

Submission for the 2020 Harvard College Undergraduate Book Collecting Prize
Found in Translation: Contemporary World Fiction Revisited

Alan Tu '23

Essay

I. Introduction

“The world’s a huge thing,” wrote Shakespeare in *Othello*, yet our American view of literature is still painfully narrow. The books that we most often consider classics—titles like *Moby-Dick*, *Jane Eyre*, and *1984*—usually come from one of two places: our country, or the accented island across the pond. English teachers in schools and universities across the nation feed students the same Anglo-American fare year after year, hoping to educate well the next generation of leaders. But the world is bigger than this. By limiting the geographic scope of our reading, we are limiting our exposure to other cultures and their imaginations. We are allowing language, in its unassuming beauty, to become a barrier.

My collection focuses on contemporary (mainly post-WWII) international fiction, with particular attention to lesser-known works in translation. With nearly fifty countries (and a number of independent presses) represented, my collection celebrates diversity in language, substance, and style: it is a response to the unfortunate reality that translated literary fiction makes up less than one percent of literature published in the United States annually.¹ *Why fiction*, you may ask. Non-fiction has a duty to the facts; indeed, its first priority is the facts. Fiction, on the other hand, makes no such promise: it is art without chains, which makes it more likely to develop its own identity in different places around the world. Novels make up the great majority of my collection, with a small percentage comprising short story collections as well as fictionalized memoirs and novels in verse.

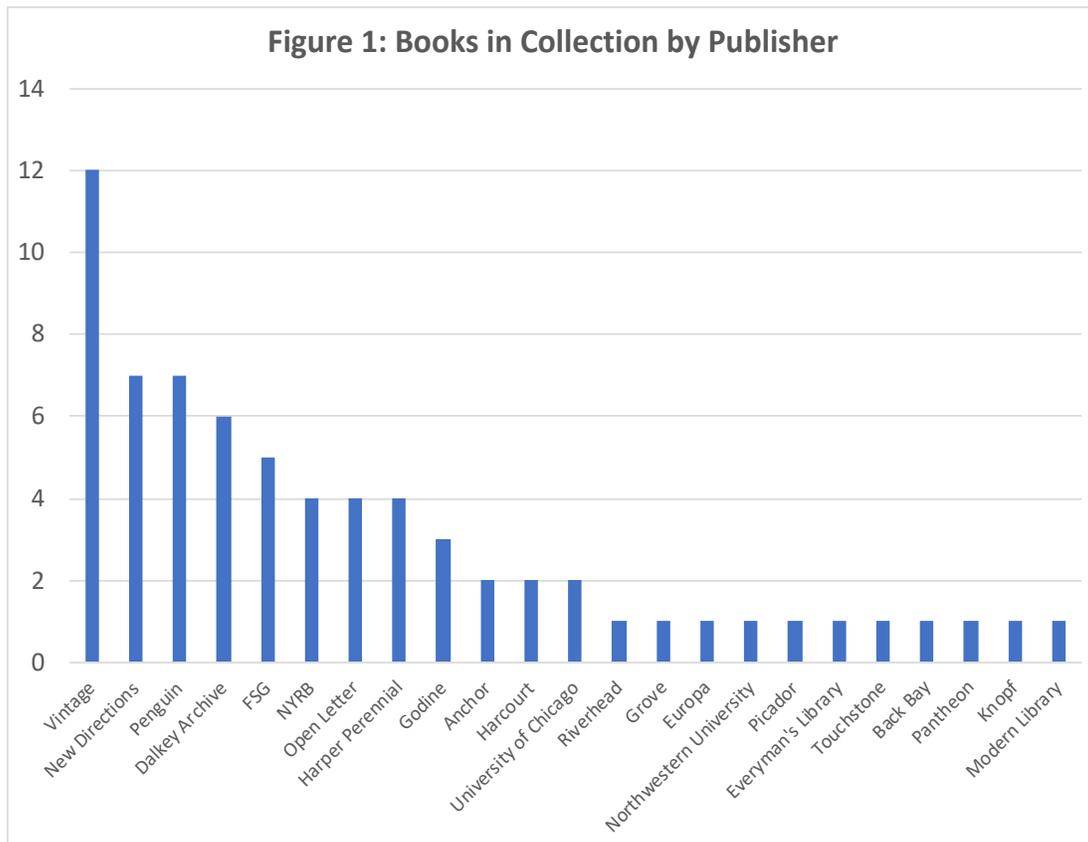
Finally, let me emphasize the contemporary aspect. The likes of Kafka, Tolstoy, and Zola will not appear here. I’ve chosen to include some “classics” from the second half of the twentieth century, such as *The House of the Spirits*, as well as some bestsellers from recent decades, like *The Shadow of the Wind*. Literature, after all, is literature—classics are classics for a reason—and though the distinction between literary and popular fiction can be subjective, I have done my best to fill my library with books of merit.

II. The Collection

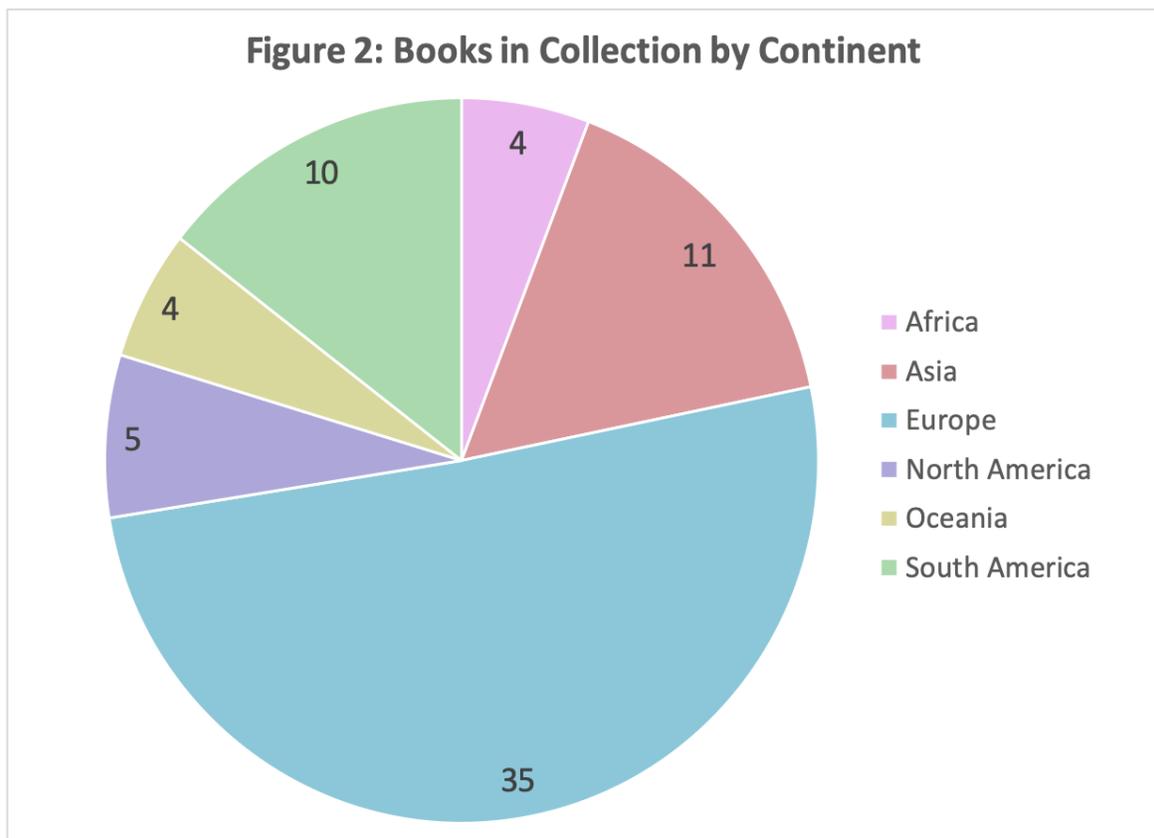
I have chosen a set of sixty-nine books from my collection to include in my bibliography. The list is sorted alphabetically by country (i.e., the author’s country of origin) and I have made sure to include the translator(s) of each work, if applicable. I have deliberately omitted all works from the United States or England, for the reasons given above. A few countries listed are actually regions of countries or former countries (Catalonia, Czechoslovakia, Scotland, Yugoslavia)—this is to emphasize significant intranational divisions or the time period in which the book was written. In addition, note that some authors (Khaled Hosseini, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Gao Xingjian, Rohinton Mistry, and Michael Ondaatje) grew up in the country listed but later immigrated/emigrated to other countries (U.S., Canada, and France). Each annotation generally

discusses a feature of the work I find particularly interesting, or it contains a short summary situating the work geographically or historically. I have taken care to write all authors' and translators' names with the correct accents, if their language uses the Latin alphabet. The original year of publication listed refers to a book's very first publication in any language (not necessarily in English translation). For *Labyrinths* and *The Collected Stories of Mercè Rodoreda*, there were no equivalent forms of the collections published in the original language, so I have listed the years of first publication in English.

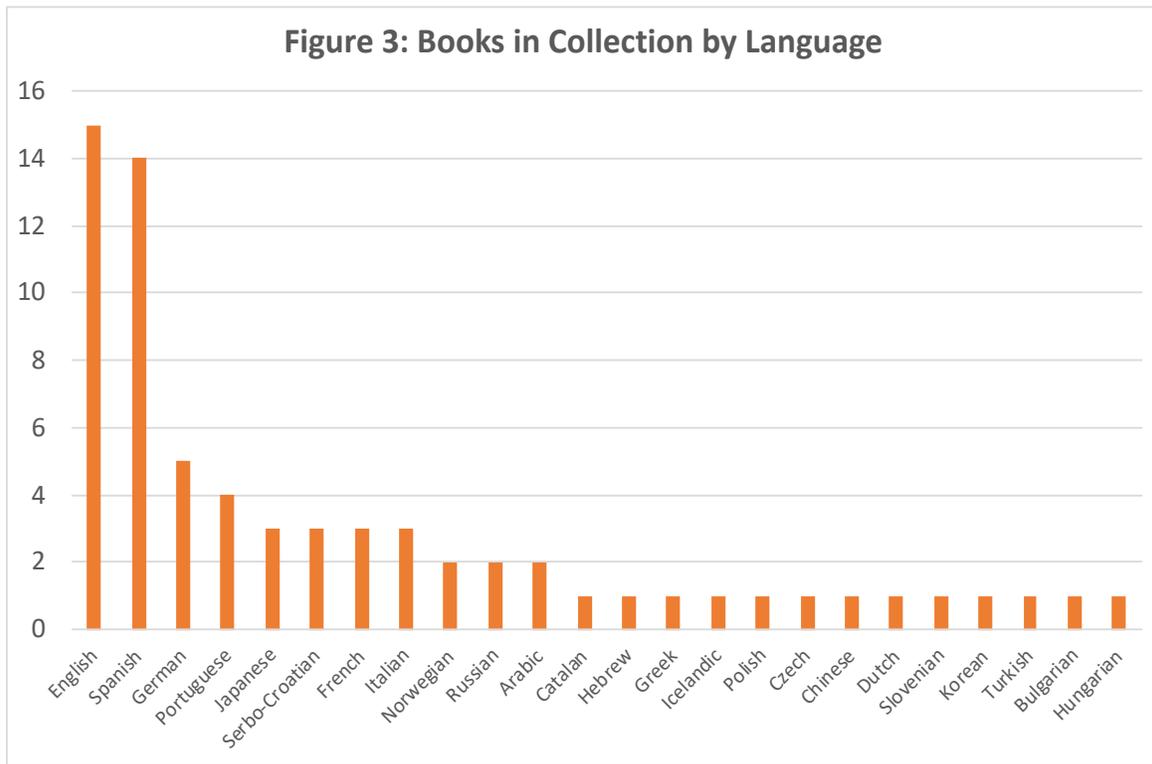
Had the publishers of the books not been required, I would have included them anyway. There are a handful of American independent presses, fortunately, whose main focus is literature in translation: New Directions, Dalkey Archive, and Open Letter. As seen in the graphic below, these three publishers are well-represented in my collection. Some divisions of larger publishing houses also do an admirable job with translation: NYRB Classics, Godine's Verba Mundi, Penguin Classics, and FSG. However, the best-represented publisher is Vintage—specifically, Vintage International. Despite its tendency to publish better-known works, Vintage has done an undoubtedly great job of making these books available to a wider audience (in fact, I began collecting Vintage books, for their distinctive spine design, before any other publisher's). Thanks to presses small and large, translated literature is making a comeback. In 2018 the National Book Foundation reintroduced the National Book Award for Translated Literature, and a New Directions book has won it the last two years.² Since 2008, Open Letter Press has given out the Best Translated Book Award, and the PEN Translation Prize has been awarded every year since 1963.³



Regarding my collection, and publishers in general: we still have work to do. For one, I've noticed a serious lack of African and Asian literature in circulation. European and Latin American culture, although distinct from American culture, are nevertheless closer to American culture—they're less *foreign* to us—than are African and Asian culture. A majority of Americans have European ancestry and the second most spoken language in the United States is Spanish. One particular gap in *my* collection is Chinese literature, as my family is Chinese. It really does seem like the market for Japanese literature is larger than that for Chinese literature. Perhaps this is due to the historic difference in government oversight between the two countries: democratic freedom versus censorship.



There are more troubling patterns in the demographics, though I'll admit I'm working with a small sample size here. 14 of the 69 (1 in 5) writers on my list are women. According to *Publishers Weekly*, men are indeed overrepresented (by a wide margin) in translation.⁴ Only 15 of the 116 Nobel Laureates in Literature have been women, with exactly three women winning in each of the last three decades. (Also, more than three-quarters of the laureates have come from Europe.)⁵ This needs to change. Yet the act (the art) of translation has seen something different: 27 out of the 62 (44%) translators on my list are women. Legendary translators à la Constance Garnett have since made way for the likes of Lydia Davis (*Swann's Way*, 2004; *Madame Bovary*, 2010), Edith Grossman (*Don Quixote*, 2003), Anne Carson (*If Not, Winter*), and Larissa Volokhonsky (the great Russian novels). Susan Bernofsky (*Go, Went, Gone*; *The Tanners*) leads the literary translation program at Columbia University, and Jhumpa Lahiri teaches translation at Princeton.⁶



III. The Collecting

The word bibliophile is redundant. I am a used-book-store-and-book-sale-connoisseur, if ever there was such a thing. Going to these places—these events—is by far my favorite pastime, even though I have way too many books at home and am far from reading them all. Still, I persist. Most of the books on my list are from used book sales at local libraries, where paperbacks go for a dollar each on the first couple of days and half that price near the end. Yes, you read that correctly: *one dollar*. New books are simply too expensive these days (nearly twenty dollars for a paperback and thirty for a hardcover?), so I see no shame in buying two dozen used books for the price of a new one! I have long struggled with the issue of reading vs. collecting: which do I prioritize? I have inevitably sunken into the latter, but do not fear—I am chipping away at my collection (i.e., reading it), volume by volume.

Each time I visit a city, I make sure to visit two places: the art museum(s) and the bookstore(s). In my annotations, you'll see that I've noted the location of purchase of books that came from used book stores. While I tend to buy dozens of books at sales, I will usually buy only one or two at a bookstore (most often, none). The cost is the main reason, and it is a good reason—otherwise, there would be no point to book collecting, as I could just buy everything at full price. My method of attack is simple: instead of scanning shelves by looking at the titles of books, I look lower, at the publishers. Each publisher has a distinct logo (colophon) and I have trained myself to look for a few in particular: New Directions' centaur, Dalkey Archive's square spiral, and Open Letter's open door. (NYRB's spines always look the same, just different colors, so they're very easy to spot.) This significantly decreases my browsing time. Why, you ask, do I only look for these

publishers? It's not because the only books I'd like to add to my collection are from these publishers. It's because books from these publishers are rarer, harder to find—quite uncommon at book sales, where almost every book is from a large, well-known publisher. I am willing to pay more for a book that I can't easily find elsewhere. But if there really is a non-small-press book that I am looking for, I can recognize it by the spine. I can recognize most of my books by their spines or covers, if you took away the identifying text.

So where did it all begin? It began in the summer of 2015, as I was entering high school. It was a difficult, boring summer and I was picking out books from the “classics” section at my local library. I came across *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and decided to read it—who knows why?—perhaps I had heard that it was a difficult book to get through, and also one of the greats. For weeks that summer, I was enthralled. I had read absolutely nothing like it before. I had read fantasy and science fiction, sure, but nothing so close to yet magically different from reality. This was my first foray into foreign fiction. Seeing that García Márquez had won a Nobel Prize, I decided to continue down Nobel Avenue; the next milestone work I picked up was José Saramago's *Blindness*. Clearly some fortune was turning my way, because these first books were fascinating even to a ninth grader. (Not all Nobel winners are like that.) Between those I had sprinkled a book by Haruki Murakami and one by Italo Calvino: some future inside me was taking root. I guess we all have a love for other places, and I was able to consummate this love through reading.

Before long, I found Goodreads: an online database of almost every book ever published. You could keep track of the books you read and the books you wanted to read, and sort them into shelves. You could write reviews and read other people's reviews; you could get book recommendations tailored just for you. I went down rabbit holes of recommendations, finding new books at every page and adding them to my “Want to Read” shelf. But where was I to find all of these books? My local library carried hardly any of them. So I took my first ever trip to the Rochester Central Library, in the heart of downtown, and I was overwhelmed. They had every book, it seemed—I had found some kind of paradise. I would come here every month for the next few years, delighting in a selection that had no equal.

Thus my magnificent reading journey began. My New Year's resolution for 2017 was to start writing book reviews; with the rare exception, that's what I have done for every book of the past three years. As difficult as it is to write about a book I really love, I am so glad, years later, when I look back upon what I have written and can still feel what I felt back then. (Link to my reviews at bottom!) Meanwhile, I was volunteering at book sales and bringing loads of books home—I bought pretty much every book I recognized. But this was not sustainable. So I began to whittle my tastes, to hold back when buying, to buy only the books that I would like to read. My purchasing rate has gone down significantly; my collection is getting closer and closer to what I want it to be.

As you'll see in my bibliography annotations, book design is extremely important to me. I think that New Directions publishes the most beautiful books: non-glossy or super-glossy covers, fresh designs, and distinctive typefaces. Many times I have almost bought a book that I already own because the design is different and so beautiful. Dalkey Archive is an odd child: a press that puts minimal effort into cover design yet still is able to make the books attractive. As for Open Letter, it's headquartered at the University of Rochester, just a fifteen-minute drive from where I live. These publishers are close to my heart.

Perhaps, ultimately, the motivation for this collection is my love for language. If I were to trace my interest in world literature back to one thing, it would be my study of the Latin language. Latin taught me more about English than did English class; it refined my sense of syntax and diction; it turned me into a “part-time poet.” It got me thinking about how much is lost in translation, and how translation is really as much an art as the writing is. There is something puzzle-like about it all. Entering college, I knew I wanted to learn a new language, one that people spoke (though I’ll never regret taking Latin). My finalists were Spanish and German; I went with the language that I thought was more fun to pronounce. After a semester of German, the language has been everything I hoped it would be. I love umlauts. I can’t wait to read Bernhard, Walser, Sebald, Erpenbeck, Kafka, etc. in the original. On that note, I’ve always been a huge stickler for pronunciation: I may not be a native speaker, but I want to pronounce authors’ names as close to correct as possible. I’ve learned, for example, that the “Ł” in Polish is pronounced like a “W”: thus Czesław Miłosz and others. My Portuguese roommate taught me how to pronounce José Saramago (not pronounced like in Spanish!). I wish the United States did a better job with language education. In Europe, kids learn many languages; here, it doesn’t happen. But it’s not too late to start. When you learn a language, you have something for life. I would like to do at least these two things in the future: write a book, and translate one.

My book reviews: [goodreads.com/atwo](https://www.goodreads.com/atwo)

Sources:

¹<http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/about/>

²<https://www.nationalbook.org/awards-prizes/national-book-awards-2019/?cat=translated-literature>; <https://www.nationalbook.org/awards-prizes/national-book-awards-2018/?cat=translated-literature>

³<http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/category/best-translated-book-awards/>; <https://pen.org/pen-translation-prize-winners/>

⁴<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/79407-the-plight-of-translation-in-america.html>

⁵<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-prizes-in-literature>

⁶<https://arts.columbia.edu/writing/translation>;
<https://arts.princeton.edu/people/profiles/jhumpalahiri/>

All other information in this essay comes from my knowledge, thoughts, and experiences, or from the contents of the books in my bibliography.

Tu 1

Submission for the 2020 Harvard College Undergraduate Book Collecting Prize

Found in Translation: Contemporary World Fiction Revisited

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1. As a visual aid, I have color-coded the countries based on continent.
2. I have omitted the book editions, as they would obscure my theme.
3. I have used the Calibri typeface because it fits the chart best.

Note: *The Third Policeman* and *I Saw Her That Night* did not have a location listed.



Bibliography

Country	Title	Author	Year*	Translator	Publisher	Location
Afghanistan	<i>The Kite Runner</i>	Khaled Hosseini	2003, 2005		Riverhead	New York
Signed by the author. Though <i>The Kite Runner</i> was written in English, it is very much an Afghan novel. As a bestseller, this book always appears in huge numbers at book sales.						
Argentina	<i>Hopscotch</i>	Julio Cortázar	1963, 1987	Gregory Rabassa	Pantheon	New York
The chapters of <i>Hopscotch</i> can be read in any order, thus its title and its reputation as one of the great novels of the Latin American Boom. It won the first National Book Award for Translation, in 1967 (the award was discontinued in 1983, until its reestablishment in 2018). ¹ The type on each page is crowded, elevating the virtuosity of the language. I also own Cortázar's collection <i>Blow-Up and Other Stories</i> .						
Argentina	<i>Labyrinths</i>	Jorge Luis Borges	1962, 1964	Donald A. Yates James E. Irby	New Directions	New York
One of the two classic story collections from Borges (and one of New Directions' bestsellers), ² <i>Labyrinths</i> creates suspense through artifice (fake authors, fake books; a scholarly tone) while tackling such fields as mathematics, philosophy, and linguistics. The first story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is one of my all-time favorites, and the opening line of "Lottery in Babylon" is sublime. My edition is old and worn-out, which only serves to increase the authenticity of the text.						
Argentina	<i>The Museum of Eterna's Novel</i>	Macedonio Fernandez	1967, 2010	Margaret Schwartz	Open Letter	Rochester
Subtitled "The First Good Novel," <i>The Museum of Eterna's Novel</i> is half novel and half prologue for that novel. Fernandez spent decades working on this metafiction groundbreaker (he and Flann O'Brien practically invented the genre), and if blurbs are any indication, Jorge Luis Borges worshipped him.						
Australia	<i>Fredy Neptune</i>	Les Murray	1998, 2000		FSG	New York
A novel in verse written in a challenging Australian dialect, <i>Fredy Neptune</i> is one of the best world-hopping adventures you'll ever read, about a man who loses his sense of touch in World War I. Favorite quote: "Did you ever hear me suck music out the big end of a clarinet?"						
Australia	<i>Voss</i>	Patrick White	1957, 2009		Penguin	New York
The major work of the Australian outback. Purchased at the Haunted Bookshop in Iowa City, IA. I also own White's <i>Tree of Man</i> .						
Australia	<i>Cloudstreet</i>	Tim Winton	1991, 1998		Penguin	Victoria
<i>Cloudstreet</i> is considered by many Australians to be their favorite Australian novel. ³ My edition is published by Penguin Australia, and one can clearly tell, from the paper quality (and the typeface), that it was printed outside of the United States.						

*The first year listed is the original year of publication (in any language). The second year listed is the year my copy was published.

Tu 2

Austria	<i>Concrete</i>	Thomas Bernhard	1982, 1986	David McLintock	University of Chicago	Chicago
Thomas Bernhard has to be one of the most brilliant and inscrutable authors of the century. He uses unending sentences and a dearth of paragraph breaks to convey a mind's descent into madness. My German teacher told me that in his department, they disagree on a lot of things, but never on Bernhard. I found this book at a local church sale.						
Brazil	<i>The Passion According to G. H.</i>	Clarice Lispector	1964, 2012	Idra Novey	New Directions	New York
The discovery of the treasure that is Clarice Lispector ("looked like Marlene Dietrich and wrote like Virginia Woolf") led New Directions to republish her major works in beautifully designed editions. ⁴ Her work focuses on epiphany, on profound changes in philosophical state. She's iconic in Brazil; too bad it took us so long to recognize her talent here. I also own Lispector's <i>Complete Stories</i> .						
Bulgaria	<i>18% Gray</i>	Zachary Karabashliev	2008, 2013	Angela Rodel	Open Letter	Rochester
A European novel obsessed with America, <i>18% Gray</i> is about a photographer's trip through America after his wife's disappearance. He recalls their past together in Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall. This book won several big awards in Bulgaria.						
Canada	<i>Autobiography of Red</i>	Anne Carson	1998, 1999		Vintage	New York
This is the other novel in verse that appears on my list. It's a modern-day retelling of the myth of Geryon as written by Stesichoros. A beautifully designed book, especially the cover photo. I also own Carson's <i>Plainwater</i> .						
Canada	<i>Runaway</i>	Alice Munro	2004, 2005		Vintage	New York
Munro is the master of the long short story, oxymoron notwithstanding. I also own her collections <i>Dear Life</i> and <i>Family Furnishings</i> .						
Catalonia	<i>The Selected Stories</i>	Mercè Rodoreda	2011, 2011	Martha Tennent	Open Letter	Rochester
Catalonia is officially part of Spain, but the region's distinct culture and language has led me to label this collection as Catalan.						
Chile	<i>The House of the Spirits</i>	Isabel Allende	1982, 1985	Magda Bogin	Knopf	New York
Known to many as the Chilean version of <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> . I liked it less, but the magic realism shines. I own this book in a beautiful hardcover deckle edge edition.						
Chile	<i>2666</i>	Roberto Bolaño	2004, 2008	Natasha Wimmer	FSG	New York
My favorite book of all time, <i>2666</i> is the longest book on my list. It revolves around an elusive author and a series of murders on the Mexican-American border, but in reality it's about absolutely everything: literature, love, death, art, sport, war. . . . The typeface is impeccable, with illustrated flourishes; the jacket design is chaotic and rightly so. Definitely the most beautiful book I own. I also have Bolaño's <i>The Savage Detectives</i> .						
Chile	<i>The Obscene Bird of Night</i>	José Donoso	1970, 2009	Hardie St. Martin Leonard Mades	Godine	Boston
With one of the scariest covers you'll ever see, this book is about a human monster who is kept company by other similarly grotesque beings. I found this gem at Autumn Leaves Used Books in Ithaca, NY.						
China	<i>Soul Mountain</i>	Gao Xingjian	1990, 2001	Mabel Lee	Harper Perennial	New York
Gao Xingjian has lived most of his life in China (his works are written in Chinese), but now he is a citizen of France. Suffice to say, he is quite controversial in China. ⁵ In terms of Chinese literature, I'd love to add Mo Yan to my collection.						

Tu 3

Colombia	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	Gabriel García Márquez	1967, 2006	Gregory Rabassa	Harper Perennial	New York
Easily the classic of Latin American literature and certainly the Bible of magic realism, <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> is the novel that began my reading journey around the world. It's been five years and I still know the first line by heart. García Márquez proclaimed Rabassa's translation to be better than the original. ⁶ A deservedly beautiful book design from Harper Perennial. I also own <i>Love in the Time of Cholera</i> .						
Colombia	<i>The Adventures and Misadventures of Maqroll</i>	Álvaro Mutis	1993, 2002	Edith Grossman	NYRB	New York
The title says it all. Seven stories of a sailor in seven hundred pages. Mutis was a close friend of Gabriel García Márquez. ⁷						
Cuba	<i>Three Trapped Tigers</i>	Guillermo Cabrera Infante	1967, 2004	Donald Gardner Suzanne Jill Levine	Dalkey Archive	Normal
Purchased at Grey Matter Books in New Haven, CT. A novel chock-full of puns, many of them unfortunately lost in translation. I am looking to add the Cuban author Alejo Carpentier to my collection.						
Czechoslovakia	<i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i>	Milan Kundera	1984, 2005	Michael Henry Heim	Harper Perennial	New York
This book actually feels lighter in the hand than any of my other books. Just kidding. Yes, it was adapted into an American film, but read the original to see how love and philosophy intersect with Prague's communist history. Published in French translation <i>before</i> being published in the original Czech. ⁸						
Egypt	<i>Palace Walk</i>	Naguib Mahfouz	1956, 1990	William M. Hutchins Olive E. Kenny	Anchor	New York
Book one of an interwar family saga (the Cairo Trilogy), <i>Palace Walk</i> stands out among Mahfouz's novels for its richness of character and detail. Mahfouz was the first (and to this day, the only) Arabic-language writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. ⁹						
France	<i>Life A User's Manual</i>	Georges Perec	1978, 2009	David Bellos	Godine	Boston
Perec was a member of Oulipo, a French avant-garde group that wrote within self-imposed constraints. He famously wrote a novel (<i>A Void</i>) that does not contain the letter "e." ¹⁰ In <i>Life A User's Manual</i> , we follow the crazy stories of an apartment's residents, and yes—it does kind of feel like a manual for life. Purchased at the Haunted Bookshop in Iowa City, IA.						
France	<i>Memoirs of Hadrian</i>	Marguerite Yourcenar	1951, 2005	Grace Frick	FSG	New York
An astonishing act of ventriloquism, <i>Memoirs of Hadrian</i> recalls the pompous diction of Ancient Rome while telling a truly poignant story. Also, a beautiful book from FSG Classics. The cover photo and color palette, the Roman-style typeface, wide margins for the text to sit in . . . wow. I also own Yourcenar's <i>The Abyss</i> .						
France	<i>Zone</i>	Mathias Énard	2008, 2010	Charlotte Mandell	Open Letter	Rochester
Énard, one of France's rising stars, wrote this novel as one continuous sentence.						
Germany	<i>Go, Went, Gone</i>	Jenny Erpenbeck	2015, 2017	Susan Bernofsky	New Directions	New York
<i>Go, Went, Gone</i> is very much a book of the present: it tackles the refugee crisis in Germany. It's probably my all-time favorite find at a book sale. The cover material is reminiscent of watercolor paper, and the New Directions design is minimalistically phenomenal.						

Tu 4

Germany	<i>The Emigrants</i>	W. G. Sebald	1992, 1997	Michael Hulse	New Directions	New York
Before his life was cut short in 2001, Sebald was widely considered a future Nobel laureate. ¹¹ Anyone who reads his work will say, "I have never read anything like it before." He incorporates black-and-white pictures into his paragraph-spare text with a dazzling, detached first-person tone. I also own Sebald's <i>Austerlitz</i> , which, unlike the rest of his oeuvre, was not published by New Directions and thus translated by Anthea Bell.						
Greece	<i>Zorba the Greek</i>	Nikos Kazantzakis	1946, 1975	Carl Wildman	Touchstone	New York
Famous much more for the Oscar-winning film that it inspired.						
Hungary	<i>Embers</i>	Sándor Márai	1942, 2002	Carol Brown Janeway	Vintage	New York
This one is truly an atmospheric experience. Contemporary Hungarian literature is very rich: I'm hoping to add László Krasznahorkai, Antal Szerb, and Magda Szabó to my collection.						
Iceland	<i>Independent People</i>	Halldór Laxness	1935, 1997	James Anderson Thompson	Vintage	New York
This is an epic tale about sheep farmers in Iceland. Read it for its gorgeous depictions of landscapes and family ties. Despite being from a different publisher, it has the same distinctive typeface as <i>Hopscotch</i> .						
India	<i>The God of Small Things</i>	Arundhati Roy	1997, 1997		Harper Perennial	New York
Arundhati Roy did not follow up this breakout debut until twenty years later, in 2017. ¹²						
India	<i>A Fine Balance</i>	Rohinton Mistry	1995, 1997		Vintage	New York
A nearly universally acclaimed long novel set during India's state of emergency in the 1970s, <i>A Fine Balance</i> offers a powerful voice to the dispossessed.						
Ireland	<i>The Third Policeman</i>	Flann O'Brien	1967, 1999		Dalkey Archive	
It's hard to find an author more Irish than Flann O'Brien. This novel was published posthumously because O'Brien could not find a publisher for it; he rewrote much of it into <i>The Dalkey Archive</i> . ¹³ With bicycle obsessions, pancakes, and flat police stations, <i>The Third Policeman</i> is way ahead of its time. Purchased at University Press Bookstore in Berkeley, CA. I also own O'Brien's <i>At Swim-Two-Birds</i> .						
Israel	<i>Suddenly, A Knock on the Door</i>	Etgar Keret	2010, 2012	Miriam Shlesinger Sondra Silverston Nathan Englander	FSG	New York
<i>Suddenly, A Knock on the Door</i> features short- to medium-length stories that are as funny as they are unexpected. Last semester I met a first-year from Israel, and it turns out Etgar Keret had visited her school! I also own Keret's collection <i>The Nimrod Flipout</i> .						
Italy	<i>The Tartar Steppe</i>	Dino Buzzati	1940, 2005	Stuart C. Hood	Godine	Boston
Near and dear to my heart, <i>The Tartar Steppe</i> is the ultimate exploration of the passage of time and the human thirst for glory. This is the first book I mention to anyone who speaks Italian. On the cover is a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, my favorite artist. Found in the basement of Harvard Book Store, Cambridge, MA.						
Italy	<i>Invisible Cities</i>	Italo Calvino	1972, 1974	William Weaver	Harcourt	Orlando
Though not Calvino's most famous book, <i>Invisible Cities</i> is his best. An aging Kublai Khan tells Marco Polo the stories of his travels, which unfold—city by city—like dreams. The asymmetrical margins are perfect, and there's a hint of an Oulipian framework at play. So quotable, so beautiful. I also own Calvino's <i>If On a Winter's Night a Traveler</i> .						

Tu 5

Italy	<i>My Brilliant Friend</i>	Elena Ferrante	2011, 2012	Ann Goldstein	Europa	New York
Possibly the most commercially successful book on this list, <i>My Brilliant Friend</i> (the first installment in the Neapolitan Quartet) was translated from the Italian—but how many of its readers know that? Many have tried, controversially, to discover the true identity of Elena Ferrante (pseudonym). ¹⁴ I'm not a huge fan of Europa's standard book design. This one is especially bad: the photograph makes it look like a children's book.						
Japan	<i>The Box Man</i>	Kobo Abe	1973, 1991	E. Dale Saunders	Vintage	New York
A man who wears a box over his head. Enough said. (But also, beautiful book design; a rare break of form for Vintage International.)						
Japan	<i>Spring Snow</i>	Yukio Mishima	1969, 1990	Michael Gallagher	Vintage	New York
A beautiful cover with vertical lettering; the text inside looks like it was printed on a letterpress. I also own Mishima's collection <i>Death in Midsummer</i> .						
Japan	<i>The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle</i>	Haruki Murakami	1995, 1998	Jay Rubin	Vintage	New York
<i>The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle</i> is a classic Murakami adventure and possibly his greatest. I've read four Murakami books, but not this one. I also own <i>Norwegian Wood</i> and <i>Kafka on the Shore</i> .						
Mexico	<i>The Death of Artemio Cruz</i>	Carlos Fuentes	1962, 1991	Alfred MacAdam	FSG	New York
Another major work of the Latin American Boom. I also own Fuentes's posthumous <i>Nietzsche on His Balcony</i> from Dalkey Archive.						
Netherlands	<i>The Ten Thousand Things</i>	Maria Dermoût	1955, 2002	Hans Koning	NYRB	New York
This is a book not about the Netherlands but about a former Dutch region of influence, the Spice Islands. Its sweeping, generational tone is reminiscent of Woolf, Steinbeck, and García Márquez. NYRB Classics has done such a great job of bringing lost writers back into the spotlight.						
New Zealand	<i>The Luminaries</i>	Eleanor Catton	2013, 2014		Back Bay	New York
A massive tome that won the Booker Prize, <i>The Luminaries</i> takes place during a gold rush in 19th century New Zealand. It has a lovely cover, with faces in the shape of moons. I can't wait to sit down and get lost in this one.						
Nigeria	<i>Americanah</i>	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	2013, 2014		Anchor	New York
America is a story of immigration, and <i>Americanah</i> is one of the best immigrant stories out there. Adichie grew up in Nigeria and attended university in the U.S. ¹⁵ (You might know her TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story.") I also own Adichie's <i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i> and her collection <i>The Thing Around Your Neck</i> .						
Norway	<i>Out Stealing Horses</i>	Per Petterson	2003, 2008	Anne Born	Picador	New York
A bestseller. I'm not entirely sure how books become bestsellers.						
Norway	<i>Through the Night</i>	Stig Sæterbakken	2011, 2013	Seán Kinsella	Dalkey Archive	Champaign
This was Sæterbakken's last novel before committing suicide, ¹⁶ and it's about a father continuing to live after his son's suicide. As expected, there is much darkness, but there is even more light.						
Poland	<i>This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen</i>	Tadeusz Borowski	1947, 1992	Barbara Vedder	Penguin	New York
Borowski wrote these stories based on his concentration camp experiences during World War II. My knowledge of Polish fiction is minimal (though Olga Tokarczuk won the 2018 Nobel Prize); I know more about Polish poetry, which I love more than any other country's poetry.						

Tu 6

Portugal	<i>The Natural Order of Things</i>	António Lobo Antunes	1992, 2000	Richard Zenith	Grove	New York
A wonderfully diabolic cover from Grove Press, which I regret is not represented more here. This book continually shifts points of view, breaks paragraphs mid-sentence, and also contains some epically long sentences.						
Portugal	<i>Blindness</i>	José Saramago	1995, 1999	Giovanni Pontiero	Harcourt	Orlando
One of the earliest translated works that I read, <i>Blindness</i> is self-explanatory: a mysterious blindness ravages a city. Then things get disgusting quickly. Saramago writes breathless sentences split only by commas to convey the sheer horror of the situation. A must-read if you want to be a writer. The cover is ugly.						
Portugal	<i>The Book of Disquiet</i>	Fernando Pessoa	1982, 2002	Richard Zenith	Penguin	New York
Fernando Pessoa wrote under seventy-five heteronyms, ¹⁷ and this book—part philosophical discourse, part fictionalized autobiography—is a summation, more or less, of the mystery he was. There are two acclaimed translations: Richard Zenith (Penguin) and Margaret Jull Costa (New Directions).						
Russia	<i>Omon Ra</i>	Victor Pelevin	1992, 1998	Andrew Bromfield	New Directions	New York
Popular in the post-USSR era, ¹⁸ <i>Omon Ra</i> is (about) a kid who wants to be a cosmonaut. Quirky yet fantastic book design; the typeface in particular is unique.						
Scotland	<i>Sunset Song</i>	Lewis Grassic Gibbon	1932, 2007		Penguin	New York
Yes, it's part of the U.K., but Scotland has a national identity all its own, and <i>Sunset Song</i> is widely considered to be Scotland's favorite book. ¹⁹ It's a bildungsroman written in a Scottish dialect.						
Slovenia	<i>I Saw Her That Night</i>	Drago Jančar	2010, 2016	Michael Biggins	Dalkey Archive	
One of my favorite Dalkey Archive books, <i>I Saw Her That Night</i> takes place at a Slovenian manor house during World War II. It's a great example of Dalkey's classic white cover from recent years, with red title letters and a hardly-there graphic.						
South Africa	<i>Disgrace</i>	J. M. Coetzee	1999, 2005		Penguin	New York
<i>Disgrace</i> is a shocking book about post-apartheid South Africa, and it has my favorite last line in literature: "Yes, I am giving him up."						
South Korea	<i>No One Writes Back</i>	Jang Eun-Jin	2009, 2013	Jung Yewon	Dalkey Archive	Champaign
A gem from Dalkey's Korean Literature Library, <i>No One Writes Back</i> is about a wanderer (and his faithful dog) who writes letters to each person he meets. Divided into 152 numbered sections, it's slight, and the ending is a bit too neat, but it will make you smile.						
Soviet Union	<i>The Master and Margarita</i>	Mikhail Bulgakov	1967, 1996	Diana Burgin Katherine Tiernan O'Connor	Vintage	New York
Written during the reign of Stalin and published posthumously in censored form, <i>The Master and Margarita</i> is a satire about the devil causing chaos in the Soviet Union. There are two major translations: Pevear and Volokhonsky (Penguin), and this one.						
Spain	<i>Nada</i>	Carmen Laforet	1944, 2007	Edith Grossman	Modern Library	New York
Published when Laforet was just twenty-three years old, <i>Nada</i> follows a university student and her new (dysfunctional) family in post-Civil War Barcelona.						
Spain	<i>A Heart So White</i>	Javier Marías	1992, 2013	Margaret Jull Costa	Vintage	New York
Javier Marías is one of the best and most well-known novelists working in Spain today. This title used to be published by New Directions; ²⁰ the current Vintage version is poorly designed, with all sans serif on the outside. Purchased at Binnacle Books in Beacon, NY. I also own Marías's <i>The Man of Feeling</i> .						

Tu 7

Spain	<i>The Shadow of the Wind</i>	Carlos Ruiz Zafón	2001, 2004	Lucia Graves	Penguin	New York
This is another bestselling novel in my collection, and it's not hard to see why. It's a page-turner set in Barcelona that strives for (and almost attains) something beyond melodrama. I have an early hardcover edition of the book, not the cover that we're all used to seeing.						
Sri Lanka	<i>Running in the Family</i>	Michael Ondaatje	1982, 1993		Vintage	New York
Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka but now lives in Canada. This fictionalized memoir, written after returning to his island home, is an astoundingly vibrant family portrait that proves stories are won in the details. Read for my creative writing workshop. I also own <i>The English Patient</i> .						
Sudan	<i>Season of Migration to the North</i>	Tayeb Salih	1966, 2009	Denys Johnson-Davies	NYRB	New York
A postcolonial narrative, celebrated in the Arab world, that explores the tensions between Europe and Africa. From Autumn Leaves Used Books in Ithaca, NY.						
Switzerland	<i>I'm Not Stiller</i>	Max Frisch	1954, 2006	Michael Bullock	Dalkey Archive	Rochester
Purchased at Haunted Bookshop, Iowa City, IA.						
Switzerland	<i>The Tanners</i>	Robert Walser	1907, 2009	Susan Bernofsky	New Directions	New York
<i>The Tanners</i> ties 2666 for the most beautiful book I own. It's small, almost square, and bright yellow. You'll notice that the year of publication is out of my time period by a few decades, but the joyous lightness of Walser's prose feels modern. Bought at Raven Used Books in Cambridge, MA.						
Trinidad and Tobago	<i>A Bend in the River</i>	V. S. Naipaul	1979, 1989		Vintage	New York
This book is also about colonization, in an unnamed African state. Dark, bleak, and atmospheric, with an unforgettable first line: "The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it." I also own Naipaul's <i>A House for Mr. Biswas</i> .						
Turkey	<i>Snow</i>	Orhan Pamuk	2002, 2011	Maureen Freely	Everyman's Library	New York
Pamuk is a controversial figure in Turkey today, especially after his Nobel Prize and the publication of this novel, which deals with themes of religion and exile. ²¹ I have designated the continent as Asia because the story takes place in eastern part of the country. Last semester I met a first-year from Turkey and it turns out Orhan Pamuk visited his school. I also own Pamuk's <i>My Name is Red</i> , which is about miniature art in the Ottoman Empire.						
Uruguay	<i>Lands of Memory</i>	Felisberto Hernández	1983, 2002	Esther Allen	New Directions	New York
Felisberto Hernández was cited as a major influence by Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Italo Calvino. He was a professional pianist, which is why pianos feature in many of his stories. Wonderful book design—the front cover reminiscent of Joan Miró's <i>Object</i> —a rare hardcover from New Directions. Purchased at Grey Matter Books in New Haven, CT.						
Yugoslavia (Bosnia)	<i>Death and the Dervish</i>	Meša Selimović	1966, 1996	Bogdan Rakić Stephen M. Dickey	Northwestern University	Evanston
A sheikh tries to rescue his brother in 18th century Bosnia. An unusually skinny book, the only one on my list from Northwestern University Press (though they do considerable translation work there).						
Yugoslavia (Bosnia)	<i>The Bridge on the Drina</i>	Ivo Andrić	1945, 1977	Lovett F. Edwards	University of Chicago	Chicago
This novel is about four hundred years in Yugoslavia's history, told through the lens of a bridge.						

Tu 8

Yugoslavia (Serbia)	<i>Houses</i>	Borislav Pekić	1970, 2016	Bernard Johnson	NYRB	New York
Fun fact: the English title does not at all resemble the Serbo-Croatian title.						

Sources:

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- ¹⁷<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/04/fernando-essoas-disappearing-act>
- ¹⁸<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/apr/30/fiction>
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All other information comes from my knowledge, thoughts, and experiences, or from the contents of the books in my bibliography.