



Translation and the International Circulation of Literature

A Comparative Analysis of the Reception of Roberto Bolaño's Work in Spanish and English

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the reception of Roberto Bolaño's novels in Spanish and English from a comparative perspective, in the context of debates about the role of translation in a highly unequal global literary field. Departing from Casanova's theorization of the 'world republic of letters' and tracing the main factors that have shaped the translation of Latin America into English, it focuses on Bolaño's case through an analysis of newspaper reviews published in Spain, Britain and the US. Issues discussed include the periodization of the reception of Bolaño's literature, the proliferation of divergent biographical narratives around Bolaño, and the degree of interconnection between the literary and journalistic fields at the transnational level. Bolaño's case illustrates the importance of translation in the universal consecration of his work and the central role played by the US in this process. It also points to the US's increasingly significant role in the global consecration of autonomous works and not just, as Casanova would claim, of commercial culture, and identifies some key limitations of theories that understand cultural globalization in terms of homogenization or Americanization.*

Keywords. Cultural consecration, Latin American literature, Newspaper reviews, Reception, Roberto Bolaño, Literary translation, International circulation of literature, Sociology of translation.

In his early forties, Roberto Bolaño (1953-2003) used to think that he would die invisible and unknown. At the time of his death, when he was only 50, he was a respected writer in the Spanish-speaking world. His work had won the most prestigious Spanish and Latin American literary prizes (the Herralde Prize in 1998 and the Rómulo Gallegos Prize in 1999) and was increasingly well known within a significant circle of the literary reading public. He was also becoming the object of a level of international recognition rarely accorded to Third World authors who do not write in English, as evident in the critical acclaim received by the first French translations of his works and the appearance

of the English version of one of his novels, *By Night in Chile*, in 2003. A few years later, the sudden international success of his books would be approached in terms of 'the construction of a myth' and a special term would be coined to name the furor created by his literature among thousands of avid followers: *bolañomania*. Bolaño's case is remarkable not only because of the speed of developments and the short span of his visible literary career, but also because of the sheer extremes upon which his fame is built. Literary histories written around 2000 do not even mention Bolaño in the space they dedicate to the 'newest' generation of Latin American writers, among which Bolaño's contemporaries – such as Juan Villoro, Edmundo Paz Soldán and Rodrigo Fresán – appear (Williams 2003). A decade later, the reach and impact of his major novels seems only comparable to the extraordinary reception once granted to García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Sociological approaches that engage with the nature of international literary exchanges have called attention to translation as an important factor that cannot be adequately described through a predominantly national and/or comparatist perspective. Johan Heilbron drew on world systems theory to provide a structural analysis of the international flows of translated books, approaching translation as a measure of centrality: the more central a language is in the international translation system, the more books are translated from this language; conversely, the most central languages tend to have the lowest proportion of translations in their own book production (1999:438-39). Pascale Casanova explored the fundamental importance of transnational exchanges in a literary field that she characterized as global from the start (2004). She showed how literatures are constituted relationally in a highly unequal international field, which she called the world republic of letters. According to Casanova, Paris dominates the literary world, is the measure of literary modernity and consecrates the texts arriving from the peripheries. In this context, translation becomes an important element of the valorization of texts and diffusion of literary modernity. In the movement from centre to periphery, translation serves a basic function of capital accumulation: for poorer languages, it is a means of acquiring capital and prestige, of enriching their domestic repertoire. At the same time, it facilitates the international diffusion of literary capital produced in the centre and extends the power of its language and literature. But Casanova is especially interested in the way translation functions when the transfer proceeds in the opposite direction: from the periphery to the centre of the literary space. In this case, she describes the function of translation as one of consecration or literarization: translation gives writers in dominated languages literary recognition, international existence, and also allows and reinforces the existence of an autonomous international position within their national field, while for the dominant languages it is a way of appropriating works from the peripheries.

Following Casanova's model, while English is crucial in the first type of translations, from the centre to the periphery, the low number of translations that are published as a percentage of total book production in English means

that it has played a much more marginal role in consecrating peripheral texts, a fact which ultimately undermines its centrality in the international literary field. In this context, Casanova explains the growing weight of the English-speaking (geographical) capitals in terms of the generalization of the commercial model and the growing power of the economic pole. In a chapter appropriately entitled 'From Literary Internationalism to Commercial Globalization?', she maintains that the autonomy of the whole literary space is currently challenged by the ever more powerful transnational circulation of American or Americanized commercial culture, which has acquired literary legitimacy through the imitation of autonomous culture (Casanova 2004).

However, Casanova might have underestimated the degree of cultural diversity that is present in small-scale production in the US, as Gisèle Sapiro's comparative examination of literary translations in the US and France demonstrates (2010). Further, it can be argued that by equating the commercial with the national pole, Casanova finally fails to account adequately for key structural transformations in the transnational circulation of literary works. The existence of new novels that achieve international success is not limited, as she claims, to the generalization of the North American popular canon or to the creation of a 'world fiction' especially and artificially designed for international circulation. Bolaño's case, which combines global recognition and commercial success with critical acclaim and literary consecration in national and regional fields, puts into question an easy and perhaps simplistic distinction between autonomous and heteronomous works and illustrates the changing power balance in the international literary field, where the US has gained an unprecedented position in granting universal visibility to literary works. To be sure, the US did not 'discover' Bolaño. He was already a consecrated author in Spain and Latin America, and the first translations of his novels appeared in French, not English. However, the translation of his works into English and his success in the US have been a crucial element of his posthumous global consecration. It has been argued that cultural consecration projects promote the legitimacy of the groups that initiate them and of the entire field (Allen and Parsons 2006:809, Allen and Lincoln 2004:874; see also Casanova 2004:23). In this sense, Bolaño's international success also helps to establish the growing legitimacy of the US in the global consecration of autonomous works.

The following analysis of the role of translation in the international circulation of literature is based not on the examination of actual translated texts, but of what has been referred to as "extratexts" or "the general meta-discourse on translation circulating independently of individual translated texts" (Tahir-Gürçağlar 2002:44), in an extension of Gerard Genette's notion of paratext (1997). As Şehnaz Tahir-Gürçağlar has convincingly argued, an analysis of translated texts is proving increasingly insufficient to contextualize these texts within the translating culture, while the study of both extratexts and paratexts offers important insights into the conditions under which translations are produced and consumed (2002:59).



In the analysis that follows, translation is considered as a gain, rather than a loss, in two main respects. Firstly, in Casanova's sense of valorization of works from the peripheries, translation is a form of capital acquisition, and Bolaño's case is an example of how an author from a more peripheral literary space acquires central capital through translation. Secondly, translation is also a form of rewriting (Lefevere 1992) through which works are endowed with new qualities and meanings that allow them to function effectively in new cultural contexts. This second sense of translation as a gain (which is explored below in the analysis of the different biographical narratives that have accompanied the reception of Bolaño's work) is a key aspect of the international circulation of literature which is often neglected in accounts of cultural globalization that stress processes of homogenization, such as those that employ notions of globalization as westernization or MacDonaldization (Ritzer 2011). Such accounts are blind to the domesticating processes through which translated works are made to fulfil the cultural needs of receiving fields. Nor can the sense of translation as a gain be easily reconciled with alternative notions of globalization as hybridization or creolization (García Canclini 1995, Nederveen Pieterse 2004, Hannerz 1996, Cohen 2007), which stress the degree of mixture and cross-fertilization between cultures. Translation, as "a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages" (Benjamin 1992:75), is understood here as a process in which cultural difference persists and no definitive synthesis can be achieved. And while the cross-fertilization of cultures is certainly a major element of an approach that puts translation at the centre of global cultural flows, this approach also calls attention to the degree of violence that characterizes the appropriation of foreign works and to translation as a fundamentally ethnocentric act (Venuti 1998:10).

1. Translating Latin America into English

Before examining the reception of Bolaño's works in Spanish and English, it is necessary to briefly describe the context in which their translation takes place, a context marked by the asymmetric nature of global translation flows and by the cultural meanings and expectations that have traditionally been associated with the translation of Latin American works. In broad terms, the reception of Latin American literature in English translation is shaped by three determining factors. The first is the low number of translations as a ratio of the total book production in English and the reluctance of the reading public to consume translated works, which turns translation into English into a rare achievement, even for established writers within their national fields or regions. Since the 1950s, the number of translations into English has remained roughly between 2% and 4% of the total book production in Britain and the US, declining even further over the past decade. Translations accounted for just 1.4% of books published in 2001 in Britain and 2.07% of books published



in 2004 in the United States (as compared, for example, with 22.9% in 2002 in Italy or 7.3% in 2004 in Germany). Conversely, since World War II, English has been the most translated language worldwide (Venuti 2008:11).

The second determining factor is a whole set of expectations that have become associated with the reception of Latin American literature, especially in the United States. These expectations are marked by the international success of the 'Boom' of the Latin American novel in the 1960s and 1970s, largely linked to the image of an exotic Latin America. In this context, as Sylvia Molloy observes, "[p]arallel to the construction of the 'Orient', there was here a very active fabrication of the Latin American 'South', one that had to be, of necessity, free of Western alliances so that Western fantasies could generously play themselves out" (2005:371). More generally, this influence is related to a growing market for translations from non-European languages as "a quick way to 'know a culture'" since the mid 1970s, a phenomenon which Gayatri Spivak approaches as a consequence of the dominant position of English as a global language (2005:94).

Thirdly, Molloy points to a notion of easy familiarity and translatability that has come to distinguish Latin American literatures – written in European languages – from other postcolonial literatures: "Latin American texts appear to offer the *illusion* of an easy familiarity, the *illusion* of translatability, and thus create the *illusion* of cultural competence, not to mention the *illusion* of institutional expertise, usually based on a smattering of texts" (2005:373; emphasis in original). In the case of the US, this appearance of easy familiarity is fostered by the geographical proximity of those countries, south of the border, that continue to provide the image of an exotic other to North American reading publics.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the translation of regionalist novels that portray a primarily rural and underdeveloped region has served to reinforce among English-speaking readers the image of a natural and remote Latin America (Jill Levine 2005:298, Munday 2008:50-54, Pollack 2009:348-49). The novels of the Boom did not fundamentally alter this state of affairs, as magical realism became the dominant perspective from which to interpret Latin American troubled history and political struggles, as well as its exuberant landscapes, peoples and cultures. In Molloy's words, magical realism quickly became "a regional, ethnicized commodity" (2005:374), conforming to a mode of representation that marked Latin America's distance from the United States. Thus, Boom novels came to represent a completely dissimilar literary achievement in different cultural contexts and literary fields. Whereas in Latin America this achievement was signalled by their successful incorporation of oral and popular traditions into literary structures, as in Ángel Rama's (1985) influential views on narrative transculturation,¹ in the United States it largely signified a revival of myth. For the Spanish-speaking public these

¹ Rama refers, in this context, to the co-existence in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* of a historical plane of events with the magical conceptions that characters have of these events (1985).



novels' modernity lay in the combination of heterogeneous cultural elements on an equal plane, overcoming the regionalists' divide between the characters' language and the author's own language. For the English-speaking public, their modernity became associated with Modernism's self-referentiality and political neutrality in the context of the Cold War (Mudrovic 2002:136).

The success of magical realism meant that a few works were considered representative of a whole culture, while it became more difficult for others that did not conform to the dominant stereotypes to be noticed. According to Pollack (2009), only the reception of Roberto Bolaño's works came to alter this state of affairs when his novel *The Savage Detectives* made it to *The New York Times* list of 'The 10 Best Books of 2007'. Pollack directly compares its success with the impact of the most iconic novels of the Boom: García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. She points to some mechanisms that serve to construct a new pattern of reception for *The Savage Detectives*, noting how the cover especially designed for the US edition is visually reminiscent of the newly released 'original scroll' version of Kerouac's *On the Road* (2009:357). Moreover, the novel is categorized by reviewers as a road story, this time fitting into ready made clichés elaborated by recently popular films about Latin America like Alfonso Cuarón's *And Your Mother, Too* and Walter Salles' *The Motorcycle Diaries* (*ibid.*:359). In spite of this new image of Latin America largely associated with itinerant non-conformists and closely connected to the US's own recent past, according to Pollack, with its extravagant cast of characters the novel also unintentionally perpetuates prevailing clichés of an exotic Latin America distant from US reality.

2. Roberto Bolaño in the press: A periodization

This article seeks to offer a broader view of the reception of Bolaño's literature by focusing on a longer temporal frame and providing a comparative perspective. It offers a systematic analysis of press coverage in Spain, the US and Britain during the period 1996 to 2012, identifying divergent reception patterns associated with Bolaño's literature in different cultural fields. It also asks to what degree Bolaño's global consecration might be a product of the international circulation of his works, investigating influences across national and regional fields and discussing the effects of Bolaño's success in English.

An empirical analysis of Bolaño's reception in three countries is provided: Spain, with Barcelona as its literary capital, has traditionally had an important role in the regional consecration of Latin American writers, of which Roberto Bolaño is a recent example; the US has played a key role in his international reception; and Britain offers an interesting point of comparison to the US reception environment.² The analysis draws on material published in the quality

² For an examination of the reception of the English translations of Bolaño's work, see also Corral (2011).

press or what has been described as elite newspapers, i.e. those publications most likely to be read by and to influence the literary taste of cultural elites, and to influence the positioning of literary producers and their products on the market (Janssen 2009:353). The data includes not just literary reviews, but also general coverage dealing with Bolaño's biography and his literature (from any section of the newspaper), which is abundant especially in Spanish newspapers. In total, 240 articles have been analyzed, out of which 99 are reviews. Of these, 165 articles (43 of which are reviews) come from the Spanish press (*El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *El Mundo*), 24 (18 reviews) from the US (*The New York Times* and *The New York Review of Books*), and 51 (38 reviews) from the British press (*The Guardian*, *The Times/Sunday Times*, *The London Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement*).³

For the purposes of analysis, the reception of Bolaño's works can be divided roughly into four main periods. The first period starts in 1996 with the publication of *La literatura nazi en América* and ends in 1998 with the appearance of *Los detectives salvajes*. During this period Bolaño's literature attracted significant critical acclaim but was little known by the public. During the second period, which extends from 1999, when *Los detectives salvajes* won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, to his death in 2003, Bolaño became a literary star. He was increasingly acknowledged as the greatest Latin American writer of his generation, his works started to reach a wider literary reading public in Spanish and translations in various languages began to appear. The third period (2004-2006) is marked by the first posthumous publications and the unprecedented success and critical acclaim of *2666*, as well as the success of the English translations *By Night in Chile*, *Distant Star* and *Last Evenings on Earth*. The fourth period, from 2007 to 2012, is characterized by the international success of *The Savage Detectives* and *2666* in English, which confirmed that Bolaño has become a literary legend and a myth, as well as by the uncovering of previously unpublished manuscripts in his personal archive.⁴

³ Literary reviews in Spain differ significantly from those in the US and Britain. Whereas in the latter context reviews are often written by novelists, in the Spanish press they are mostly written by literary journalists. In Bolaño's case, two recognized reviewers have had a special role in his reception, producing a remarkably coherent critical frame for the appreciation of his literature: Juan A. Masoliver Ródenas of *La Vanguardia* and Ignacio Echevarría, writing first in *El País* and later in *El Mundo*. In Spain, it is primarily the quality newspapers, and especially their weekly cultural supplements, that are generally read for reviews. There is no equivalent in the Spanish press to the long pieces published as literary reviews in publications such as the *New York Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement* or the *London Review of Books*.

⁴ Bolaño's publisher Jorge Herralde provides useful figures on sales to illustrate the development of the writer's career. Whereas during the period 1996-1998 the world sales of *Estrella distante* amounted to fewer than 1,000 copies per year, *2666* had to be reissued almost every month from October 2004 to April 2005, with sales reaching a total of 30,000 copies. Increased international circulation was reflected in the 49 translations in 12 different



2.1 Achieving literary visibility (1996-1998)

Roberto Bolaño first appeared on the literary scene with the publication of *La literatura nazi en América* in 1996, although *La Vanguardia*'s reviewer (Masoliver Ródenas, 19 April 1996) points out that Bolaño had already been the author of "five books of poetry and three novels"⁵ by this stage. Curiously, the only reference to drugs published in the Spanish press in connection with Bolaño – an issue, as we will see below, that will become a major theme of his reception in the US – appeared in the same year. It relates to a statement made by Bolaño – "violence is an addictive hard drug" – during the launch of a second novel, *Estrella distante*, while reflecting on the scale of the violence that constitutes the book's main theme (Guardia, *La Vanguardia*, 23 December 1996).⁶ A review of *Llamadas telefónicas* quotes Bolaño's conception of literature as "opening one's eyes into the darkness" and mentions his view that the detective's job is good training for a writer (Masoliver Ródenas, *La Vanguardia*, 6 March 1998). This period ended when *Los detectives salvajes* obtained the Herralde Prize in November 1998, providing new visibility and prestige to an author who, according to Jorge Herralde, has a "similar profile to other award winners: high literary quality, recognised by the critics but little known by the public" (quoted in Ginart, *El País*, 3 November 1998). In their coverage of the award, newspapers *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *El Mundo* introduce an author who, in 1993, "took the decision to live from literature or starve. And, however modestly, has managed to live from his writing" (Barranco, *La Vanguardia*, 3 November 2011). The publication of *Los detectives salvajes* also signalled the start of Bolaño's consecration as a key Latin American writer. Masoliver Ródenas' review (*La Vanguardia*, 4 December 1998) greets the work as "the great Mexican novel of his [Bolaño's] generation", declaring the appearance of a new Latin American star, while Echevarría emphasizes its originality and states that "*Los detectives salvajes* is ... the type of novel Borges would have agreed to write" (2007:37, originally published in *El País*). The book, a fictionalization of the author's youth in Mexico City which portrays the main characters' passage from courageous radical literary youths to defeated forty-somethings who have lost all hope,

countries that existed by October 2004 (Herralde 2005:41-59). More recently, Herralde has referred to the success of *2666* in English: according to its publisher Jonathan Galassi, the novel had sold over 100,000 copies by May 2009, only seven months after its publication (Herralde 2010:24). According to the newspaper *El Mundo*, the Spanish editions achieved similar success: 118,000 copies of *Los detectives salvajes* and 94,000 of *2666* were sold by 2010 (Sanz, *El Mundo*, 28 January 2010).

⁵ All translations from Spanish are my own.

⁶ But 'Playa' ('Beach'), the short story to which some have attributed the origin of Bolaño's association with heroin in the English-speaking world, was published in *El Mundo* on 17 August 2000.



is described as a *Bildungsroman* taken to its ultimate consequences. French, Italian and German translations are mentioned, as is Bolaño's first trip back to Chile since 1974.

2.2 Regional consecration (1999-2003)

Having won the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, the most important Latin American award, in 1999 *Los detectives salvajes* became consolidated in the press as the novel that defines a generation of writers who were born in the 1950s. Bolaño's description of the work as "an adventure novel with sex, drugs and rock and roll" (Ayén and Homedes, *La Vanguardia*, 16 July 2003) marks his distance from his most illustrious predecessors, Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez, who were the first to win this award, in 1964 and 1965 respectively. The ensuing publication of *Monsieur Pain* and *Amuleto* attracted significant critical attention, but it was not until the appearance of *Nocturno de Chile* in 2000 that the motif of Bolaño as a Latin American star reappears. Nevertheless, the reception of the novel during this period is uneven: while Masoliver Ródenas celebrates what he considers as possibly the best novel of an extraordinary writer, a novel that transcends the generational context and creates a true masterwork that will become key in contemporary Latin American literature (*La Vanguardia*, 9 February 2001), Joaquín Marco points to its traditional technique and to what some will see as postmodern scepticism (*El Mundo*, 27 December 2000). The publication of *Putas asesinas*, Bolaño's second book of short stories, is greeted with insightful reviews by Masoliver Ródenas and Echevarría (in *La Vanguardia* 14 September 2001, and *El País*, 20 October 2001, respectively). Both discuss the writer's significance as an "emblematic author of the new Latin American fiction" (Echevarría, *El País*, 20 October 2001). The extent of the recognition Bolaño achieved in the Spanish-speaking world during the last few years of his life is signalled by the publication of his collections of poetry (*Tres* and *Los perros románticos*, both in 2000), of an experimental novel written in 1980 (*Amberes*, 2002), and by the reprinting, in 2002, of his first book of short stories (*Llamadas telefónicas*). During this period, Bolaño became the object of fervent admiration, evident in what is referred to as the pilgrimage of Latin American writers to their idol's home in Blanes (*La Vanguardia*, 10 February 2002), and in the proclamation of Bolaño as the most influential novelist of his generation at a conference in Seville in June 2003. Finally, 2003 also saw the publication of *By Night in Chile*, the first English translation of Bolaño's works, which is described by Ben Richards in *The Guardian* as "a brilliant analysis of Chilean literature and the contaminated soil out of which it has emerged" (22 February 2003).

Bolaño's death in July 2003 received significant coverage in *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *El Mundo*, which published tributes by, among others, writers and personal friends Juan Villoro, A.G. Porta, Rodrigo Fresán, Enrique



Vila-Matas and Jorge Herralde. The biographical portrait that took shape in these tributes will be examined in detail below. English language obituaries also appeared in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, the latter written by Bolaño's translator Chris Andrews. This period ends with the publication of *El gaucho insufrible*, Bolaño's third book of short fiction, which he completed only a few weeks before his death.

2.3 First posthumous years (2004-2006)

The year 2004 saw the appearance of Bolaño's collected newspaper articles and other miscellaneous material (*Entre Paréntesis*) and, at the end of the year, of his great unfinished novel *2666*. With the much anticipated arrival of Bolaño's 'enormous' final work, several reviews are published in each of the Spanish newspapers covered here. Writing in *El País*, Argentinean author Rodrigo Fresán describes *2666* as "the total novel which not only ends a whole work, but which, at the same time, redefines it and elevates it to vertiginous heights", characterizing it as a "cosmic novel", a "boundless artefact" which can be readily compared to *In Search of Lost Time* and *A Man Without Qualities*, but also to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (21 October 2004). In *La Vanguardia*, Masoliver Ródenas also uses the term "total novel" and "masterwork" to describe what he considers to be "one of the great contemporary novels of our language" (20 October 2004). Two months later, when the novel is chosen as the best book of fiction in 2004 (*2666* is also designated best work of fiction of the year in the cultural supplement of the newspaper *El Mundo*), he refers to it as "a totalizing novel that seeks to create a complex narrative universe, one that takes us to the beginnings of the modern novel, to Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* and to James Joyce's *Ulysses*", noting that "*2666* is meant to be not only the great novel in the Spanish language of the first decade of the new century, but one of those fundamental pieces that define a literature as a whole" (*La Vanguardia*, 15 December 2004). Coinciding with the publication of *2666*, a conference is held in Barcelona where Bolaño's "strange and disproportionate" literary trajectory is analyzed (Ayén, *La Vanguardia*, 22 October 2004; Mora and Punzano, *El País*, 21 October 2004; Néspolo, *El Mundo*, 20 October 2004). Roberto Bolaño's prestige continues to grow "at a vertiginous pace" (Masoliver Ródenas, *La Vanguardia*, 15 June 2005), and several of his books are reprinted, including an early novel co-written with A. G. Porta and published in 1984 (*Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce*).

The New York Times also begins to take note of Bolaño's work in 2004. *By Night in Chile* receives two reviews. A first short note relates Bolaño's style to "the classics of Latin American magic realism", but also points out that "his cerebral protagonist and nonfiction borrowing are reminiscent of Thomas Bernhard and W.G. Sebald" (Kamine, 11 January 2004), while a review by



Richard Eder discusses the novel as “thinly disguised history”, emphasizing Bolaño’s portrayal of Chile’s intellectuals as complicit with military rule and siding with privilege (16 January 2004). *Distant Star* is only discussed within a collective piece on ‘Fiction in Translation’ (Tepper, 27 March 2005). In the UK, by contrast, it features as the object of a long review in *The Guardian*. The review highlights Bolaño’s oblique, wry style in confronting horror and the sense of guilt felt by those who survive it, a style which appeals to “many Hispanic writers unhappy with the lazy, indulgent fantasies of magical realism” (Caistor, 23 October 2004). Significantly, *The New York Times* also dedicates an article in 2005 to the Spanish reception of *2666*, noting that “Bolaño’s reputation and legend are in meteoric ascent”, and drawing on quotes by Echevarría, Fresán and Herralde, as well as on translator Natasha Wimmer’s characterization of Bolaño as an “international, post-nationalist writer” (Rohter, 9 August 2005).

2.4 *Global consecration and the establishment of a literary myth* (2007-2012)

News coverage related to Bolaño’s trajectory and his legacy is no less significant in the Spanish press in more recent years, but the single most important development of the period under examination in this section is the enthusiastic reception and unprecedented success of Bolaño’s major novels in the United States, a fact that in itself became the object of debate in the Spanish (and British) press. It is thus appropriate at this point to start with English language press coverage before turning our attention to the Spanish press.

Bolaño’s major novels made it to *The New York Times* lists of ‘10 Best Books of 2007’ (*The Savage Detectives*) and of 2008 (*2666*), an unprecedented achievement for any work of fiction originally written in Spanish. The critical success of his literary output in the US is also evident in the fact that *2666* became the first work of fiction originally written in Spanish to obtain the National Book Award in 2009. These developments were accompanied by an increasing number of biographical accounts of an author who now enjoyed literary superstar status as an “exemplary literary rebel” (Kerr, *The New York Review of Books*, 18 December 2010), who lived “a nomadic, bohemian, heroin-fuelled existence as a vagabond poet” (Richards, *The Guardian*, 23 June 2007). Curiously, *The Savage Detectives* did not attract the glowing reviews one would expect it to receive in this context, perhaps because of the strangeness of its description of the life and politics of a Mexican post-avant-garde group outside Latin America. In *The New York Times*, Richard Eder’s article relates its shortcomings to the indigestible long middle section, which is seen as a long parenthesis where “narrative stops” (12 April 2007), while James Wood proclaims that *By Night in Chile* is still Bolaño’s greatest work (15 April 2007). In *The Guardian*, Alfred Hickling feels it necessary to

warn the reader of the “supremely indigestible account of the squabbles of the Latin American avant-garde” (19 July 2008), while Ben Richards – who views *The Savage Detectives* as Bolaño’s revenge on the novel for an enforced career choice – notes that the poets depicted in this work “are of a particular type that treads dangerously close to cliché” and that “it’s a partly imagined generation that does not seem very broadly conceived” (23 June 2007).

Nazi Literature in the Americas and *2666* appear in the US in 2008 (and in the UK in 2010 and 2009 respectively), confirming Roberto Bolaño’s international renown within a very short span of time. *Nazi Literature in the Americas* is reviewed as a continuation of a thematic line characteristic of the author, namely that “culture, in particular literary culture, is a whore”, and linked in this respect to *The Savage Detectives* and *By Night in Chile* (d’Erasmus, *The New York Times*, 24 February 2008). The much anticipated *2666* receives two reviews in *The New York Times*. Whereas *The Savage Detectives* was introduced one year earlier as the work of the most outstanding figure of the generation that succeeded magic realism, Jonathan Lethem reads *2666* as “a landmark in what’s possible for the novel as a form in our increasingly, and terrifyingly, post-national world”, while also identifying Bolaño’s *Savage Detectives* as “a kind of reset button on our deplorably sporadic appetite for international writing” (9 November 2008). Janet Maslin invokes David Lynch, Marcel Duchamp and the Bob Dylan of ‘Highway 61 Revisited’, stating that in *2666* “Bolaño’s references were sufficiently global to encompass all that, and to interweave both stuffy academia and tawdry gumshow fiction into this book’s monumentally inclusive mix” (13 November 2008). In a similar vein, Leo Robson writes in *The Times* that Bolaño “was a true outlaw, a culture glutton whose reference points ranged from Heidegger to Keanu Reeves” (9 January 2009). In *The Guardian*’s overview of Bolaño’s trajectory, the enormous critical acclaim of *2666* in the US, and more generally Bolaño’s “conquest of the US”, becomes a theme in its own right (Tayler, 17 January 2009).

Similarly, the most notable feature of Spanish language coverage during this period is its focus on the impact and controversy occasioned by Bolaño’s success in the US, which is discussed in detail below. This occupies an important place in reviews, alongside a wide ranging debate on Bolaño’s legacy. At the same time, attention is also devoted to the posthumous publication of works found in Bolaño’s archives: *El secreto del mal* (2007)/*The Secret of Evil* (2012), *La universidad desconocida* (2007), *El Tercer Reich* (2010)/*The Third Reich* (2011), *Los sinsabores del verdadero policía* (2011)/*Woes of the True Policeman* (2012). In the context of the English-speaking world, attention to these posthumous publications is extended to former works that were not yet available in English translation – *The Romantic Dogs* (2008), *The Skating Rink* (2009), *Monsieur Pain* (2010), *Antwerp* (2010), *The Insufferable Gaucho* (2010) and *Between Parentheses* (2011).



3. Bolaño's two lives

The most readily noticeable feature of the reception of Bolaño's work in Spanish and English is the proliferation of divergent biographical narratives of the author in the two contexts. The intense interest in the author's biography is partly stimulated by the autobiographical element in Bolaño's work, by his peculiar literary trajectory, and by his early death, at the height of his success, which helped to turn him into a literary legend. However, what is interesting is that these biographical narratives differ significantly in the Spanish- and English-speaking contexts, and that they reveal consistently different visions of the role of the writer, thereby impacting the specific reception of Bolaño's work in different literary fields.

Before his death, the predominant image associated with Bolaño in Spain was that of a writer who – in Bolaño's own words – chooses to “make a living from literature or starve” (quoted in Ginart, *El País*, 3 November 1998), an author described by Spanish writer and friend Javier Cercas as “literature's kamikaze who is prepared to survive in inhuman conditions as long as he can devote himself to writing” (*El País*, 22 November 1999). Bolaño himself noted: “I consider myself essentially a poet, but poets are not necessarily writers of verse, but those who open their eyes in the dark room” (quoted in Bandera, *La Vanguardia*, 22 December 1997). His Chilean nationality and Mexican ‘sentimental education’ are alluded to with reference to his novels: reviews mention that Bolaño was in Chile during the coup when *Nocturno de Chile* was published, while the writer is quoted as saying that he does not want to return to Mexico “for fear that all his Mexican material fades away” (in Obiols, *El País*, 15 September 2001). His Latin American origins and itinerant past do not seem especially remarkable in a city which was, after all, the centre of the Boom of the Latin American novel and where over a hundred Latin American writers currently live (*La Vanguardia*, 10 February 2002). Bolaño's odd and colourful jobs so frequently referred to in the English language press (night-watchman in a campsite, grape picker, seller of cheap jewellery), are explicitly related in this context to the dedication of an author who lived only for literature, a chain smoker and permanent coffee drinker who never slept (García, *El Mundo*, 16 September 2002; Obiols, *El País*, 17 September 2002; Ayén and Homedes, *La Vanguardia*, 16 July 2003).

These different elements – Bolaño's total dedication to literature; his autonomy and contempt for extra-literary considerations, including recognition and sales, and for writers who succumb to them; his conception of writing as opening one's eyes in the darkness – all converge to produce a consistent biographical narrative in which Bolaño is readily identified as a contemporary exponent of the heroic struggles from which the autonomy of the literary field first emerged, a position that Pierre Bourdieu has traced to the trajectories of Flaubert and Baudelaire in nineteenth-century Paris (1996). Examination of

the articles published in the press immediately after Bolaño's death reveals that this image of the writer had already been fully formed by then. Herralde highlights Bolaño's "radical aesthetics, ethics and politics", describing him as a "trapeze artist without a net" who was postponing a liver transplant so that he could finish his great novel, always putting literature above everything else (*La Vanguardia*, 17 July 2003). Herralde's description of Bolaño as a "masked dandy" is reiterated in Fresán's reference to his "image of dandy and freak" (*El País*, 17 July 2003). Villoro states that "Roberto Bolaño never seemed to need any guide or orientation. A pioneer who despised all maps", and highlights his eclectic knowledge and engaging conversation: "Mesmeric talker, he participated centrally in gatherings and could reveal unheard-of details about medieval poetry, serial killers, German troubadours or Falangist ideologues" (*El País*, 16 July 2003). Bolaño's British publisher, Euan Cameron, will confirm this image years later, when he describes the London party that took place to celebrate the publication of *By Night in Chile*: "Roberto filled the drawing room with his cigar smoke and chatted irresistibly. I remember being astonished that he was familiar with Jacobite history" (*The Sunday Times*, 7 December 2008). Returning to the Spanish context, Vila-Matas mentions that "in his last years, nobody could drag Bolaño away from his writing desk at night" and states: "as I thought that Roberto read everything, I started living in a state of permanent literary insufficiency, because he had set very high standards and I did not want to disappoint him with, for example, a sloppy text; with one of those pieces in which, for a thousand different reasons, one is unable to *be consumed* completely or, in other words, to give one's awe" (*El País*, 6 September 2003).

Nothing could be further from this image of monastic dedication to literature than the figure of the rebel and drug-addicted beatnik that became familiar in the US, but also in the UK, with the success of *The Savage Detectives*. Whereas in Spain Bolaño's excesses were linked to the consumption of great quantities of cigarettes and coffee, later replaced by herbal tea with honey, and to the sleepless nights of an author dedicated to writing, the translation of Bolaño's biography into English turned him into a heroin addict who only cleaned up when he became a father and needed to provide for his family. It is also worth pointing out that in contrast with the Spanish context, where the construction of Bolaño's biography shows a remarkable continuity from the late 1990s until the present, in the English-speaking context it underwent significant mutations over the years. Early portrayals in the British press were very much in tune with Spanish press coverage. The first *Guardian* review mentioned that "[s]ince 1973 Bolaño has lived outside Chile and his fiction has reflected that" (Richards, 22 February 2003), while his obituary stressed that "[h]is mischievous spirit upset many fellow writers, who often bore the brunt of his attacks. Fed up with the pious sentimentalism of the kind of socially committed literature he felt was expected of Chilean writers, he aimed

to subvert good taste, revolutionary or conservative” (Caistor, *The Guardian*, 17 July 2003). Significantly, the two obituaries published in *The Guardian* and *The Independent* were both written by translators of Spanish fiction into English. By contrast, the first portrayal of Bolaño in *The New York Times* was that of a writer “who died in exile in Spain” (Tepper, 27 March 2005), who “spent much of his life in exile, in Mexico and Europe” (in a piece entitled ‘The Folklore of Exile’, *Prose*, 9 July 2006).

The motif of Bolaño’s beatnik existence, as well as the idea that he decided to turn to writing fiction when he became a father and felt responsible for providing for his family, initially appeared in Larry Rohter’s account of the success of *2666* in Spanish (*The New York Times*, 9 August 2005),⁷ but was only consolidated with the publication of *The Savage Detectives*. The success of this novel was accompanied by Bolaño’s growing reputation as a hard-living literary outlaw, a biographical narrative which is built around three main elements: Bolaño as a vagabond, a drug addict and a poet. Firstly, the characterization of Bolaño as an exile gave way to an emphasis on the writer’s nomadic existence, his moving from place to place and living in poverty, an image of an itinerant life which is complemented by a series of odd jobs. Secondly, reference to Bolaño’s heroin addiction, leading to his subsequent illness and death, featured in most reviews of *The Savage Detectives*, *2666* and other works, even after it was denied by Bolaño’s widow and the writer’s new agent Andrew Wylie (in a letter published in *The New York Times* on 7 December 2008). Thirdly, the writer of what is hailed as “the finest novel of the present century” (Tyler, *The Guardian*, 17 January 2009) is time and again described as a poet, not merely because he started as one or in allusion to Bolaño’s own views on poetry and literature in general, but because his fiction was now somehow presented as a capitulation to the need to make a living. The publication of his co-written novel in 1984 and the appearance in 2002 of a novel originally written in 1980 do not seem to disrupt the claim that the writer became a novelist in the 1990s so that he could provide for his family.⁸

It seems that in the English-speaking world “Bolaño’s desperado image is a large part of his appeal” (Kunkel, *London Review of Books*, 6 September 2007), not just for readers who follow him as the leader of a cult, but also for the critics who, even in the most intelligent and penetrating reviews of his works, recognize in this biographical narrative an important source of Bolaño’s contribution to literature. Thus, according to Jonathan Lethem, Bolaño constructed a remarkable body of writing so “that literature ... could meaningfully

⁷ This interesting piece will be discussed in some detail in the next section.

⁸ This became the main theme of a **reportage** published in *La Vanguardia* entitled ‘When Bolaño decided to be a novelist’. The piece featured quotes extracted from the personal journal of the author which reveal that Bolaño already wanted to write a novel in 1978, refuting “the cliché of a Roberto Bolaño that turned to narrative fiction because of economic reasons” (29 January 2012).



articulate the low truths he knew as a rebel, exile, addict" (*The New York Times*, 9 November 2008). For Sarah Kerr, "[w]ell beyond his sometimes nomadic life, Roberto Bolaño was an exemplary literary rebel. To drag fiction toward the unknown he had to go there himself, and then invent a method with which to describe it" (*The New York Review of Books*, 18 December 2008).

The idea that Bolaño was "an exemplary literary rebel" is itself highly ambiguous and recalls Bourdieu's examination of "the revolt against all authorities and institutions" characteristic of "the most extreme position of the avant-garde" which is incarnated by Baudelaire, in his life as much as in his work (1996:65).⁹ If in the English-speaking context this description is primarily related to the image of Bolaño as an outlaw, in Spain the adjective 'literary rebel' occasionally appeared to designate an author who defied literary conventions, as in Villoro's characterization of Bolaño as a "rebel detective of reality" (*El País*, 14 April 2007). Bolaño's rebellion was against the professionalized careers of contemporary writers, which challenge the very autonomy from which they first emerged. However, the image of Bolaño as an outlaw tells us more about the context of reception in the US than about Bolaño himself. It speaks not just of the fact that "the US is a country of drug-addicts, and smoking marihuana all night long seems very interesting", as Bolaño's German translator remarked (Verdú, *El País*, 24 November 2010), but of a particularly successful domestication of Bolaño's figure through his identification with the North American avant-garde.

Finally, the significant divergence of biographical narratives in the Spanish- and English-speaking contexts, aided by the fact that in the US the whole of Bolaño's literary trajectory is posthumous, should not blind us to one fundamental similarity: the frantic speed of Bolaño's recognition and ultimate consecration which, in different countries, languages and literary fields, "catapulted him from obscurity to worshipful adulation" (Maslin, *The New York Times*, 13 November 2008). This has gone hand in hand with the motif of the almost magical productivity of the writer, in part the result of the accelerated pace of Bolaño's writing in his last years, when he was approaching death. However, the astonishing richness of the writer's output in a short span of time, his "heroic productivity" (Kunkel, *London Review of Books*, 6 September 2007), could also be explained by the sheer accumulation of work that Bolaño produced in obscurity before he could find a publisher. The enormous productivity that has dazzled commentators is also the result of long years of invisible underground writing activity of a cellar-dweller not unlike Kafka.

⁹ Bourdieu arguably builds here a partial view of "the most extreme position of the avant-garde" which, according to Peter Bürger, does not emerge until the first decades of the twentieth century and involves the explicitly political aim of bringing art back to life (1984:49-53). This is relevant to a discussion of Bolaño's literature because of its relation to the Mexican post-avant-garde movement of Infrarrealism, which has found some echo especially in the Spanish press, but unfortunately falls outside the scope of this article.



4. Interconnected fields

What first strikes us about Bolaño's reception is the fact that he is predominantly placed within a universal, western canon, rather than within the Latin American literary tradition. In this context, Pollack's characterization of the reception of *The Savage Detectives* as a new prism for reading Latin American literature in English, distant from the clichés that were associated with the dominant magical realist lens of the past 40 years, could be seen as premature. Critical reception of *The Savage Detectives* already situates the work primarily within world literature, not the Latin American tradition. Thus, for instance, James Wood states that "[t]his wonderfully strange Chilean imaginer, at once a grounded realist and a lyricist of the speculative ... has been acknowledged for a few years now in the Spanish-speaking world as one of the greatest and most influential modern writers", tracing parallels between Bolaño and writers "committed to the long dramatic sentence", such as Hrabal, Bernhard and Sebald (*The New York Times*, 15 April 2007). Interestingly, the appreciation of Bolaño's oeuvre is based on the Spanish reception of *2666*, not of *Los Detectives Salvajes*, which was primarily viewed as the "the great Mexican novel of his generation" (Masoliver Ródenas, *La Vanguardia*, 4 December 1998). However, it is not until the appearance of the English version of *2666* that Bolaño's global consecration acquires its full dimensions. The publication of the book was preceded by an unprecedented expectation: "Who'd have thought it: the most hotly anticipated novel of the new year is a 900-page posthumously published unfinished epic from a Latin American author", as *The Guardian* put it; "It was heralded as a masterpiece on its publication in Spanish in 2004, and excitement has been building ever since" (3 January 2009). Again, the critical acclaim of *2666* in Spanish is alluded to and seems to pave the way for the rapid success of Bolaño's literature in English. This confirms the high degree of interconnection of the literary and journalistic fields, as well as the influence of semi-peripheral locations on more central ones, even before works are transferred through translation.

One major dimension revealed by this comparative analysis of the reception of Bolaño's literature, then, is the degree of interconnection between different literary and journalistic fields. International connections and influences across borders have been traditionally downplayed in analyses that emphasize divergences of reception (Griswold 1987) and the 'scandals of translation' (Venuti 1998). Nevertheless, both the literary and the journalistic fields are highly globalized, and it is necessary to acknowledge the extent to which this interconnectedness shapes the international circulation and reception of literary works.

As we have seen, in Casanova's approach the literary field is global from the start, which means that the power and centrality of literatures have to be accounted for relationally. Modern journalism is also global at its inception.

The field of global news was established during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the use of the telegraph became widespread and major news agencies specializing in news gathering and distribution emerged and expanded their worldwide connections (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998, Bielsa and Bassnett 2009). These infrastructures responded to the rapidly growing appetites of metropolitan publics for news from around the world, giving rise to what has been described as the globalization of the event (Palmer 1983:213). The consequences of the globalization of news have predominantly been explored in terms of homogenization, where the great proliferation of texts and channels for their circulation hides the existence of a limited number of news sources and the global dominance of a handful of news organizations, the standardization of discourses (Boyd-Barrett 1997:143) and the primacy of Anglo-American ideologies (Marchetti 2002, Paterson 1998). However, national differences in journalistic discourse have also been shown to prevail in spite of globalizing pressures (Benson and Hallin 2007).

Media coverage is central to consecration processes in a variety of cultural fields, such as music (Schmutz 2009), film (Allen and Lincoln 2004) and literature (Griswold 1987). But reviews only partially respond to the general criteria of modern journalism, as they are also influenced by the semi-autonomous mechanisms for value creation in the cultural field. For instance, it is centrality in the cultural world system rather than geographical proximity – a key news value – that determines coverage (Janssen *et al* 2008). More generally, cross-national studies of the relationship between globalization and newspaper coverage of foreign literatures have shown that while the latter has increased, centrality in the literary world system remains a key factor shaping the international orientation of newspapers. Thus, France has become more internationally oriented, in inverse relation to its centrality, but the US has not (Janssen 2009, Janssen *et al* 2008). However, in these studies the degree of interconnection between national journalistic fields tends to be underestimated. Nor can the important role of reviews in introducing translated works to new fields be accounted for by the approaches adopted in this type of research. Newspaper reviews can minimize the dangers of misunderstanding and distortion of texts in a new field by introducing relevant details of the context in which they emerged, very much like prefaces aimed at foreign readers. Or they can do the opposite, transforming elements of the original context to such an extent that they become unrecognizable to new readers, thus facilitating divergent patterns of reception.

The comparative analysis of the reception of Bolaño's work presented here shows that borrowings and citations have proliferated in both directions. Reviewers of Bolaño's literature in English, both in the US and the UK, have often referred to the Spanish reception, quoting abundantly from Spanish sources. Bolaño's success in the US has in turn fed an important debate in Spain about the nature of this reception and led to the perception of his litera-



ture in a new light. With respect to the influence of the Spanish reception on the English language press, there is a notable increase in coverage after the publication of *2666* in Spanish and its critical acclaim as a key achievement in contemporary fiction, so that even if the Spanish literary field lacks centrality to secure Bolaño's global consecration, it does send some significant echoes across the language divide to other fields. Thus, *The Times Literary Supplement* reviewed the still untranslated *2666* on 9 September 2005. *The New York Times* published a key piece written by Larry Rohter with a Chilean byline that is both a translation of several important elements of the Spanish reception of Bolaño's literature and the origin of some of the main ingredients of the construction of Bolaño's divergent biography in the English-speaking context. Rohter amply quotes from Spanish and American sources, including Echevarría, Fresán, Herralde, as well as Wimmer. Curiously, it is to Spanish sources that the origin of two of the specifically English biographical narratives – namely, Bolaño's 'beatnik existence' and his turn to narrative fiction in 1990 in order to earn a living after the birth of his son – is attributed, thus confirming the important role of reviews in mediating international exchanges and in facilitating divergent patterns of reception for translated works.

In the opposite direction, the scale of Bolaño's success in the US becomes a main theme in the Spanish press from 2008, following a debate in the previous year around the mythical dimensions of Bolaño's fame and its distortions (especially in articles written by Cercas and Villoro in *El País*, 14 April 2007, where references to fallacious views of Bolaño as an outlaw and as the "Jim Morrison of the novel" can be found). This amplifies the already legendary proportions of his fame, giving rise to the term *bolañomanía* and consolidating his reputation as "a new, essential international voice" (Punzano, *El País*, 29 October 2008; Celis, *El País*, 14 March 2009), but also continues to feed into the construction of a mythical figure who now triumphs in the US "disguised as a beatnik" (Vila-Matas, *El País*, 12 October 2008). Bolaño's success in the US and the distortions that accompany this reception become the main topic of a conference held in Madrid (Verdú, *El País*, 24 November 2010; Ojeda, *El Mundo*, 23 November 2010) and of several analytical pieces. The scholar Julio Ortega describes the appearance of another Bolaño who has "the spectacular role of a new life", pointing to some key elements of a domestication of Bolaño's novels that link him to Kerouac's style (*El País*, 3 January 2009). Echevarría, on his part, dedicates two articles to reflecting on the reception of Bolaño's literature in the US and feels it necessary to remind his readers that Bolaño was already a consecrated author in Spanish-speaking countries, to avoid giving the impression that he represents the kind of writer who is "formatted according to North-American tastes and models" (*El Mundo*, 22 October 2010, 16 December 2011).

Finally, British reception can be situated within an intermediate position between the US and Europe. Even though Bolaño's literature began to be

reviewed significantly earlier and several obituaries of Bolaño were published, British coverage is directly influenced by the US reception of Bolaño, which explains the proliferation of similar biographical narratives in later reviews. But it also marks a distance from this reception, with frequent reflections on the author's success and the scale of *bolañomania* in the US, as in the Spanish press. In this context, the coverage of *The Times Literary Supplement*, which published 12 reviews between 2003 and 2012, is of special interest. Based not just on reviews of translated books but also of the Spanish publication of some of Bolaño's key texts not yet available in English (*Los detectives salvajes* in 2004, *2666* and *Entre paréntesis* in 2005 and *El Tercer Reich* in 2010), the coverage draws a map of Bolaño's literature that closely follows his consecration in a different field and in which the specific temporalities of publication of works in Spanish and English are no longer invisible. In this sense, *The Times Literary Supplement* has every right to call itself "the leading international forum for literary culture".

The Times Literary Supplement also stands out because of the frequent references to translations as translations in its reviews. Like foreign correspondents (Hannerz 1996:120, see also Bielsa and Bassnett 2009:59-60), reviewers tend to assume universal intelligibility and to downplay linguistic and cultural barriers. Thus, in assessing rewritings, even when they appear in sections devoted to fiction in translation, reviewers mostly treat texts as if they were originals. Explicit comments on translation are rare, even when the reviewer deals with formal features of the work, and tend to be limited to a mere confirmation that a text has been "marvelously and vividly translated" (Prose, *The New York Times*, 9 July 2006) or "has been translated with wonderful agility" (Maslin, *The New York Times*, 13 November 2008).¹⁰ Literary magazines offer more space for reflection on the different temporalities of original and translated works and on the work of translation and its difficulties. The nature of Bolaño's writing, which has been described as a "virtually unprecedented achievement in multiply-voiced narration" (Kunkel, *London Review of Books*, 6 September 2007) and in which the use of vernacular style bears the mark of different varieties of Latin American Spanish, explicitly invites such a reflection. As the writer Francisco Goldman states (*The New York Review of Books*, 19 July 2007):

The Savage Detectives is not only Bolaño's "spectral" recreation of the Mexico City of his youth, but also makes uncanny use of the city's

¹⁰ Interestingly, James Wood's review of *The Savage Detectives* (*The New York Times*, 15 April 2007) was followed by a letter to the editor entitled 'In Praise of Translators' (20 May 2007) denouncing the inability of the reviewer to attribute the style of the work not just to the original writer but also to the translator and suggesting that the paper "find[s] reviewers who are able to assess work in translation as it should be considered: as the work of two artists, not one".



exuberantly baroque vernacular, a mix of traditional slang and that of several subcultures (adolescent, low-life, hipster-druggy, snippy upper-class bohemians, and so on). Throughout the multi-voiced epic of *The Savage Detectives*, the gifted translator Natasha Wimmer is almost always up to the task, but it must also be said that it is probably impossible to make Mexican Spanish sound like Mexican English. (They have *chingaderas* and we have crap.)'

The field of global news is characterized by a high degree of communication between different media and fast and effective transmission of information on an international scale, so that relevant developments in one field can influence coverage and reception in another. The complex nature of these exchanges can be obscured if an excessive emphasis is placed on the news homogenization thesis, because exchanges occur in a multiplicity of directions. This can be illustrated with reference to the global echo achieved by a reportage published in *La Vanguardia* on Bolaño's legacy. On 7 March 2009 the newspaper announced on its front page the appearance of new material in Bolaño's archive, including two new novels, diaries and poems; it also published two photographs, one of a young Bolaño and another of the author's scattered notebooks. The article, which occupied two central pages of the cultural section, also discussed Bolaño's trajectory and his international stature in detail. Three days later, *The Guardian* published a piece in its international section with a Madrid byline based on the Spanish article (10 March 2009), which became in turn the topic of a short note in *The New York Times* the day after (11 March 2009). According to *La Vanguardia* (14 March 2009), their reportage also found an echo in *USA Today*, *Village Voice*, *The Telegraph*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Clarín* and *O Globo*. In addition to revealing the high degree of interconnection between different media, the fact that the discovery of new material in Bolaño's archive was turned into a global news event also confirms the author's stature in the international literary field.

5. Conclusion

As Bourdieu points out, texts circulate without their contexts (1993:263), not just because they lose a whole series of social attributes they owe to the original fields within which they were produced, but also because they gain, through translation, new qualities that serve to establish their position in the new field. It is in this very empirical sense of gain that translation contributes not just to the production of literary value (as in Casanova's notion of translation as literarization), but also to the production of meaning, of new interpretations and patterns of reception with which translated works become associated in their receiving fields. An analysis of press coverage in different national spaces allows us to reconstruct the main patterns of reception of literary works and to compare how the meanings attributed to them differ in various contexts,



according to the cultural needs and expectations prevailing in each field. It thus allows us to empirically examine what is gained in translation and to reach a better understanding of the dynamics of the international circulation of literature.

The proliferation of divergent biographical narratives of Bolaño after his death points to different patterns of reception of his works. Whereas in Spain Bolaño's main achievement was to renew a heroic tradition that seemed to have succumbed to professionalization, in the US Bolaño's trajectory revived dreams of youthful marginality associated with the country's recent past. Bolaño's transformation in the US into a vagabond, an addict and a poet illustrates that "the foreign text that achieves bestseller status in translation becomes a site where values proliferate unexpectedly" (Venuti 1998:125), thus revealing much more about the domestic culture for which it was produced than the foreign culture which it is taken to represent.

International literary exchanges are shaped by the changing power relations between national fields and the unprecedented centrality of English, which in Bolaño's case has proved a key factor even though he already enjoyed the highest levels of recognition in the Spanish-speaking world. But Bolaño's case also shows that, contrary to what Casanova has argued, English and the US in particular can now play a crucial role in the universal consecration of autonomous works, and not just in the international commercialization of Americanized culture. This points to some key limitations of theories that understand processes of cultural globalization primarily in terms of homogenization.

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