

CARIBBEAN AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN LITERATURE IN SWEDISH TRANSLATION

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Abstract This paper gives a quantitative overview of the publication of Caribbean and Sub-Saharan African Literature in Swedish translation during the twentieth century. The study is above all based on information taken from Swedish websites, for example Alex Dictionary of Authors and Macondo. The data collection registered 204 items written by 92 Caribbean authors from 20 countries and 719 items authored by 293 African writers from 34 countries. Most authors were published in anthologies and their works were almost exclusively translated from a former colonial language (English, Spanish, French and Portuguese). Translations of titles were generally faithful. Changes from the original could often be explained as due to differences in grammar or culture, or as a means to indicate or leave out the genre (autobiography, love story etc.), or to emphasize or tone down the geographical origin of the book.

Keywords Caribbean literature, African literature, Swedish translation, statistic survey, translations strategy

Introduction

According to a recent survey targeting teachers and librarians in Swedish schools there is a strong need for more information and better access to literature from “exotic” regions, i.e. World Literature (“Världslitteraturen i skolan”, 2004). The survey only took into consideration accessibility to literature in translation, because even though quite a few Swedes have a good knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, it seems that

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they prefer literature in translation. In fact, half of the published fiction in Sweden are translations, and mostly from English. If a foreign author is to get more publicly known, a translation into Swedish is desirable.

This study presents the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan African literature that is available in Swedish translation, i.e. two aspects of what is considered “world literature” in the Swedish literary discussion today. The paper provides quantitative information concerning publications (novels, short stories, essays, poetry, travel books etc.), authors and countries, as well as a comparison of the titles of the originals and the translations.

Background

Sweden had interests in Africa in the 17th century (Berg, 1997) and a colony in the Caribbean for a period of a hundred years in the 18th and 19th century (Hubertsson, 1996). However it seems that the interest for African and Caribbean literature started mainly in the 1940s and 1950s. Through socially committed authors like Hjalmar Gullberg, Artur Lundkvist and Arne Lundgren, writers were introduced to a Swedish audience and not always through translation (Stenvång, 2002). In the 1960s Per Wästberg compiled an anthology of prose (*Afrika berättar* [Africa tells] in 1961, reprinted in 1965 and 1970) and poetry (*Afrikansk lyrik* [African poetry], 1970). According to Raoul Granqvist (1985) the image of Africa as irrational, emotional and inferior with regards to the western civilization, was still strong in Sweden in the 1950s. This point of view also prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, although the main interest concerned the liberation movements of the African nations. Granqvist (1985) also pointed out that the political phases in Africa were accompanied by the translation of a special favoured genre. Swedish translations of the white South African novel were for example more popular in the 1950s whereas black poetry was in style in the 1960s. From the 1980s and onwards, Africa was seen as a “hopeless” continent, constantly ravaged by wars and famines (Ruuth-Bäcker, 2002).

Three recent general introductions to modern Africa are available in Swedish: Ruuth-Bäcker (2002), Siljeholm (1997) and Norström Ridaeus (1995). A bibliography of the African literature (prose, drama and poetry) in print in Swedish 1948-1974 was published in the mid-seventies (Staaaf, 1976). On the other hand, no Swedish book focusing solely on introducing Caribbean literature could be identified, although Stenvång (2002), a published version of parts of the Macondo website [2], contained a general introduction to Caribbean writers. A presentation of West Indian authors was also available in the so far only Caribbean anthology in Swedish – Ögon av sten och vatten: en karibisk antologi [Eyes of stone and water: a Caribbean Anthology], edited by Julien and Landelius (1994).

According to a specialist in English-speaking African Literature at a Swedish university, scholarly research on African literary, both in Sweden, as well as in the other Nordic countries, focused mainly on South African writers (Olausson, 2006). On the other hand, scholarly research on Caribbean literature appeared to be almost non-existent in Sweden. However, recently two academic dissertations were published, discussing the authorships of Chamoiseau (Ljungberg Kullberg, 2006) and Dabydeen (Falk, 2007).

Swedish translations of African literature were studied by Granqvist (1985) twenty years ago. More recently Christina Gullin (1998) portrayed two of Sweden's most prominent translators of fiction from English - Else Lundgren and Caj Lundgren. Both of them have translated works by African and/or Caribbean authors. Her study included an in depth analysis of Else Lundgren's translation *Julys folk* of Nadine Gordimer's *July's people*. Gullin (1998, 2006) argued that a reader of a Swedish translation had a different experience than a reader of the English original given that the voice of the translator had been added to the voice of the author. In the case of *July's people*, Gullin (1998)

considered the implications of the narrower meaning of the Swedish title and the fact that the Swedish text appeared more concrete as the present participles of the original had been rendered by finite verbs.

Method

This paper studied works from Caribbean and Sub-Saharan African authors of fiction translated into Swedish. [3] In order to identify these works I used two literary databases available online (Alex [4] and Macondo); a bibliography of African literature in Swedish 1948-1974 (Staaf, 1976); three reference books of modern African fiction (Ruuth-Bäcker (2002), Siljeholm (1997), Norström Ridaeus (1995)); an index of the content of the literary magazine Karavan (2007) and the web-based catalogue for talking books and Braille. Occasionally, other sources were used to add material to the database, for example newspapers, bookshops, and searches in Libris, the online The National Union Catalogue of the Swedish academic and research libraries. Both Libris and The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille proved to be important complements as the entries in Alex and Macondo did not always contain the most recent works of some authors.

The study took into consideration works by named authors only. Anthologies with African tales and children's stories were left aside. The intention was to comprise only literary texts; however, works from other genres, for example autobiographies, travel books and essays were included as they figured in one or more of the source materials. In the following, titles of original works and their translations are marked with italics. Explanations in English of Swedish titles are put in hard brackets and are written with common letters.

The works were entered in a database (Microsoft Access) to facilitate the study. The entries in the database were: source (Alex, Macondo, Ruuth-Bäcker, Staaf, Libris, Karavan, etc.); author's name; country of origin (only one country for simplification); region (Caribbean or Africa);

title of the original; year of publication of the original; title of the translation; year of publication of the translation; publisher of the translation; title of anthology if the translated text was published in an anthology; translation strategy). Poetry published in the same issue of a newspaper or magazine was accounted for as one entry regardless of the number of poems.

The categorizing of the strategy of translation was sometimes subjective, as it was not always evident to establish the border between what might be considered a faithful translation and a free translation. The title of a target text was considered a faithful translation if it was identical with the title of the original or differed slightly because of grammar. This group also included titles where an element had been added or deleted, for example Maryse Condé's *Segou: les murailles de terre* (1984) which was rendered as *Segu: murar av lera (en afrikansk släktkrönika)* [*Segu: walls of clay (an African family tale)*] (1989) and Juan Bosch's *El pentagonismo. Substituto del imperialismo* (1968) that was given the Swedish version *Pentagonismen [The pentagonism]* (1968).

The category of free translations included Swedish versions that differed to a lesser or larger extent from the original, for example René Vázquez Díaz' *Un amor que se nos va* (2003) which was translated as *Dårskap och kärlek [Foolishness and love]* (2003) and Caryl Phillips' *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) which was given the Swedish title *Atlantöverfart [Crossing of the Atlantic]* (2001).

Results and Discussion

Caribbean Literature

The study registered 204 entries of literary works in Swedish translation by 92 Caribbean authors from 20 countries. The breakdown according to text genre and media is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Caribbean Literature in Swedish Translation

	Prose (novels)	Poetry	TOT
Books	89 (62)	11	100
Publications in anthologies	39	49	88
Publications in newspapers or magazines	5	11	16
TOT	133	71	204

Half of the items were books, mostly novels. Most poetry and short stories were published in journals or anthologies: eleven of the 71 entries for poetry in the database were collections of poetry by a single author. Out of the 28 entries for short stories, three referred to collections by one author. Two thirds of the books were available on cassette or CD, the major part consisting of novels. As the anthology *Ögon av sten och vatten* was accessible as a talking book, it meant that in all, 71 Caribbean authors could be enjoyed by an audience with impaired vision.

The majority of the writers figured in one of six anthologies containing West Indian material. Most of the authors were men (80%), even though women in recent years were better represented. For example, during the period 2000-2007, 7 of 16 published writers were women. This is quite different from the initial period 1950-1969, with a complete male dominance (27 authors).

The very first West Indian book translated into Swedish was *In the castle of my skin* (1953) by the Barbadian author George Lamming. The Swedish version of this novel was published one year after the original, in 1954, with the slightly different title *Inom min mörka gräns* [Within my dark border]. The first Swedish versions of books written by a female Caribbean author were published in 1977, 38 and 47 years after the publication of the originals. The writer was the British novelist Jean Rhys, born in Dominica, and the novels were *Godmorgon, midnatt!* (Good morning, midnight!, 1939) and *Efter Mr Mackenzie* (After leaving

Mr Mackenzie, 1930). Her most famous novel, *Wide Saragasso Sea*, from 1966, had to wait another 12 years before it was published as *Den första kvinnan* [The first woman] in 1989. The West Indian author with most books translated into Swedish was the Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul. Twenty-one of his works (9 novels, 2 collections of short stories, 2 autobiographies and 8 travel books) have been published regularly in Swedish since 1973, starting with *Visa mig min fiende: noveller och dagboksblad* (In a free state, 1971) and *Ett land i mörker* (An area of darkness, 1964).

Lamming, Rhys, and Naipaul all wrote in English, and English is the language from which most foreign literature in Sweden was translated (Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs, 2005). The Anglophone domination was however less prominent with regards to Caribbean literature. Out of the 204 Caribbean entries in the database, the source language could be ascertained for 201 cases, almost exclusively languages from the former colonial owners: English (79 entries or 39%), Spanish (75 entries or 37%), French (42 entries or 21%), Dutch (3 entries or 2%), Papiamentu (1 entry), Saranantongo (1 entry) and Swedish (3 entries or 2%). It was noted that there were more Swedish translations of poetry from Spanish (33 entries) than English (17 entries). Not surprisingly, French (18 entries) was also better represented in the category of poetry.

The database included 99 entries where the title of both the original and the translation could be identified. It showed that most works had been rendered faithfully (79 cases), and that ten of these titles, mostly personal names, were even identical with those of the original, for example *Texaco* (Chamoiseau, 1992, 1994) and *Annie John* (Kincaid, 1985, 1986). A few cases were registered where an ellipse (6) or an addition (12) was chosen. The deleted or added material included both individual words and minor clauses. For example, the gerund *leaving* was left out in the Swedish translation of Rhys's novel *After leaving Mr Mackenzi* (1931),

i.e. Efter Mr Mackenzie (1977). This was not surprising as English gerunds are difficult to translate as there is no given equivalent form in Swedish. The elucidation *Skådespel om Patrice Lumumba* [Play about Patrice Lumumba] was added to the faithful translation *En tid i Kongo* [A time in Congo] to render Aimé Césaire's *Une saison au Congo* (1966, 1969) – perhaps influenced by a three year earlier German translation by Monica Kind, *Im Kongo : ein Stück über Patrice Lumumba* (1966). Seventeen entries were categorized as free translations and there were major discrepancies between them with regards to how closely the Swedish versions remained to the originals. Rhys's novel *Wild Sargasso Sea* (1966) first received the Swedish title *Den första hustrun* [The first wife] (1989). By referring to the main character of the novel, the publisher made the link to Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) more explicit. On the other hand, the alliteration on 's' in the original would have been lost had the novel been translated faithfully (the Swedish word for sea is *hav*). Interestingly, the Swedish translation was republished in 2006 at another publishing house under the title *Sargassohavet* [The Sargasso Sea]. The novel thereby gained a more autonomous status, as the title now referred to the title of the original instead of the loose link to the British nineteenth century novel. Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953), also discussed above, was considered as a free translation as well. The Swedish title *Inom min mörka gräns* [Within my dark border] (1954) changed the metaphor of the original and added the adjective "dark", which probably strengthened the allusion in the novel to the issue of race for a Swedish audience.

African Literature

The database registered 719 entries of literary work by 293 writers from 34 African countries. The breakdown according to text genre and media is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: African Literature in Swedish Translation

	Prose (novels)	Poetry	TOT
Books	375 (254)	20	395

Publications in anthologies	119	48	167
Publications in newspapers or magazines	69	88	157
TOT	563	156	719

About half of the items were books, mostly novels. Poems were generally published in newspapers and magazines, or anthologies. Short stories on the other hand tended to appear in anthologies; the study registered for example six anthologies containing only texts of this genre. Half of the items were available on cassette or CD and in all the Swedish audience with impaired vision had access to 173 African writers.

The vast majority, i.e. at least 230 authors or poets were men. However, even though African women writers represented just 20% of the total number of African writers in Swedish translation, they wrote 30% of the novels, i.e. the most popular literary genre on the Swedish book market. This large number of women novels was a result of the important production of novels by Nobel Prize Laureate Doris Lessing (born in Zimbabwe) and, to a lesser extent, the Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer (14 novels, 6 short stories and an essay in Swedish translation). Lessing is in fact the author with most items in Swedish translation: 24 novels, 5 short stories collections, 2 autobiographies, 2 short stories in journals, 1 travel book, 1 drama and 3 miscellaneous, in all 38 entries in the database. Moreover, another woman – Olive Schreiner from South Africa – was the first African writer to figure in Swedish translation. The first of her four works translated in Swedish, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), was published in Sweden in 1890 as *Under Afrikas himmel: historien om en farm i Kaplandet* [Under the African sky: the story about a farm in the Cape]. The novel was retranslated in 1944 for another publisher with the title *Farmen i Afrika* [The farm in Africa]. A second edition of the 1944 translation came out in 1981 at yet another publisher.

A Swedish translation of an essay by Schreiner (1911) on women and labour was published the same year as the original. However, her last literary work to be published in Swedish, a novel, was printed in 1897. This meant that the Swedish audience had to wait another 50 years for the next African literary text, produced by another woman from South Africa, namely Mary Renault (1948). This time African literature had come to Sweden to stay.

Quite a good half of the authors were represented only in anthologies, journals or newspapers. The proportion of women writers whose works were published in separate editions was 23% and 19 collections of poetry by a single author were registered.

The source language of most African literary work in Swedish translation was that of one of the former colonial powers, i.e. English (591 entries), Portuguese (91 entries), French (73 entries), Spanish (1 entry), Arabic (3 entries) and Italian (1 entry). The African source languages were Afrikaans (3 entries) and Kikuyu (1 entry).[5] The corpus also contained a further 6 entries of unknown source languages and one item, a poem by Patrice Lumumba, that was translated to Swedish via a Rumanian version (1960). The dominance of European source languages was expected as Swedish is a small language and there are no translation training courses with African language combinations in Sweden. Finally, four African immigrant authors wrote directly in Swedish. [6] Three quarters of Swedish translations of African literary works were translated from English. This was not surprising as most African authors that were translated in Swedish were from English-speaking countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia and Kenya. In fact, South Africa alone accounted for 253 of the total 719 entries in the database, and only three or four of these items were written in Afrikaans.

However, the study showed that the source language of Swedish translations of African poetry was more often Portuguese (58 entries) than English (50 entries) or French (39 entries). The lack of English dominance in this genre may be explained by the preference for publishing prose by the authors from the largest English writing country, i.e. South Africa. Poetry translated from South African writers accounted only for a tenth of the total amount of African verse in Swedish translation. The situation was very different for the most popular prose genre – almost half (46%) of the translated novels were written by South Africans, mainly by André Brink (17 novels), Nadine Gordimer (14 novels), J. M. Coetzee (12 novels), and Laurens van der Post (11 novels).

The database included 380 entries where the title of both the original and the translation could be identified. A comparison between Swedish and original titles showed that more than two thirds of the items were translated literally. A little less than one third were considered free. Nine percent of the titles had been altered from the original by added material, often with the intent to indicate the genre of the work, for example by adding “short stories”, “love story”, “autobiography” etc. to the title. Another category was addition as an attempt to emphasize the African origin of the book, as with Okot p’ Bitek’s *Song of Lawino: lament* (1966) which became *Lawinos sång: En afrikansk kvinnas klagan* [Lawino’s song. An African woman’s lament (1971)]. Additions were also used when a complete faithful translation of the source text title was found semantically incomplete, for example Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986) was translated as *Mr Foe* (1989) and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The River between* (1965) became *Floden mellan bergen* [The river between the mountains] (1971). The investigation revealed a smaller amount, but the same kind, of ellipses. Accordingly the Swedish reader did not know what kind of story that Elieshi Lema’s *Parched earth: a love story* (2001) was as the title was translated as *Bränd jord* [Parched earth] (2004). Also some African names were deleted if they were not considered meaningful to the Swedish reader. For example, Sefi Atta’s shortstory

Hailstones over Zamfara (2004) received the shortened title Hagel [Hailstones] (2006), probably because a Swedish audience would not be able to identify the proper name as a state in Nigeria. Finally, there were a few cases where the Swedish title was less specific than the original due to omission of parts of the original title, like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The beautiful ones are not yet born* (1969) which was translated as *De ännu inte födda* [The not yet born] (1984).

The 111 entries of freely translated titles could be grouped in four categories. The first contained extracts from novels in anthologies, where the title had been adjusted to reflect the content of the extract, for example Obafemi Awolowo's *The autobiography of Awolowo* (1960) was translated *Att gå i skola* [To go to school] (1965). Another category regrouped titles that had changed so that it explicitly situated the book in an African setting, such as Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* (1980) that was called *Brev från Sengal* [Letter from Senegal] (1980). A third category compiled titles that belonged to the same semantic domain as the original but using another expression, for example Justin Cartwright's *Deep six* (1972) that was translated as *Kontrakt med döden* [Contract with death] (1979). In this case the modification was necessary as the measuring systems are different in the source and target cultures (imperial vs. metrical). A final class contained entries where no obvious reason could be identified to explain the change other than that a faithful translation would not be fully acceptable in Swedish. This was the case with Breyten Breytenbach's novel *And death white as words* (1978) that was translated as *Blodet på dörrposten* [The blood on the doorpost] (1984).

Conclusion

This study investigated modern Caribbean and African literature in Swedish translation through an inventory of publications based on searches in online databases, an index of the material published in the literary magazine *Karavan* and a biography of African literature in

Swedish translation (Staff, 1976). A total of 204 entries (Caribbean literature) and 719 entries (African literature) were registered in a database. 100 entries referred to books by Caribbean authors (62 novels and 11 collections of poetry) and 395 entries referred to books by African authors (254 novels and 20 collections of poetry). The vast majority of the 92 Caribbean and 293 African authors were male, but a change in favour of female writers was noticed in recent time. Most authors were published in anthologies and their works were almost exclusively translated from a former colonial language (English, Spanish, French and Portuguese). Translations of titles were generally faithful. Changes from the original could often be explained as due to differences in grammar or culture, or as a means to indicate or leave out the genre (autobiography, love story etc.), or to emphasize or tone down the regional origin of the book.

The inventory showed that the two main online databases used, i.e. Alex and Macondo, are important tools for retrieval of information, and that they complement each other as the two sites do not always contain the same data. In order to have a complete understanding of the actual amount of Caribbean and African literature in Swedish translation one also would wish for a continuation of Staaf's meticulous endeavour and establish up-to-date bibliographies from these areas.

Notes

[1] This contribution is an updated version of a paper originally presented during the colloquium Senghor Negritude: Legacy and Present Relevance (26-27 October 2006) at The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus in Barbados. I would like to thank the following people for having contributed in one way or the other during the elaboration of this paper: Dr. Kaudi Mabana, Professor Marco Schaumloeffel, Dr. Tetz Rooke, Mr. Björn Olofsson, Ms. Maria Bergstrand and Ms. Alison Johnson.

[2] Macondo is a project whose ambition is to promote "World Literature", i.e. literature from Africa, Asia and Latin America (including the Caribbean). The main three partners behind the project is the library Världsbiblioteket, the publisher Tranan

and the solidarity organization UBV/Latinamerika. The intention is to create an online database and a printed version with World literature authors and their works in Swedish translation. Access to the database is free of charge.

[3] Following Julien & Landelius (1994), this paper defined Caribbean (or West Indian) literature as writers from the Islands of the Caribbean Sea, as well as Belize, Guyana, French Guyana and Surinam. The paper also left out writers from North Africa, as they belong to another tradition (Ruuth-Bäcker, 2002). In the following African literature refers to Sub-Saharan African literature.

[4] Developed by a group of librarians, Alex contains ca.3 900 entries of Swedish and foreign authors of fiction (whose works have been translated into Swedish), with references to ca. 45 000 titles. The database is subject to a charge.

[5] One more African language should be added to this list, because in the preface to his anthology *Afrika berättar* (1961) Per Wästberg indicated that the source language of one of the items in this collection was African, but without specifying the language or the author.

[6] N'Denian Kebba Landing Sonko, originally from Gambia, published a collection of poems and one children's book with parallel text in Swedish and Mandinka; the Nigerian poet Cletus Nelson Nwadike published four collections of poetry and a children's book; Yeshiwork Wondmeneh from Ethiopia published a novel and Ghanaian Yeboah Shadrack Kwame, who attended a veterinary school in Sweden, wrote one of his 12 published short stories in Swedish.

[7] This paper was presented at the XVIII FIT World Congress and full acknowledgment and copyright is given to the source. Permission of the publication has been granted by the author(s).

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Much of sub-Saharan Africa's indigenous print and publishing history is most deeply marked by the complex consequences of the work of 18th- and 19th-century Christian missionaries. The East African Literature Bureau, run initially by the Church Mission Society's Nairobi bookshop manager, Charles Roberts, was established in 1947 (with offices in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, and Kampala) to provide development-related material on agriculture, health, and education, as well as fiction, poetry, and anthropologically inspired titles. From its founding to the beginning of the Mau Mau struggle in 1952, it published more than 900,000 volumes, mostly in Kiswahili (41 per cent), but also English (12 per cent), Luganda, Gĩkũyũ, and Dholuo. Sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing rapid urbanization as well as a growing slum population. 1.2 billion. As a result, the existing housing stock in Sub-Saharan Africa remains overcrowded and of limited quality, and there is typically a backlog of housing. As a result of low incomes and high costs of formal housing, the informal delivery of housing as a less expensive alternative has been the norm in SSA, while formality is the exception. Sub-Saharan African countries top the list of countries and territories by fertility rate with 40 of the highest 50, all with TFR greater than 4 in 2008. All are above the world average except South Africa and Seychelles.[62] More than 40% of the population in sub-Saharan countries is younger than 15 years old, as well as in Sudan, with the exception of South Africa.[63]. Country. Population. Sub-Saharan Africa displays the most linguistic diversity of any region in the world. This is apparent from the number of languages spoken. The region contains over 1,000 languages, which is around 1/6 of the world's total.[70].