglophone audiences. However, the appearance of a Chinese-language corner at a public library in New Zealand is understandable given the increasing Chinese population in the country (Statistics New Zealand, 2018).

### **7.5 Discussion of Library Interview Findings**

All three interviewed librarians underlined the importance for WCL's book selections of consulting the sources of information that have the greatest influence on readers' choices. While bookstores and literary festivals could also benefit from such practice, public libraries are *obliged* to cater to patrons' interests. It is important to consider this distinction in relation to the different entities' policies and practices for selecting and promoting translated fiction. One way of catering to a wide-ranging audience is adopting as eclectic an approach as possible in selecting and promoting books.

The interviewed librarians mentioned some of their efforts to adopt a global approach in selecting items. A global view comes about, among other things, as a result of the choice of sources that selectors consult to learn about new publications. This holds true for all three institutions included in the interview phase, although it plays out differently for each. With regards to WCL, selectors might benefit from consulting sources that focus on literature in translation, including Words Without Borders online magazine, the University of Oklahoma's World Literature Today magazine, Asymptote Journal, and Rochester University's Open Letter Books. Although literature in translation is occasionally included in the lists sent out by book suppliers and featured in the book review sections of mainstream outlets, that is, the sources most frequently consulted by WCL selectors, specialised platforms can provide fiction selectors with a broader picture of this category, which in turn can contribute to a more potent world literature collection at WCL. As one of the major literary gatekeepers in New Zealand's capital, WCL can exert a significant positive influence on the reception of translated fiction by Wellington readers through its selection of books.

Unlike the interviews with Writers Week and Unity Books staff, the library interviewees made several references to a possible relationship between multiculturalism/multilingualism and reading

preferences. This relationship has been analysed from different perspectives throughout the present thesis. While the librarians' personal opinions or the general direction of conversation during each interview might have played some part in prompting such references, they could equally reflect the organisational approach of WCL. Staff at WCL are at the frontline of public service, encountering people from different ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds. As a result, librarians are likely to develop a first-hand appreciation for growing cultural and linguistic diversity. This appreciation was reflected in different parts of the interviews, for example when Olson alluded to Radio NZ's eclectic book reviews: "*They do review all sorts of books. They have a multicultural point of view.*"

As for criteria for selecting translated fiction, Olson and Johnson referred to 'suitability to the public library context' and 'projected popularity among library patrons' as the two most important. The interviewees' remarks align with the selection criteria outlined in WCL's Collection Policy: "responding to customer and community demand and local interest; continuing relevance to the Wellington community; suitable library format; the quality of the item, with reference to the average expected price" (Wellington City Libraries, 2016, p. 3). The last criterion reminds us of the logistical factors involved in the selection of items for the library. The emphasis on 'local interest' throughout this policy document might explain the interviewed librarians' detailed observations of the popularity, or lack thereof, of different parts of the collection, as well as their informed views on the popular categories of books within each branch library. Combined with a stronger global outlook, this local approach can yield even better results. Not only can this nuanced knowledge result in more informed selection decisions at WCL, but it also has the potential to influence the workings of other book-related stakeholders in Wellington, including literary festivals. Past Writers Week committees aimed to realise this potential by bringing librarians to committee meetings (see chapter five for more details).

## 8. Conclusion

In chapter four, I presented the findings from the survey of a purposively selected sample of Wellington readers, whereas chapters five to seven contained the findings from semi-structured interviews with a selected group of stakeholders in Wellington's book sector. In this chapter, I will first present the main findings of the survey and the interviews separately and then focus on the conclusions that can be drawn from the connections between the two.

### 8.1 Summary of Survey Findings

The survey findings presented in this thesis provided a means for addressing the first research question: *What are the perceptions of translated fiction among adult readers in Wellington?* The combination of closed-ended and open-ended responses allowed first-hand insight into Wellington readers' perceptions of translated fiction, their main sources of information about translated books, and the relationship between demographic/social background and perceptions of translated fiction. First and foremost, the findings point to the marginal standing of translated fiction in the respondents' actual reading, epitomised in the tiny share of translated fiction as a proportion of total fiction read. Nonetheless, most respondents do not see translated fiction as necessarily less enjoyable or more difficult to read than English fiction, nor do they feel alienated by foreign-sounding fiction titles. In fact, the most frequent theme in the open-ended responses was "interest in translated literature". Twenty of the 79 open-ended responses specifically expressed this interest, with some pinpointing the reasons why translated fiction is both interesting and necessary for them as readers.

As I have tried to show throughout the thesis, some respondents were particularly knowledgeable about and interested in the dynamics of literary translation into English as well as the peculiar translation landscape in New Zealand. That knowledge and interest was reflected in their responses to both closed-ended and open-ended survey items, especially in the unconventional ways in which they perceived translated fiction (see chapter four). Two points should be considered when trying to make sense of this finding. Firstly, respondents are likely to portray a more open-minded version of themselves when asked directly about their perceptions of foreign fiction. This is especially the case for a sample of readers in Wellington, where there is a strong ongoing discourse around inclusiveness and openness towards other cultures. Secondly, as other researchers (e.g. Campbell, 2015) have noted before, readers are more likely to talk in positive terms about literature in translation when responding to a survey by a translation scholar on the topic. In Campbell's (2015) words, "it is possible that their willingness to engage with

translation issues was unusually high or that they espoused a more positive attitude towards translation than would normally be the case” (176).

Also prevalent across the survey findings was a disregard for whether a book is a translation or an English original. This finding tied in with the respondents’ overall indifference to the original language of a book they had read or were about to read, which surfaced in their responses to one of the closed-ended questions: approximately 82 percent of the readers in this sample said they do not care about the original language of a book, as long as they like the author/genre.

A more specific question relating to my first research question was: *Do age, ethnicity, and knowledge of one or more second language predict readers’ perceptions of translated fiction?* The survey findings are quite telling when it comes to the relationship between knowledge of second languages and perceptions of translated fiction. While age and ethnicity had very little correlation with perceptions of translated fiction, multilingualism proved to be the strongest predictor of positive perceptions of translated fiction. This finding was consistent across almost all survey items, leaving little doubt as to the effect of second language knowledge on the readers’ perceptions of translated fiction. Respondents with an intermediate to advanced knowledge of one or more second languages were more likely to express a specific interest in reading translated fiction. They also expressed considerably less scepticism towards translated books. Moreover, over half of the comments which delved deeper into the specific features of translated books and what makes them worth reading were submitted by multilingual respondents, although multilinguals made up only 30 percent of the sample. Future studies might produce a more nuanced view of the correlation observed here between knowledge of second languages and perceptions of translated fiction by adopting more rigorous methods for evaluating the readers’ L2 knowledge and asking more detailed questions about this specific correlation.

The findings also revealed that most respondents do not see translated fiction as a separate category of books. Instead, many respondents tended to talk of “books from other cultures”, “multicultural fiction”, and “diverse fiction” when responding to open-ended questions about translated fiction. Campbell (2015, p. 174) also found that “respondents did not consider ‘translated’ to be a particularly meaningful category for discussing books.” The reason(s) why English-speaking readers in the UK and New Zealand see only a weak connection between, say, “multicultural fiction” and “languages other than English” requires further study. What seems to draw many readers to translated fiction is a desire to be exposed to fresh ways of seeing the world through the written word, regardless of the original language of the book. This desire may



sometimes be satisfied by reading English-language fiction, although some commentators remain sceptical about the extent to which that is possible.

Roxburgh (2004), for example, believes that American authors rarely write stories about other cultures and immersion into other cultures, and that we need to go to books written in other languages to find those stories. The first part of Roxburgh's argument is questionable for several reasons, including the generalisation about "American authors" as a meaningful category. The second part, however, does provide some food for thought regarding the actual potential of English-language fiction for functioning as a window to the world. Dali and Alsabbagh (2014, p. 571) acknowledge that "the great diversity and oversupply of reading matters in English has, in a way, eliminated the necessity and longing for translated fiction", yet there is no doubt that "we must ... preserve the variety and pungent authenticity that local fiction encapsulates" (Anderson, 2014)

More broadly, the survey findings uncovered the intertwined set of factors that impact reading choices and form perceptions of translated fiction. While the impact of some of these factors, including age, gender, and education level, can be evaluated through descriptive and inferential statistics, others can hardly be quantified. In the survey for this study, for instance, I attempted to gauge the respondents' exposure to cultures other than their own by asking questions about their participation in international cultural events in Wellington and their experiences of travelling overseas. I then tried to find any potential correlation between level of exposure and perceptions of translated fiction, in the hope of addressing the following research question: *Is there a connection between readers' international engagement and their perceptions of translated fiction?* Mainly thanks to the open-ended responses I received, this approach did yield some important insights into the perceived impact of some of these factors. However, it also revealed the difficulty of pinning down the factors that influence readers' perceptions and preferences, making it difficult to answer the outlined question definitively. There were some signs of a positive correlation between the degree of international engagement, as evaluated in this study, and perceptions of translated fiction. However, a one-to-one connection could not be established using the existing data. Aside from the impact of each individual's unique circumstances, book-related stakeholders have the potential to create and shape reading interests, hence the decision to interview representatives from important stakeholders in Wellington.

## **8.2 Summary of Interview Findings**

The second phase of this study consisted of seven semi-structured interviews with representatives from three major stakeholders in Wellington's book sector: New Zealand Festival's Writers Week,

Unity Books Wellington, and Wellington City Libraries. I outlined the procedure for selecting these institutions in the methodology chapter. The main selection criterion was the perceived role of these institutions in shaping Wellingtonians' reading tastes through their selection and promotion decisions. The interview data were accompanied by the content analyses of the institutions' archives, policy documents, and online platform content, depending on the nature of their work. These data were used collectively to address the second research question, that is, to discover the policies and practices of New Zealand Festival's Writers Week, Unity Books Wellington, and Wellington City Libraries for selecting and promoting translated fiction. Here, I will present the most notable findings for each institution and attempt to draw conclusions based on the combination of findings.

Writers Week is one of the most prestigious literary festivals in New Zealand. Historically known for its international focus, Writers Week has recently seen a steep decline in the proportion of non-English-speaking writers, which is surprising given the recent spike in translation publications in the UK and the US, New Zealand's main suppliers. My interviews with the former and current coordinators of Writers Week uncovered a contrast between theory and practice. In theory, writers in translation are considered an integral part of Writers Week, without whom the festival stands to lose its hard-earned status. In practice, however, New Zealand writers and occasionally writers from elsewhere in the anglophone world have dominated the Writers programme in recent editions. While this approach can be partly attributed to the efforts for nationalising culture and literature in New Zealand, it could also reflect the weakened ties between Writers Week and international cultural organisations in Wellington. As discussed in chapter five, foreign embassies and international cultural institutes used to play an active part in sponsoring writers in the earlier editions of the New Zealand Festival. This support led to the appearance of record number of international guests in those editions, especially in 1994. If there is a willingness to bring more non-English-speaking writers to Writers Week, re-establishing ties with international institutes seems to be a necessary first step.

Unity Books Wellington was the most frequently mentioned Wellington bookstore during my preliminary talks with stakeholders in the capital's book sector. Selecting it as the representative of the bookselling community was, therefore, a straightforward decision. In terms of the share of translated fiction in Unity Books' Fiction collection, my findings could hardly have been more heartening. Around 17 percent of Unity's World Fiction category, which includes publications from all over the world except New Zealand, were translated titles as of June 2021. This figure is significantly higher than the commonly mentioned translation rates in the UK and US (five percent and three percent, respectively). Although Unity Books holds an impressive range

of translated books, it does not make much effort to promote this thread of its collection. Even the World Fiction category in Unity's physical and online stores makes no distinction between English-language originals and translated titles. Data from interviews with Unity Books' representatives helped trace one of the possible causes for the store's passive promotional practices: reluctance to acknowledge translated fiction as a discrete fiction category.

The final stakeholder selected for the second phase of this study was Wellington City Libraries. Comprising 12 branch libraries, WCL is a major literary tastemaker in Wellington, mentioned on several occasions by other stakeholders as well as survey respondents. I initially planned to conduct two interviews with fiction specialists at WCL, but the range of work undertaken at the City Libraries warranted a third interview. I also analysed the library's website with an eye on content related to translated books (e.g., blogs and newsletters). The main finding from the interviews and content analyses was WCL's treatment of literature in translation as a discrete fiction category, reflected in the library's selection, categorisation, and promotion practices. This is the most important factor that distinguishes WCL from Writers Week and Unity Books. In recent years, WCL has had several showcases of translated fiction in branch libraries as well as on its website. In 2018 alone, it hosted two physical displays of translated books at the former Central Library, in addition to posting seven blogs focusing on literature in translation between 2017 and 2019. The library has even changed the subheadings on its catalogue to accommodate a discrete category called *translated fiction*. Given the interviewed librarians' extensive knowledge of patrons' reading interests, demonstrated through detailed comments about local reading trends, one might conclude that the separate treatment of translated fiction at WCL is an acknowledgment of patrons' preferences. Although most of the respondents to my survey were Unity Books' customers, almost all of them mentioned WCL as a significant influence on their reading choices. Regardless of whether WCL's approach to translated fiction is a response to patrons' interests, an attempt to create interest in this category, or a mixture of these two, it demonstrates a potential way ahead for other stakeholders.

The practices of each of the three institutions for selecting and promoting translated fiction are important in their own right. What is also of relevance is the realisation that even in a small literary community like Wellington, stakeholders can have different perceptions of a certain category of books and devise idiosyncratic practices based on those perceptions. Individual stakeholders in smaller contexts can exert more influence on readers' perceptions and choices. Tilly Lloyd's perceptions of translated literature, for example, can rub off on Wellington readers with relative ease, just like Claire Mabey's gatekeeping role at Writers Week is highly consequential.

Another important connection between the findings for Writers Week, Unity Books, and WCL is these entities' shared fondness for New Zealand literature. Although the three differ significantly in terms of the nature of their work and the size of their operation, they all work actively towards promoting homegrown literature. However, there is an important difference between the approach of Writers Week and Unity Books on the one hand, and WCL on the other. Whereas the first two promote New Zealand literature often at the expense of other categories of books, including translated literature, WCL adopts a broader and more inclusive approach for promoting its English-language and translated collections. Among other things, this approach might reflect WCL's responsibility to cater to public interests, and as said by one of the interviewed librarians, "*public taste is very wide indeed.*" Through holding physical showcases and posting promotional blogs, WCL has created more visibility for translated fiction.

### **8.3 Connections between Survey and Interview Findings**

Findings from the survey of Wellington readers and the interviews with stakeholders in Wellington's book sector contain references to several shared topics, some of which warrant further elaboration.

One of the topics that was ubiquitous throughout the survey and interview data was perceptions of translated fiction. While survey respondents were asked directly about their perceptions of translated fiction, representatives from the selected organisations were prompted to elaborate on their respective organisation's policies and practices for selecting and promoting translated fiction, which I then used to draw conclusions about the potential underlying perceptions. Overall, both the survey respondents and interviewees had a reserved stance towards the treatment of translated fiction as a separate fiction category. A considerable group of survey respondents, however, expressed interest in the notion of a discrete "translated fiction" or "international fiction" category in libraries, bookstores, and literary festivals. Some of these respondents expressed their interest by providing positive feedback on the idea of administering a survey focusing on translated fiction, while others saw this discrete categorisation as a tool that could help them reach their eclectic reading objectives.

WCL seems to have adopted a similar approach to the one favoured by the group of respondents outlined above. Writers Week and Unity Books, however, do not have specific practices for selecting and promoting translated books, in spite of the latter's impressive collection of translated fiction. During the interviews, representatives from Writers Week and Unity Books expressed this approach on multiple occasions.

The findings of the study regarding the impact of Writers Week on respondents' reading choices are quite eye-opening. Introducing the New Zealand audience to world literature appears

to have been a relatively low priority for Writers Week organisers. The proportion of writers from New Zealand appearing on the Writers Week programme has grown significantly over the past two decades. While this type of focus on national literature is understandable in the light of the nationwide project to promote New Zealand literature since the 1990s, the degree of such focus is questionable. The data pertaining to its previous editions suggest that Writers Week has relied heavily on English-speaking guests. That could explain why very few respondents in this study made any mention of the festival's impact on their approach to translated fiction, or world literature for that matter. At the same time, Writers Week seems to have had a considerable impact on broadening the audience's reading horizons in areas other than translated fiction.

Overall, the survey and interview data did not provide any meaningful evidence to suggest that the selected sample of readers and stakeholders in Wellington oppose or dislike translated fiction per se. Some survey respondents did favour English-original fiction and certain practices of the stakeholders could be categorised as unaccommodating of translated fiction, but participants in both groups demonstrated an appreciation for literature in translation. What the data did suggest, however, was some discrepancy between discourse and practice with respect to the treatment of translated fiction. In most cases, translated fiction was perceived more positively in discourse than it was treated in practice. This was especially the case for some of the interviewed experts, whose organisations had not taken meaningful steps for promoting translated fiction and writers in translation. Survey respondents also demonstrated this approach when they provided overly positive comments about translated fiction but reported reading very few translated books. These cases, however, were matched, if not outnumbered, by cases where individual respondents had taken concrete steps to incorporate translated fiction into their reading.

As expected from the outset, the question of reading preferences and perceptions of translated literature is multifaceted and has no straightforward answer. The way the findings have been presented and discussed in this thesis captures that complexity. What adds to the complexity is the scarcity of research on this topic, hence the decision to include a wide range of items in the questionnaire to be able to extrapolate *respondents'* understanding of literature in translation rather than imposing a certain understanding on them. Although the survey respondents and expert interviewees were given information sheets outlining the objectives of the research and the definition of key terms, some of them applied their own definitions and understandings. Interestingly, some survey respondents floated between certain conceptualisations of translated fiction, as if challenging their own perceptions and contemplating alternative understandings. The following two comments demonstrate this phenomenon:

*“Interesting survey, thanks. I haven't thought that much about translated books as a category, so this is enjoyably thought-provoking.”* (59, Female, European New Zealander)

*“I really didn't think of translated books as a genre, or even something to consider when picking something to read. Will have to give them a go now though.”* (19, Female, European)

The above comments, alongside others presented in chapter four, show that many Wellington readers are willing to consider alternative perspectives on translated fiction, and that they do not require much prompting to start thinking about them. In fact, “the widespread aspiration to be cosmopolitan and openminded means that Wellington has the right conditions for turning from ‘translation indifferent’ to ‘translation positive’” (Richard Millington, personal communication, June 2021). While some readers take it upon themselves to enhance their translation awareness, others need higher exposure to translated books in order to develop it. This is where stakeholders’ practices become crucial. As seen in some instances across the thesis (e.g., Writers Week’s session featuring Jokha Alharthi, Unity Books’ Found in Translation display, and WCL’s physical and online showcases of translated literature), even one-off promotions of translated literature can spark interest among readers. If they occur more frequently, such promotions can drive meaningful policy changes that would highlight international fiction in general and translated fiction in particular. In a small, tight-knit literary community like Wellington’s, each translation display or international writer appearance counts towards creating a larger audience for translated literature.

#### **8.4 Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Future Research**

In the introduction, I pointed out the merits and significance of this research. Here, I will outline some of its limitations and suggest potential avenues for future research.

One of the limitations of this study is its reliance on self-reporting. The survey is almost completely based on the participants’ self-reporting as well as recalling their past reading experiences. This means that the survey findings, especially those relating to the number of translations read and attendance at different literary events, should be treated only as a guide to readers’ engagement with translated fiction. Perhaps certain questions could be presented differently to minimise the potential inaccuracy that can ensue from self-reporting. The combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions, however, did allow the respondents to elaborate on their responses and comment on the questions. Longitudinal studies of a selected group of readers in

Wellington, or more broadly in New Zealand, could further minimise the inaccuracies resulting from self-reporting.

Another limitation is that the survey is targeted at readers of translation while the interviews are with stakeholders in Wellington's book sector. Ideally, interviews would also have been conducted with readers identified as representative of the main values shown to be significantly different. In view of the scarcity of translation reception research in New Zealand, my rationale for not following this approach was the need to gain a holistic view and identify broad patterns before detailing readers' perceptions. I attempted to minimise the impact of this limitation by including multiple open-ended questions throughout the survey, which indeed resulted in a wealth of descriptive responses. Future studies might follow the conventional approach of a survey followed by interviews with selected participants, which is likely to provide richer data and a basis for more definitive interpretation.

The focus on the reception of 'translated fiction', a subset of translated books, could be considered a further limitation of the study. In terms of its scale and focus, this study lies somewhere between the case studies investigating the reception of one or more translated books in a certain country or region (e.g., Sousa 2002, D'Egidio 2015) and those looking at larger categories such as books read for pleasure (Campbell 2015), which may include fiction, non-fiction, or poetry. Future studies of translation reception in New Zealand might focus on the promotion and reception of nonfiction, poetry, or other book categories. A larger-scale study that takes a comprehensive approach encompassing all categories is also possible, even if it seems unlikely given the marginal position that translation research currently occupies in New Zealand.

The underrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) participants might be identified as another limitation of this study. This might have been overcome through a targeted approach to data collection, one that ensured a fuller representation of different ethnic and linguistic groups. Admittedly, if the survey had been distributed via a different channel, for example the public library, I might have received more responses from members of CALD groups. However, such an approach would necessarily be premised on the assumption that certain groups would be underrepresented in the institutions chosen for recruiting participants for this study, that is, local book clubs and the social media platform of a local bookstore. During the data collection phase of my study, I had no grounds for making such an assumption. Indeed, the underrepresentation of CALD participants emerged only during data analysis. The composition of the sample therefore reflects, broadly speaking, the composition of the membership of these institutions. An attractive avenue for future research would be to focus on members of CALD groups to identify potential differences in translation perception between CALD and non-CALD readers.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, my selection of book-related stakeholders in Wellington involved a certain degree of subjectivity, and now, at the end of my study, it is clear to me that other institutions could also be fruitfully mined for data illuminating the place of translated fiction in Wellington's literary scene. For example, my findings suggested that Radio New Zealand is an influential presence in the city, with both stakeholders and readers mentioning RNZ on multiple occasions. More specifically, the Nine to Noon programme features regular book reviews of fiction and nonfiction publications. Future research might focus on the activities of individual entities, such as Radio New Zealand, as they relate to translated literature.



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**Appendix A:** Non-source-language-specific awards for literature in English translation  
(Compiled by Mohsen Kafi)

<b>Name of the Award</b>	<b>YOE<sup>40</sup></b>	<b>Description</b>
PEN Translation Prize <sup>41</sup>	1963	This annual award confers a \$3,000 prize on the author of a book-length prose translation from any language into English published during the previous calendar year.
International Dublin Literary Award	1996	Awarded annually to one book written or translated into English. Books are nominated for the Award by invited public libraries in cities throughout the world. If the winning book is in English translation, €75,000 is awarded to the author and €25,000 to the translator.
National Translation Award	1998	This Award is awarded annually in poetry and in prose to literary translators who have made an outstanding contribution to literature in English. Submitted works must have been translated by a U.S. citizen or resident. The winning translators and books are featured at the annual conference of the American Literary Translators Association.
Best Translated Book Award	2007	This prize draws attention to the best works of translated literature of the following year. Each winning author and translator receive a \$5,000 cash prize.
The International Booker Prize	2016	The International Booker Prize is awarded annually for a single book, translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland. The £50,000 prize is divided equally between the author and the translator
Warwick Prize for Women in Translation	2017	This prize is awarded annually to the best eligible work of fiction, poetry, literary non-fiction... written by a woman, translated into English by a translator (or translators) of any gender, and published by a UK or Irish publisher. The £1,000 prize is divided equally between the writer and her translator(s). Aim: addressing the gender imbalance in translated literature.
The TA First Translation Prize	2017	An annual £2,000 prize for a debut literary translation into English published in the UK. The Prize is shared between the translator and their editor.
National Book Award for Translated Literature	2018	Awarded to a work of fiction or nonfiction translated into English and published in the U.S. A prize of \$10000 is split between the author and the translator.

<sup>40</sup> Year of Establishment

<sup>41</sup> Known as the PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club Translation Prize until 2008

**Appendix B:** Source-language-specific awards for literature in English translation (Compiled by Mohsen Kafi)

<b>Name of the Award</b>	<b>YOE</b>	<b>Source Language</b>	<b>Description</b>
John Florio Prize	1963	Italian	A biennial award of £2,000 for translations into English of full-length Italian works of literary merit and general interest.
Schlegel-Tieck Prize	1965	German	An annual award of £3,000 for translations into English of full-length German works of literary merit and general interest.
Scott Moncrieff Prize	1965	French	An annual award of £1,000 for translations into English of full-length French works of literary merit and general interest.
Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Translation Prizes	1979	Japanese	The Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture at Columbia University annually awards \$6,000 in Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prizes for the Translation of Japanese Literature. A prize is given for the best translation of a modern work or a classical work, or the prize is divided between equally distinguished translations.
French-American Foundation Translation Prize	1986	French	An annual prize for the best translation from French into English in both fiction and nonfiction. Stated aim: to promote French literature in the United States and to provide translators and their craft with greater visibility.
Governor General's Award for French-to-English translation.	1987	French	The Canada Council awards \$25,000 to the writers, illustrators and translators of the winning books and \$3,000 to their publishers.
Bernard Shaw Prize	1991	Swedish	A triennial award of £2,000 for translations into English of full-length Swedish language works of literary merit and general interest.
Helen and Kurt Wolff Translator's Prize	1996	German	Awarded annually to honour an outstanding literary translation from German into English published in the US the previous year. The translator of the winning translation receives US \$10,000.
Vondel Prize	1996	Dutch or Flemish	A biennial award of €5000 for translation into English of full length Dutch or Flemish language works of literary merit and general interest.
Premio Valle Inclán	1997	Spanish	An annual prize of £2,000 for translations into English of full-length Spanish language works of literary merit and general interest.
TLS-Risa Domb/Porjes Prize	1998	Hebrew	A triennial prize of £2,000 which recognises the English translation of a full-length Hebrew book, fiction or non-fiction, of general interest and literary merit.

Oxford–Weidenfeld Prize	1999	European languages	An annual literary prize for any book-length translation into English from any other living European language. The prize of £2000 is awarded to the translator.
Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize	2006	Arabic	An annual award of £3,000 for published translations from Arabic of full-length works of imaginative and creative writing of literary merit and general interest.
Found in Translation Award	2008	Polish	This prize is given every year to the author/authors of the best Polish literature translation into English that was published in a book form in the past calendar year. Administered by the Book Institute, the Polish Cultural Institute in London and the Polish Cultural Institute in New York.
Lucien Stryk Asian Translation Prize	2009	Asian languages	This prize recognizes the importance of Asian translation for international literature and promotes the translation of Asian works into English. Book-length translations from Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Kannada, Korean, Sanskrit, Tamil, Thai, or Vietnamese into English are eligible.
Goethe-Institut Award for New Translation	2010	German	The Society of Authors and the Goethe-Institut, London biennial Goethe-Institut Award for New Translation. The award is open to British translators of literature who translate from German into English. The 2018 winner received an award of €1,000 and attended the 2018 Leipzig Book Fair.
The PEN/Edward and Lily Tuck Prize for Paraguayan Literature	2010	Spanish or Guarani	This prize assists with the translation of Paraguayan literature from Spanish or Guarani into English. The award carries a cash stipend of \$3,000 for the living author of a major work of Paraguayan literature. Another \$3,000 is given to the winning translator to bring the work to the English-speaking world.
Patrick D. Hanan Book Prize for Translation	2015	Chinese or an Inner Asian Language	This prize is awarded biennially to an outstanding English translation of a significant work in any genre originally written in Chinese or an Inner Asian Language, from any time period. The winner receives \$1,000.
EBRD Literature Prize	2018	Multiple	The EBRD Literature Prize acknowledges a work of literary fiction written originally in any language from a country where the EBRD invests <sup>42</sup> , translated into English, and published by a UK publisher. The first prize of €20,000 is equally divided between the winning author and translator.

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<sup>42</sup> EBRD invests in 38 countries across the globe. The full list of countries can be found at <https://www.ebrd.com/where-we-are.html>

## Appendix C: Survey of Wellington Readers

### Survey of Wellington readers

#### Part 1: Reading habits

1. How many fiction books do you read on average a year?

2-5 ☐                      6-10 ☐                      11 to 16 ☐                      16 or more ☐

2. Some of the major fiction genres have been listed below. Please score each genre from 1 to 5 based on how much you like it (1=dislike; 5=like a lot).

Comic/graphic novels ☐

Crime ☐

Historical fiction ☐

Horror ☐

Humour ☐

Literary fiction ☐

Romance & saga ☐

Sci-fi and fantasy ☐

Short story ☐

Thriller ☐

War fiction ☐

Westerns ☐

Young adult fiction ☐

3. Which of the following places do you usually visit for choosing a book in Wellington?  
Please write a number from 1 to 3 besides your top three options (1= the most often; 2= often; 3= sometimes).

Wellington City Libraries ☐    Unity Books ☐    Whitcoulls ☐    Vicbooks ☐

Arty Bees' Books ☐    Book Haven ☐    The Ferret Bookshop ☐    Pegasus Books ☐

Others (please specify):

#### Part 2: Reading translated fiction

4. What is the approximate share of translated books in the total number of fiction books you read in the last 12 months?

None ☐                      A quarter ☐                      Half ☐                      More than half ☐    Don't know ☐

5. Some people prefer to read books from their own cultures, while others prefer to read books from other cultures. Which of the following statements most fits your preferences?

- I prefer to read books from my own culture. ☐
- I prefer to read books from other cultures. ☐
- I like reading books from my own culture and books from other cultures about the same. ☐

6. Are there any cultures, countries or regions that you particularly like reading from?  
Yes ☐ No ☐

6a. If yes, please name your favourite cultures/countries/regions in terms of fiction books:

7. Please express your agreement/disagreement with the following statements about English fiction vs translated fiction (1= strongly agree; 5= strongly disagree).

- a) Regardless of genre, I'll enjoy English fiction more than translated fiction.
- b) Translated fiction is likely to be more difficult to read than English fiction.
- c) I'm often intimidated by foreign-sounding fiction titles.
- d) Reading translated fiction brings more prestige than English fiction.
- e) Translated fiction is not a distinct fiction category to me.
- f) From my experience as a regular reader, I have trust in the abilities of most literary translators into English.

8. Which of the following places do you usually visit for choosing a fiction book in Wellington? Please write a number from 1 to 3 besides your top three options (1= most of the time; 2= often; 3= sometimes).

Wellington City Libraries ☐ Unity Books ☐ Whitcoulls ☐ Vicbooks ☐

Arty Bees' Books ☐ Book Haven ☐ The Ferret Bookshop ☐ Pegasus Books ☐

Other (Please specify):

9. Thinking about **translated fiction books**, what are your favourite **local sources of information**? Please rank the options from 1 to 7 (1=the most favourite; 7=the least favourite)

Visiting local bookstores in Person ☐ Visiting Wellington City Libraries in person ☐

Websites of local bookstores ☐ Radio NZ ☐ The listener ☐ JAAM ☐

Landfall ☐      North & South ☐      The Sunday Star Times ☐

Others (please specify):

### Part 3: International engagement

This is the final part of the questionnaire. In this part, you will be asked some questions about your participation in international cultural events in Wellington. Similar to the previous section, you can elaborate on your responses in the allocated space.

10. Off the top of your head, how many times have you attended the events held by embassies/high commissions/international cultural associations in Wellington (e.g. Goethe Institute, Confucius Institute, Alliance Française Wellington, Polish Association of New Zealand) in the last 12 months?

0 ☐      1-3 ☐      4-7 ☐      More than 7 ☐      Don't know ☐

10a. Can you share the highlights of a couple of international cultural events that you enjoyed the most in the last 12 months?

11. Have you ever attended the Writers Week events in Wellington?

Yes ☐      No ☐

11a. If yes, do you recall seeing/hearing any international speakers at the events that you attended?

11b. Where was(were) the international speaker(s) from?

11c. How did attending the Writers' and Readers' Week events influence your subsequent book choices? Please feel free to explain.

12. Which parts of the world have you visited?

Africa ☐      Asia ☐      Europe ☐      Middle East ☐      North America ☐  
Pacific Islands ☐      Russian Federation ☐      South and Central America ☐  
Other (please specify):

12a. Have you become interested in reading stories from any of the countries or regions that you have visited?

Yes ☐ No ☐

12b. If yes, please name that country or region.

#### Part 4: Demographic questions

13. What gender do you identify with?

Female ☐ Male ☐ Nonbinary ☐ Prefer not to answer ☐

14. How old are you?

15. Which of the followings best represent your ethnicity? Tick as many as apply.

European ☐

Asian ☐

Maori ☐

Pacifika ☐

Latin American ☐

Middle Eastern ☐

African ☐

Other (please specify):

16. What is your highest completed level of education?

a) NCEA Level 1 or equivalent ☐

b) NCEA Level 2 or equivalent ☐

c) NCEA Level 3 or equivalent ☐

d) University qualification below degree level ☐

e) University degree ☐

f) No formal qualifications ☐

17. What is your mother tongue? English ☐ Other (please specify):

18. We suppose that you have a good knowledge of English either as your mother tongue or second language. Do you know any languages other than **English**?

Yes ☐ No ☐

18a. If no, please proceed to question 19. If yes, please select the language(s) that you know at an intermediate to advanced level. If your second language(s) are not listed, please specify in the Other section:

Arabic ☐      Chinese ☐      French ☐      German ☐      Hindi ☐  
Italian ☐      Japanese ☐      Korean ☐      Portuguese ☐      Russian ☐  
Samoan ☐      Spanish ☐      Te reo ☐  
Other (please specify):

19. In total, how many years have you lived in Wellington?

1-5 years ☐      6-10 years ☐      11-15 years ☐      More than 15 years ☐

20. Are you a member of a book club or reading group in Wellington?    Yes ☐    No ☐

20a. If yes, what is the name of this book club or reading group?

21. Please feel free to share your final thoughts about translated books or any other topic related to this survey.

The survey is now finished. Do you wish to enter the draw to win a \$20 book voucher?

Yes ☐      No ☐



## **Appendix D:** Information sheet for survey respondents

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

### **Who am I?**

My name is *Mohsen Kafi* and I am a Doctoral student in *Literary Translation Studies* at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my Dissertation.

### **What is the aim of the project?**

This project aims to investigate the selection, promotion, and reception of translated fiction in Wellington.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (Application number 0000026632).

### **How can you help?**

You have been invited to participate because you are 18 years of age or older, reside in Wellington, and read at least two fiction books in English in the last 12 months. If you agree to take part, you will complete a survey. The survey will ask you questions about *translated fiction books*. The survey will take you *about 30 minutes* to complete.

### **What will happen to the information you give?**

This research is anonymous. This means that nobody, including the researchers, will be aware of your identity. By answering it, you are giving consent for us to use your responses in this research. Your answers will remain completely anonymous and unidentifiable. Once you submit the survey, it will be impossible to retract your answer. Please do not include any personal identifiable information in your responses.

Personal details (Email address) will be collected only for those who wish to enter the prize draw. All personal details will be received separately from the survey data. This ensures that your answers to the survey questions are anonymous.

## **Appendix E:** Information sheet for expert interviewees

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

### **Who am I?**

My name is *Mohsen Kafi* and I am a Doctoral student in *Literary Translation Studies* at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my PhD Dissertation.

### **What is the aim of the project?**

This project aims to investigate the selection, promotion, and reception of translated adult fiction in Wellington.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (Application number 0000026632).

### **How can you help?**

You have been invited to participate because of your expert view on the book sector in Wellington. If you agree to take part, I will interview you at a space of your choice. I will ask you questions about the *policies and practices of your organisation for selecting and promoting translated fiction*. The interview will take *about an hour and a half*. I will audio-record the interview with your permission and write it up later. You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time before *15 December 2019*. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

### **What will happen to the information you give?**

Your name, your role, and your organisation will be named in the final report (provided you have the authority to agree to this on behalf of the organisation).

### **What will the project produce?**

The information from my research will be used in my PhD dissertation, academic publications, and conferences.

### **If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?**

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;

- withdraw from the study before *15 December 2019*.
- ask any questions about the study at any time.
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview.
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

**Appendix F:** ‘Staff Picks’ section at Unity Books Wellington (Photo taken in June 2021)

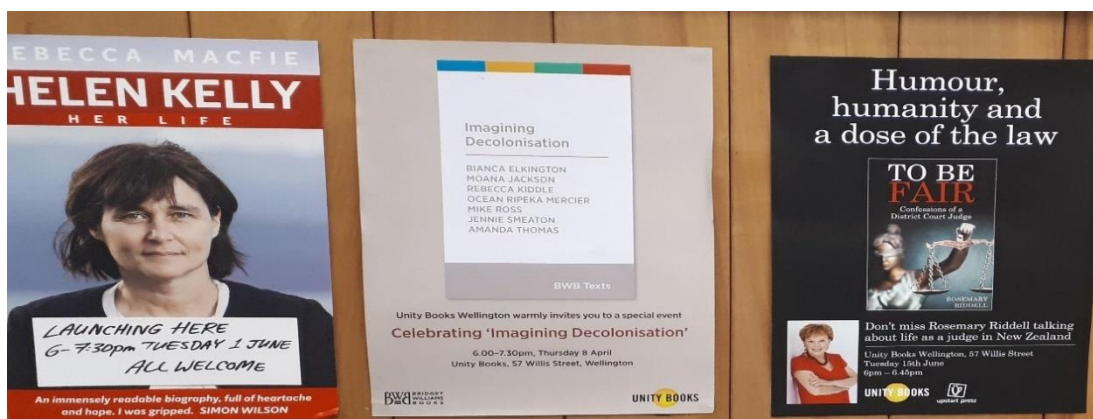
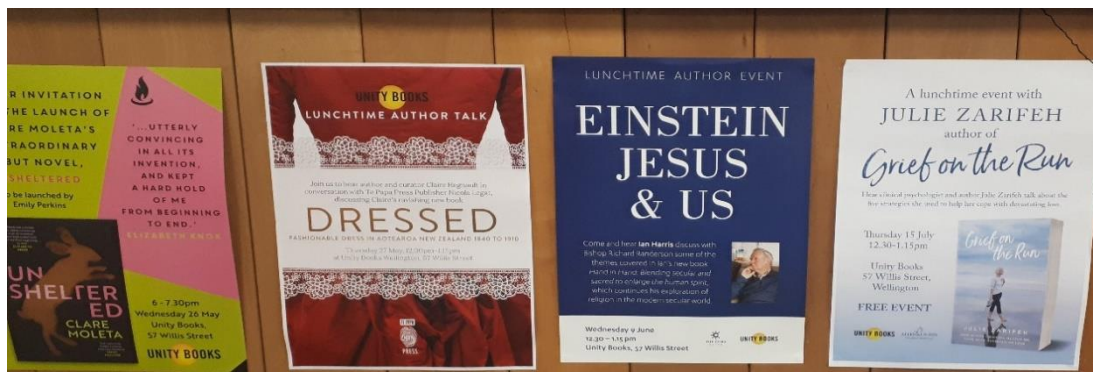
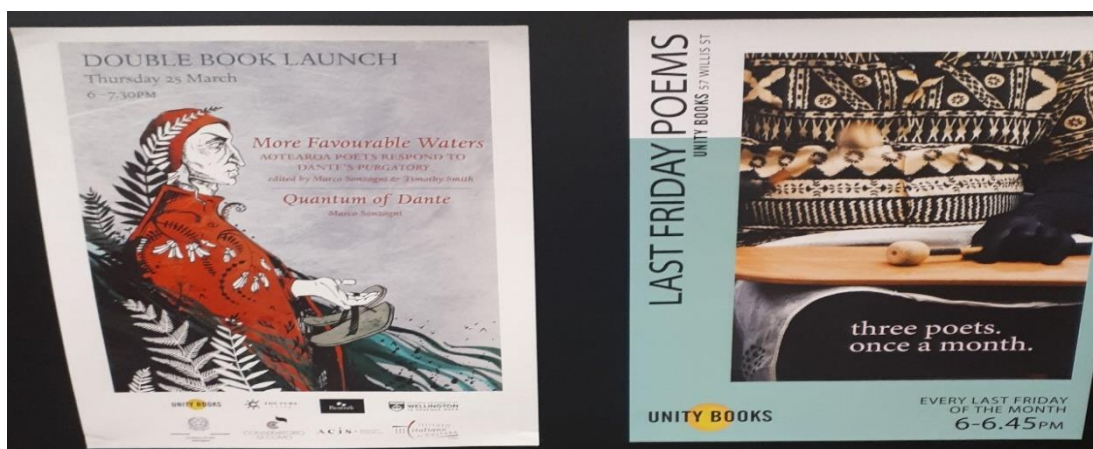
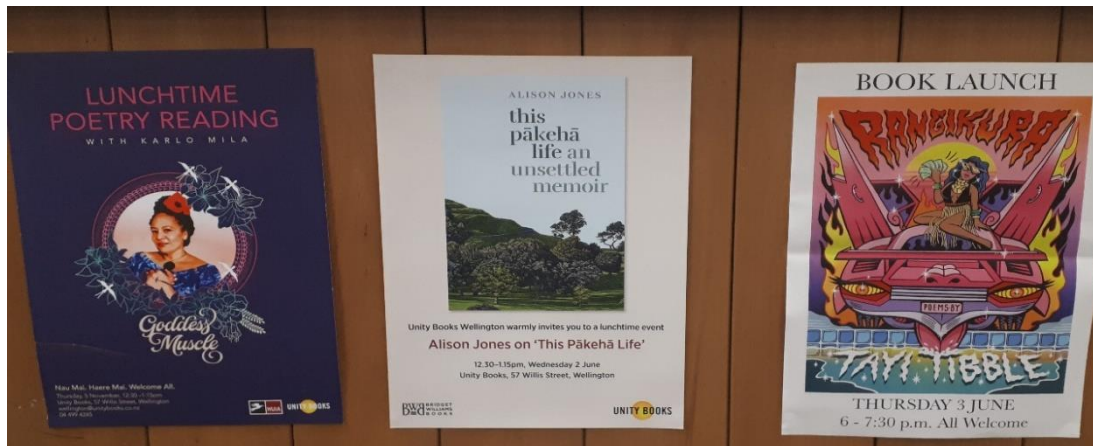


**Appendix G:** ‘Top 100 Books’ poster and showcase at Whitcoulls Wellington (Photo taken in June 2021)





## Appendix H: Events held at Unity Books Wellington from March to June 2021



**Appendix I:** A screenshot taken in June 2021 of the popular tags section on Unity Books' website





**Appendix J:** Poster of a 2018 showcase of translated fiction books at Wellington Central Library





The photograph shows two bookshelves in a library. The left shelf is labeled "READERS' CHOICE" and the right shelf is labeled "LIBRARIANS' CHOICE". Both shelves are filled with various books. The left shelf has books like "The Fortress" by S.A. Jones, "The Sunlight Pilgrims" by Jim Fegan, "The Man Who Loved Dogs" by Leonardo Padura, and "The Fortress" by S.A. Jones. The right shelf has books like "The Sunlight Pilgrims" by Jim Fegan, "The Man Who Loved Dogs" by Leonardo Padura, "The Fortress" by S.A. Jones, and "The Sunlight Pilgrims" by Jim Fegan.