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Aspects of the Evolution of the Literary Canon:

An Empirical Study

Relatore:

Prof. Roberto Gilodi

Candidato:

Luca Giovannini

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Of poets who come down to us through distance

Of times and tongues, the foster-babes of Fame,

Life seems the smallest portion of existence;

Where twenty ages gather o'er a name,

'Tis as a snowball which derives assistance

From every flake, and yet rolls on the same,

Even till an iceberg it may chance to grow;

But, after all, 'tis nothing but cold snow.

—Lord Byron, *Don Juan* IV, 100 *

Alla mia famiglia; ed in particolare,

a nonna Caterina e a zia Elena

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* George Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron*, vol. VI, ed. by Ernest H. Coleridge. London: John Murray, 1903, p. 211.

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Introduction

Canon has always been a thorny issue among scholars in the humanities, as the huge and ever-growing bulk of literature on the topic demonstrates [1]; the debate on which texts ought to be revered as the pinnacles of human expression, or if such a distinction is to be awarded at all, spans most Western intellectual history and has at times led to heated confrontations. To limit oneself to the last century, it is still perceivable the echo of the so-called 'Canon Wars', fought from the late 1980s in the battleground of American universities: the clash, as widely known, revolved around the contents of traditional literary curricula, which some conservatives pundits perceived as under siege by the proponents of multiculturalism, charged of wanting to replace some great old names from the Western heritage (Chaucer, Shakespeare and the like) with a more demographically inclusive choice of more recent authors [2].

Ignited by texts such as Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), William Bennet's "To Reclaim a Legacy" (1984) and E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* (1987), the controversy was clearly more political than literary, and received mainstream attention as a proxy for the larger cultural struggle to define the American nature [3]; furthermore, it put under scrutiny the whole organisation of US colleges and their alleged leftist bias, as claimed by Roger Kimball in his contentious *Tenured Radicals* (1990). Eventually, the storm of controversy subsided, but by the time it had become clear multiculturalists had won (for syllabi were effectively enlarged and modified towards greater representativeness of different authorial voices) the point of contention had gradually shifted toward the value of humanities in themselves [4].

At the same time, the late 20th century saw a surge in scholarly literature dealing with the theoretical aspects of canon and canon-building, as exemplified by the well-known

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[1] For an anthology of critical stances on canon from the 18th century onwards see Lee MORRISSEY (ed.), *Debating the Canon: A Reader from Addison to Nafisi*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

[2] A comprehensive account of the period is found in Henry Louis GATES Jr., *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; see also Erik GRIMM, "Bloom's Battles. Zur historischen Entfaltung der Kanon-Debatte in den USA", in *Literarische Kanonbildung*, special issue of *Text+Kritik* (2002), pp. 39-54. For a useful criticism of the assumptions behind both camps see John GUILLORY, "Canonical and Non-Canonical: A Critique of the Current Debate". *ELH* 54, 3 (1987), pp. 483-527.

[3] The reference here is to the book by James D. HUNTER, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: BasicBooks, 1991.

[4] See e.g. Eleonora BELFIORE and Anna UPCHURCH (eds.), *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Utility and Markets*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, or Martha NUSSBAUM's oft-cited *Not for Profit. Why the Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

contributions by Barbara Herrnstein Smith and Charles Altieri to the *Canons* issue of *Critical Inquiry* (1983) [5]; among many book-length studies, E. Dean Kolbas' theory-oriented approach, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (2001), and the more historiographic accounts by Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon* (1991), and Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon* (1998), are worthy of note. Two texts, however, seemed to stand out in this panorama: on one side, John Guillory's *Cultural Capital* (1993) represented perhaps the most substantial advance in canon studies, insofar as it offered a Bourdieu-inspired analysis of canon development focused on the role of the school; on the other, Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994) gained wide recognition among the general public because of its eulogy for the traditional canon and its scornful rebuttal of the predicament of higher education.

While the early twenty-first century saw a reduced, yet steady scientific interest in canon-related issues, especially within the German-speaking milieu [6], some interesting contributions have been made by scholars working in the growing field of digital humanities; among them, one should highlight the studies conducted at the Stanford University's 'Literary Lab' centre, such as Mark Algee-Hewitt's and Mark McGurl's quantitative attempt to define a 20th-century canon of novels (2015) or a collective investigation by Algee-Hewitt et al. into the alleged morphological divide which separates the works in the 'canon' and those in the 'archive' (2016) [7]. Another pamphlet, released in November 2018 and authored by J.D. Porter, further raised the bar, in an ambitious effort to draw a picture of the canon's contemporary structure through a combination of the two metrics of popularity (how much an author is read) and prestige (how much an author is praised by critics).

As a matter of fact, Porter's study offered several valuable insights, ranging from an analysis of the fractal nature of canonical arrangements to the individuation of different paths to canonicity (which he terms the 'rocket' and the 'airplane' approaches); furthermore, his essay featured also some asides with interesting implications, such as the assertion that

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[5] Barbara HERRNSTEIN SMITH, "Contingencies of Value", pp. 1-35; Charles ALTIERI, "An Idea and Ideal of Literary Canon", pp. 37-60, in *Canons*, special issue of *Critical Inquiry* [= 10, 1] (1983).
[6] Some bibliographical references in Leonhard HERRMANN, "System? Kanon? Epoche? Perspektiven und Grenzen eines systemtheoretischen Kanonmodells", in *Kanon, Wertung und Vermittlung*, ed. by Matthias Beilein, Claudia Stockinger and Simone Winko. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2011, p. 59, n. 1. Among 21st-century English scholarship on canon one should cite at least Frank KERMODE, *Pleasure and Change: The Aesthetics of Canon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
[7] Mark ALGEE-HEWITT and Mark MCGURL, "Between Canon and Corpus: Six Perspectives on 20th-Century Novels". *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet* 8 (January 2015), pp. 1-27; Mark ALGEE-HEWITT at al. "Canon/Archive. Large-scale Dynamics in the Literary Field". *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet* 11 (January 2016), pp. 1-13. All pamphlets released by the Literary Lab are available for free at their homepage: [www.litlab.stanford.edu].

"[l]ike anything else built up over time, the canon does retain vestiges of its own creation – its history has left traces in its present form. [...] Methods of entering the canon change over time, and the texts that use those methods retain traces of them even as the canon ages [...] Modes of becoming canonical may have a lasting, identifiable effect on modes of being canonical." [8]

This conjecture about a link between modes of *becoming* and *being* canonical among literary works remained actually marginal in Porter's work, which focused instead on enhancing the understanding of historical canons through data visualisation, but it seemed however to deserve a fuller investigation, insofar as a proper combination of quantitative and qualitative work might allow to verify if, as the scholar contends, canonisation dynamics do have a lasting effect on the structure of canon and if "existing differences" in canonical stances may be truly interpreted "as evidence of historical habits of creation and reception" [9]. Such an empirical validation is the aim of the present dissertation which, after a theoretical introduction on canonisation modes across history, will indeed test Porter's hypothesis against a background sample of canonical works from Western literature and thus assess its viability.

According to this sketch, Chapter One offers a twofold introductory overview on canon formation: on one side, it examines changes in the modes of canonisation through some key stages in the development of Western Literature, while on the other it focuses on individual and institutional actors in the process, assuming as theoretical reference Pierre Bourdieu's description of the literary field as presented in *The Rules of Art* (1992) and related essays [10]. From these writings one will borrow, in particular, the tripartite classification of the modes of consecration forces: while the sociologist spoke, with regards to the 19th-century French milieu, of the competing influence of artists, bourgeois institutions and readers in defining cultural canons, this dissertation reprises and adapts those categories to a larger geographical and spatial framework and uses them as analytical tools to understand different paths to canonicity.

Chapter Two is aimed primarily at finding a suitable study corpus on which Porter's claims could be tested. Given the sheer extension and fluid perimeter of the literary canon,

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[8] J.D. PORTER, "Popularity/Prestige". *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet* 17 (September 2018), p. 20-21.
[9] PORTER, p. 21.
[10] Pierre BOURDIEU, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995; ID., *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

statistical sampling is employed to extract from various compilation of canonical works a restricted, yet representative corpus of about twenty items suitable to close enquiry; it is worth noting that, in sharp contrast with many other canon studies [11], it is here adopted a text-centred approach, mainly to match Porter's own take on the matter. The sampled works are then investigated one-by-one in order to isolate which canonization force was the most relevant in granting their first access to the literary pantheon; this goal is pursued through the construction of detailed profiles on the reception history of each of them.

Chapter Three represents, in a sense, an attempt at what Franco Moretti called "operationalising", i.e. "building a bridge from concepts to measurement, and then to the world", "from the concepts of literary theory, through some form of quantification, to literary texts" [12] – in this case, from the Bourdieusian categories, through sampling, to the actual works sampled. In practice, it opens up delineating where the corpus texts stand in modern canon by means of a replica of Porter's model based on popularity and prestige; only after charting their current canonical stances it becomes indeed possible to verify whether, as Porter postulated, the texts' actual positions within canon are somehow related to the canonisation source they used to get in – an assertion which seems to find some confirmation in empirical data.

At the same time, the chapter underscores another interesting feature, namely that works coming from different backgrounds of canonisation seem to enjoy different degrees in canonical strength even in the long term; from this perspective, it becomes feasible to use canonisation instances as predictors of different degrees of literary fame. These conclusions, alongside with some other related remarks about the decay of cultural items, are however to be taken with a pinch of salt; although any effort has been made to provide a statistically significant and scientifically sound test of Porter's assertions, its results are to be understood as tentative until more thorough research, drawing upon a significantly larger corpus, is conducted; the evidence presented here, while far from hinting at a general theory of canon dynamics, could nonetheless serve as a first step in that direction.

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[11] See for example Charles ALTIERI, "Canons and Differences", in *The Hospitable Canon: Essays on Literary Play, Scholarly Choice, and Popular Pressures*, ed. by Virgil Nemoianu and Robert Royal. Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991, p. 2.

[12] Franco MORETTI, " 'Operationalizing': or, the function of measurement in modern literary theory". *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet* 6 (December 2013), p. 1.

1. Entering the Canon

1.1 Modes of canonisation across history

As one may easily imagine, delineating a comprehensive history of Western canon formation is a task too ambitious and far-reaching to be accomplished here; even if such an enterprise were attempted, it would likely end up simplifying a process which "has been fraught with episodes of ambiguity, unrest, and even radical contention throughout its history" and morphing it into a "smooth", but ultimately deceitful "chronological narrative in which the meaning of the concept appears to have continuously evolved and expanded to include a greater and greater diversity of literature" [1]. In the light of this risk, it comes as little surprise that most scholars have preferred to examine in depth specific temporal and spatial instances of canon-building instead of attempting to sketch out pan-historical reconstructions of canon dynamics [2]; likewise, investigation on the general mechanisms of canonisation have been seldom conducted [3].

While taking into due consideration Kolbas' warnings, and therefore refraining from making too overtly generalising statements about canonical processes, this chapter will aim nonetheless at offering a general overview on some crucial moments where, to borrow a Marxist expression, the 'modes of production' of Western canon have changed. In other words, it will attempt to review some historical turning points in which the mutation of social, political and cultural circumstances has changed the criteria behind canonisation and therefore its outcomes. What is expected to emerge, within the limits of such a cursory account, is the gradual transformation or, better, the gradual addition and juxtaposition of different standards for canonicity across Western history – from the first canonising attempts in Antiquity, mainly based on linguistic concerns, to the Middle Ages and their ideal of "canonical truth", from the political uses of canons in the age of Nation-States to the commercial canonisation heralded by the modern literary mass market.

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[1] E. Dean KOLBAS, *Critical theory and the literary canon*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001, p. 21-22.

[2] See for example Jonathan B. KRAMNICK, *Making the English Canon. Print-capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700–1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, or, for a German audience, Günther LOTTES and Robert CHARLIER (eds.), *Kanonbildung. Protagonisten und Prozesse der Herstellung kultureller Identität*. Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2009.

[3] A notable exception is the paper by Rakefet SELA-SHEFFY, "Canon Formation Revisited: Canon and Cultural Production". *Neohelicon* 29, 2 (2002), pp. 141–159.

Common scholarly consensus traces back the earliest hints of canonisation instances to late Hellenism, and more specifically to the intellectual milieu of the Alexandria library: according to Quintilian [4], two of its head librarians, Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus of Samothrace, were indeed responsible for compiling genre-specific lists of renowned authors, probably drawing from the bibliographic material collected by Callimachus in his *Pinakes*. Reasons behind the creations of these 'canons', however, remain disputed: if Curtius wholeheartedly asserted that "Alexandrian philologists [...] put together a selection of earlier literature for the use of grammarians in their schools" [5], namely with an explicitly didactic purpose, other have more nuanced views. Compton, for example, agrees those early canons "could have been a syllabus for beginning students", but sees them also as "a list for traveling book-buyers [...] or an outline of authors deemed worthy of commentaries or textual analysis to be written by employees of the library or students of the librarians" [6].

Whatever criteria the Alexandrian librarians adopted, it seems that these compilations were, at least for some time, flexible and open to changes and additions, insofar as both market practices and school requirements of the age required just priority lists of texts and not mandatory readings. It remains therefore controversial why they were eventually fixed, bringing them closer to the modern concept of canon: among different explanations, Citroni cites the "catalogic mentality" of Greek culture, i.e. the tendency to summarise an extended cultural tradition in a symbolic number of key authors, and the "epigonal sense" of Hellenism, consisting in the widespread sensation that the great literary tradition was already exhausted and thus lists of older classics could not be further updated [7].

The effects of Aristophanes' and Aristarchus' selections were, in any case, far-reaching: although "[m]otivated initially by pedagogic convenience", the two librarians "soon arrived at estimates of critical value", using their lists as the basis for "a series of other operations – textual restoration, editorial redaction, allegorical exegesis – that are just as typical of critical

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[4] QUINTILIAN, *Institutio Oratoria* I 4, 3, speaking of the Alexandrian librarians: "veteres grammatici [...] autores alios in ordinem redegerint" ("the old critics [...] drew up a canon of some authors"); in *Inst.* X 1, 54 the two are also called "poetarum iudices" ("judges of poets").

[5] Ernst CURTIUS, *European Literature and Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard Trask. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013 [1948], p. 249.

[6] Todd M. COMPTON, "Infinite canons: A few axioms and questions, and in addition, a proposed definition", 13 June 2016 (http://toddmcompton.com/infinitecanonsprint.htm).

[7] Mario CITRONI, "I canoni di autori antichi: alle origini del concetto di classico", in *Culture europee e tradizione latina: atti del Convegno internazionale di studi*, ed. by Laura Casarsa, Lucio Cristante and Marco Fernandelli. Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2003, pp. 14-16.

institutions as the tasks of classroom instruction and literary evaluation" [8]. Even though, as Gorak argues, their main aim remained the philological enterprise of "preserving the life of an alien culture by means of classrooms models" [9], it is likely that some axiological assessment was already in play: the authors included were not yet prescribed sets of secular readings, as in the modern sense of 'canon', but they still embodied a higher level of rhetorical proficiency, signalled by "subtlety of diction and versification, elegance in ornament, consistency of characterization, and imaginative power" [10].

Terminology employed to describe the authors in those lists, however, seemed not to underline their absolute excellency, their standing out of the crowd, stressing instead their status of being *chosen* by someone: Alexandrians called them ἐγκρινόμενοι or ἐγκριθέντες, "the received (into selection)", and similarly Quintilian described them in Latin as *scriptores recepti*, with the process of "canonisation" being labelled as *in ordinem/in numerum redigere* [11]. Only later would the idea of 'superiority' enter the canon's semantic field: the now-ubiquitous term "classic", as Aulus Gellius' seminal formulation (*Noctes Atticae* XIX 8, 15) already shows, was intended to convey from the start the idea of a difference in ranking between writers [12]. One must also note, however, that the metaphor Gellius employed was fairly uncommon and it underwent lexicalisation only after the Renaissance, gaining traction by being applied not only to Graeco-Roman texts but also to more recent ones [13].

Significantly, the term 'canon' was not applied to Aristophanes' and Aristarchus' compilations until the late eighteenth-century; to be more accurate, up until then the noun was exclusively employed to refer to the list of scriptural books approved by the Church [14]. It was

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[8] Jan GORAK, "Canons and Canon Formation" in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. IV, ed. by H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 561.

[9] Jan GORAK, *The Making of Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1991, p. 52.

[10] George A. KENNEDY, "The Origin of the Concept of a Canon and Its Application to the Greek and Latin Classics", in *Canon vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, ed. by Jan Gorak. New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 108.

[11] QUINTILIAN, *Institutio Oratoriae* I 4, 3; X 1, 54; X 1, 59. More philological notes in CITRONI, p. 8 ff. and note 8.

[12] In a much-quoted passage, Gellius advises students with grammatical doubts to look up to the example of "someone at least from that older group of orators or poets, i.e. a first-class (*classicus*) and tax-paying writer, not a proletarian" ("e cohorte illa dumtaxat antiquiore vel oratorum aliquis vel poetarum, id est classicus adsiduusque aliquis scriptor, non proletarius"). The metaphor is clear: under Servius Tullius' taxation system *classici* or *adsidui* were the wealthiest citizens, imbued with more authority and prestige than the low-income mass of *proletarii*.

[13] CITRONI, p. 5. The term's first modern usage is in Thomas Sébillet's *Art poétique* (1548), where it designates two French medieval authors, Alain Chartier and Jean de Meun.

[14] On the etymological roots and the semantic shifts of the term *canon* (from the Greek word κανών, "rod" or "yardstick" employed by masons for measuring) see among others GORAK, pp. 9-10 and Herbert OPPEL, *Κανών. Zur Bedeutungsgeschichte des Wortes und seiner lateinischen Entsprechungen (regula-norma)*. Leipzig: Dieterich, 1937. On the formation of the biblical canon see e.g. Hans VON CAMPENHAUSEN, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1968 (= *The Formation of the Christian Bible*. London: A&C Black, 1972) and CURTIUS, p. 256 ff.

the Dutch-German classical scholar David Ruhnken, in his *Historia critica oratorum Graecorum* (Leiden, 1768), the first to apply it to the activities of the Alexandrian grammars, and his pioneering choice, although heavily debated at the time, "made it common [...] to extend the application of *canon* to any list of valuable inherited works" [15]; the term's modern usage, in this sense, could be fully considered "an Augustan invention" [16]. Furthermore, it should be noted that this operation entailed a little but relevant semantic shift: the Biblical canon theologians spoke of was a canon of *books*, while the canons Ruhnken ascribed to the Alexandrian librarians were canons of *authors* – although, as Kennedy correctly recalls, metonymy between producers and products of literature was already common in Antiquity [17].

Anyway, canonical lists seem to have rapidly become the standard way of systematising older and valued literature, especially in schools, which became in the following centuries the main sites for the progressive consolidation of a literary curriculum composed of standard core authors. During the Middle Ages, however, mutating social and cultural conditions required some adjustments in the modes of production of canons. On one side, while Greek texts were forgotten, Latin canonical works were somewhat relegated to the role of language acquisition instruments, since extensive Latin knowledge was still necessary to apply for Church and administration posts but the idiom itself was no more actively spoken across Europe [18]; on the other, it was imperative to accommodate an ever-growing number of Christian texts in the canon, and this required obviously freeing some room occupied by pagan writers. Choices made by early medieval scholars, however, were quite equilibrate: a review of various 'best authors' compilations conducted by Curtius found a deliberate "effort to establish a balance between Christians and Pagans" which aimed at producing a durable "medieval school canon [...] from the best of the pagan and Christian canons" [19], even though a physiological overrepresentation of Christian tests was sometimes to be observed.

In analysing this shift, it may also be useful to take into account long-term social phenomena such as the increase in book production and literacy which, albeit often overlooked in canon formation history, can nonetheless shed some light in its evolutive process during the

[15] GORAK, p. 51.

[16] Douglas Lane PATEY, "The Eighteenth Century Invents the Canon", in *Making and Rethinking the Canon: The Eighteenth Century*, special issue of *Modern Language Studies* [= 18, 1] (1988), p. 17.

[17] KENNEDY, p. 107.

[18] Gerlinde HUBER-REBENICH, "Kanongeschichten: Antike Literaturen", in *Handbuch Kanon und Wertung*, ed. by Gabriele Rippl and Simone Winko. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2013, p. 266-67.

[19] CURTIUS, p. 261.

period: recent bibliometric studies [20] show how the transition from early Middle Ages to Renaissance saw book request and supply shift from an ecclesiastical to a lay milieu, with some relevant consequences on the definition and propagation of literary canons. Centuries up to the eleventh, to begin with, featured the tremendous rise of the monastic movement, with abbeys and cloisters spreading across Europe and consolidating their position as political, economic and cultural powerhouses; as widely known, preservation and transmission of culture – an operation which implied daily 'canonical' judgments on which texts were worth copying and shelving – was one of the monks' main duties.

According to John Guillory, however, the role of medieval *scriptoria* in shaping the canon was peculiar inasmuch as they did not assume aesthetic or linguistic quality as the chief motive for canonisation: the medieval pedagogical canon, indeed, seems to have been selected according to the criterion of 'transcendental truth', which completely overlooked the works' literary value – or even the category itself of literature – and looked instead at their religious significance [21], both in literal and allegorical terms (think of the Christian-oriented misreading of classics). The same "validating feature", the concept of religious truth, was employed to judge both religious and secular texts, which became therefore "equivalent as far as their function in a pedagogical point of view was concerned" [22].

In the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, though, "the market took over the role of the monasteries", leading to a "continuous growth of the book industry" nurtured by the demand of cities and newly established universities [23]. Canonisation modes, conversely, remained by and large the same: while humanists progressively rediscovered and inducted into canon of several classical works, contemporary authors were consistently left outside the picture. In this respect, writers in search of public acknowledgement had to recur to more or less deft forms of self-canonisation: Ross cites as emblematic the case of Petrarch, who sponsored his own coronation as the first poet laureate (1341) and "presented an intellectual challenge to the auctorial system", insofar as he considered himself on equal footing with canonical *auctores* and promoted a revision of the current canon in an anti-medieval direction

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[20] Eltjo BURINGH and Jan Luiten VAN ZANDEN, "Charting the 'Rise of the West': Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, A Long-Term Perspective from the Sixth through Eighteenth Centuries". *The Journal of Economic History* 69, 2 (2009), pp. 409–445.
[21] John GUILLORY, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 72.
[22] Mortimer GUINEY, *Teaching the Cult of Literature in the French Third Republic*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 14. As Guiney underlines, this equation was valid only for classroom practice; religious texts remained obviously superior to profane ones as far as the intrinsic value was concerned.
[23] BURINGH and VAN ZANDEN, p. 440.

[24]. This stance, however, had an illustrious precedent, namely Dante inducting himself into the "bella scola" ("the fair school") of Graeco-Roman literary heavyweights in *Inferno* VI, 94-96 [25].

Further evolution in canon formation methods was eventually ushered by Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press (1439), leading in the following centuries to the emergence of a stratified marketplace where both literature and criticism were commercialised throughout the whole of Europe [26]. The establishing of print culture across Europe had without doubt a relevant influence on canon-building; indeed, it represents the first element in Kolbas' summary of canonisation dynamics in the early modern period:

> At least three major features distinguish modern literary canonization from the ancient and medieval periods. First, certain material and social conditions developed that changed the nature of literary production, distribution, and reception. Second, the incorporation of the modern nation-state and its increasing influence as a primary form of cultural identity helped to fix distinct national canons. And third, the comparatively recent creation of specific courses dedicated to the study of secular literature in schools and universities—in a manner quite different from the medieval concern with grammar—further helped to canonize selected works in nationally standardized curricula. [27]

If the first feature seems uncontroversial, the last feature cited – the birth of specific canon-based pedagogical programmes – bears a strong relationship to the second, namely the process of national identity-building, which could be actually considered "the single most effective means of reinforcing a specific literary canon in the modern era" [28]. Canonising a work because of its political exploitability, or because of its ideologic content, was an idea alien to Alexandrian culture, and even in the Middle Ages the process of literary consecration was informed to higher criteria of transcendental value; with the birth of the early modern nation-

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[24] Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998, p. 37.

[25] After meeting Homer, Horace, Lucan and Ovid together with Vergil, Dante comments: "e più d'onore ancora assai mi fenno, / ch'e' sì mi fecer de la loro schiera, / sì ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno" ("And more of honour still, much more, they did me, / In that they made me one of their own band; / So that the sixth was I, 'mid so much wit", trad. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1867).

[26] See among others Marshall McLuan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1962; Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980; Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800*. London: Verso, 1976.

[27] Kolbas, p. 17.

[28] Kolbas, p. 19.

States, begun with the gradual emergence of vernacular languages and the first glimpses of a language-based national conscience, such an operation became instead possible [29]. Vernacular canons, indeed, arose in a sense as a nationalist response to "the multilingual cultural internationalism of the Renaissance humanists"[30]; they signalled a break with the Middle Ages' unified canon, which postulated an essential continuity between Antiquity and Christianity, and consisted essentially of its nation-specific instances, each one with its assortment of core authors and texts functional to the building of a shared identity.

As Guillory remarks, the primary site of this process was the educational system, which from the 19th century onwards was increasingly placed under state control: schools "provided an instrument by means of which the state could dissolve the residually feudal bonds of local sovereignty and reattach personal loyalty to itself" [31], and this loyalty was to be built conveying through the academic curricula ideals, values and principles the pupils should learn in order to become exemplary citizens. In other words, literary canons became an instrument in the discursive construction of "imagined communities" [32] across all Europe, although modes, timing and scale were different in early consolidated national entities, such as Spain, France or Britain, and in 'latecomers' such as Germany and Italy, where "cultural canons were [actual] weapons and justifications for the desired nation-state identity" [33]. As multiple scholars note, the phenomenon's most striking example was nonetheless provided by the United States, a recently established state entity where early attempts of creating an American canon explicitly aimed at "support[ing] the construction of self-fulfilling models of national esteem" [34].

Nationalist uses of canon remained popular throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and their emphasis on the social significance of canonical choices, especially in educational contexts, still resonated in some influential works from the "canon wars" debate, such as Bill Reading's *University in Ruins* (1997) or Allen Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). During the last century, however, one had to reckon also with another powerful element in canon definition, namely the mass market, whose influence seems to have grown stronger in correspondence with the gradual "subsumption of writing under the general form

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[29] Gisela BRINKER-GABLER, "Vom nationalen Kanon zur postnationalen Konstellation", in *Kanon Macht Kultur. Theoretische, historische und soziale Aspekte ästhetischer Kanonbildungen*, ed. by Renate von Heydebrand. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1998, p. 80.

[30] GUILLORY, p. 76.

[31] GUILLORY, p. 42.

[32] The mandatory reference here is to Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983 [rev. eds. 1991 and 2006].

[33] Alois HAHN, "Einführung: Kanon im gesellschaftlichen Prozeß", in *Kanon Macht Kultur*, p. 463, trans. mine.

[34] GORAK, p. 66. See also KOLBAS, p. 20 ff.

of capitalist production" [35]. The reference here is to the pervasive process of commodification and massification literature had experienced since the mid-eighteenth century, when advances in industrial production started both to multiply reading occasions (more people disposed of enough free time to read) and to allow mass production and distribution of inexpensive book editions [36]. The long-term result of these historical changes was the progressive transformation of literary products into expendable goods, subjected to the laws of demand and supply; within this new paradigm, which Guillory considers "the omnipresent and inescapable horizon of [modern] social life" [37], the canon itself had to adapt and reinvent itself, at least in two main features.

On one side, the literary market's massive enlargement had but reinforced the necessity of some guidance to navigate the *mare magnum* of possible readings and escape what Giulio Ferroni once called "the anxiety of quantity" [38]. Accordingly, the output of canonical suggestions, often given by non-specialist, generalist sources, increased; academics, for their part, remained mostly entangled in theoretical debates, dividing themselves between conservative calls for preserving and perpetuating the authority of age-old classics and, conversely, proposals for different, more inclusive choices – two contrasting tendencies which were taken up, with all their obvious political undertones, by the two camps in the American 'canon wars'. But beyond politics, the multiplication of concurring canons seemed to represent the natural prosecution of the fragmentation process begun with the birth of the vernacular canons; if the first ancient-medieval 'unified' canon gradually broke along national-linguistic lines, now those same canons were further shattered according to multiple, so to say, 'identity-related' perspectives of different constituencies, which aimed at constructing new canons of authors based on their ethnicity, gender, beliefs, social classes and so on [39].

On the other side, however, the reification of literature meant also that commercial success apparently became a *sufficient* condition for canonisation in itself. Indeed, although in the past strong market performances have been often a predictor of literary consecration (Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is a typical example), they were not the only responsible for it; judgments by experts, such as literary critics, academics or other writers, were almost always necessary to consolidate any claim to canonicity. Recent trends, instead, show how works can

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[35] Nicolò PASERO, "Canone, norma, sanzione. Breve nota". *Allegoria* 29-30 (1998), p. 93, trans. mine.
[36] GORAK, p. 68.
[37] GUILLORY, p. 326.
[38] Giulio FERRONI, *Dopo la fine: sulla condizione postuma della letteratura*. Torino: Einaudi, 1996, p. 183, trans. mine.
[39] On the theoretical shortcomings of this approach to canon-building see KOLBAS, pp. 66-68.

assert themselves worth of canonisation just in virtue of their popularity among readers, often receiving a posthumous, and at this point somehow forced, recognition from academia. The traditional 'top-down' mode of canonisation, in other words, seems to have been replaced by a 'bottom-up' approach, where traditional, institutionalised sources of canonisation yield to the market's evidence as defined by reader's choices – although the implications of these process, and its actual effectiveness in canon-building, still need to be assessed more thoroughly in the future.

Some consequences, however, could be already outlined: for example, the age-old distinction between highbrow literature and the so-called *Trivialliteratur* [40] has been gradually blurred, whereas raw economic profit, hidden under the neutral reference to 'readers' taste', has begun to act in this sense as legitimising instance, defining as 'literary' all that is marketable, while traditional criticism is left powerless before the numbers of copies sold [41]. The risk behind this evolution, as many critics did not fail to note, is that future "hypothesis of canon revision […], under the pretence of updating and modernising," would be just aimed at imposing "the models of mass culture and marketing" [42]. What seems to emerge, however, is a more complex scenario, in which the canon's existence is simultaneously contested and reasserted and its hierarchical structure is both negated – for all texts are equal to the market, provided a profit could be made from them – and preserved in popular devices such as bestsellers' lists, compilations of "the books of the century" and similar devices [43].

1.2 Key actors in canonisation: a Bourdieusian perspective

From early Alexandrian canonisation to modern market success, these brief notes on the history of canon formation should have suggested that the process has been by no means smooth and linear: different criteria of canonisation (linguistic, aesthetic, religious, political, commercial) have been employed in different ages to establish canons, and several individuals, both on their own and/or acting within the perimeter of recognised institutions, have been involved both in their creation and propagation. Among all the actors concerned, a key role has

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[40] See Hans-Joachim ALTHOF, "Trivialliteratur: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Begriffs und seines Umfelds". *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 22, 2 (1978), pp. 175–201.
[41] Carlo BORDONI, "Il romanzo di consumo", in *Enciclopedia Treccani, XXI Secolo* (2009) [online].
[42] Giulio FERRONI, "Al di là del canone". *Allegoria* 29-30 (1998), pp. 78-79, trans. mine.
[43] Roberto ANTONELLI, "Introduzione", in *Il Canone alla fine del millennio*, special issue of *Critica del testo* [= 3, 1] (2000), p. 4.

been traditionally recognised to the educational system: John Guillory's work, and in particular his influential *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993), has been indeed pivotal in rejecting the image of canon formation as a "conspiracy of judgment", secretly organised by subjects interested in upholding dominant values through literature, and setting instead the process against its true background, i.e. the pedagogical context where literary works are handed down to posterity [44].

Canonical judgments of individuals, Guillory argues, are indeed truly effective only if made in an institutional setting, the school, where they are effective in determining the conservation and propagation of chosen works; in other words, he considers the canon, "in its concrete form as a syllabus or curriculum, [...] a discursive instrument of 'transmission' situated historically within a specific institution of reproduction" [45]. From these premises, one could situate his argument within an overtly sociological approach to literature: in his account, the ideological content one attributes to literary products "do not inhere in the works themselves but in the context of their institutional presentation, or more simply, in the way in which they are taught" [46] and, similarly, the canon's traditional capacity of "assimilating enormously heterogeneous productions" is perceived not as a property of its own, but rather as the result of an "ideological integration" process conducted within the school [47].

There have been warnings, however, against overestimating the role of the school in the process: for all his efforts in establishing it as the major site of canon-building, Guillory himself has stressed that syllabi are more relevant for the dissemination than for the effective canonical judgement of works [48], while Herbert Grabes has invited to refute "the reductive equation of the literary canon with the teaching canon or curriculum" and to take instead into account "the multitude of factors instrumental in its formation and sustenance" [49]. The inherent complexity of canon dynamics has indeed prompted most scholars to avoid attempting systematic explanations and a majority of them, indeed, would probably share Simone Winko' figurative description of canonisation as guided by an 'invisible hand': taking inspiration from Adam Smith, which introduced this metaphor as a tool to explain situations where the uncoordinated efforts of number of different agents lead to the achievement of a common goal, she maintains

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[44] GUILLORY, p. 28.
[45] GUILLORY, p. 56.
[46] GUILLORY, p. ix.
[47] GUILLORY, p. 85.
[48] John GUILLORY, "Canon, Syllabus, List: A Note on the Pedagogic Imaginary". *Transition* 52 (1991), p. 45.
[49] Herbert GRABES, "Cultural Memory and the Literary Canon", in *Cultural memory studies: an international and interdisciplinary handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008, p. 314-315.

that each actor in canon formation (writers, critics, editors, publishers, readers, bureaucrats etc.) bestows his personal consecration on some works according to his sensibility and in pursuit of his own goals, with the current canon being the final, 'unintended' result of all these position-takings.

To sum up, she argues, "nobody has intentionally composed [the canon] like it is and not otherwise, yet many have 'intentionally' participated in its construction"; an 'invisible hand'-style explanation would then be preferable, and virtually unavoidable, because it is almost impossible to distinguish clearly or "arrange hierarchically the instances involved in the process according to their importance" [50]. While Winko's metaphor may be a bit stretched, she nevertheless raises an important issue: given the multiplicity of competing agents which have contributed across the centuries to the consecration of literary works, it may indeed be difficult to pinpoint exactly which of them have been involved in each particular instance of canonisation.

Unreservedly accepting this view, however, would mean renouncing to pursue this dissertation's goal at all: were canonisation dynamics truly too hard to disentangle, it would become impossible to verify Porter's hypothesis about canon formation and persistence, because no enquiry would be able to convincingly trace each work's path to literary fame. Against this perspective, however, one could argue that it is still possible to identify, at least in broad strokes, which sources of canonisation were the most involved for the consecration of a given work, provided one employs the suitable analytical tools. To break down the sheer complexity of canonisation dynamics, indeed, one does not need to painstakingly review every possible nuance in each book's canonisation history; it seems more useful, instead, to look for some overarching patterns, to find some formal categories which would allow effective study and comparison of different stances within the canon.

Attempts in this sense have of course been made in the past, but not always with satisfying results: Jan Gorak, for example, mistook a passage in Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* for a definition of "three major agencies of literary canon formation" [51], whereas the German scholar was actually speaking of different *types* of canon, stemming from "the literary tradition of the school, the juristic tradition of the state, and the religious tradition

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[50] Simone Winko, "Literatur-Kanon als *invisible hand*-Phänomen", in *Literarische Kanonbildung*, special issue of *Text + Kritik* (2002), p. 11, trans. mine.
[51] Gorak, "Canon and Canons Formation", p. 563.

of the Church" (in other words: the literary canon, the canon of laws, the scriptural canon) [52]. A similar tripartite model, however, has been also posited by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and his proposal deserves to be reviewed in-depth, insofar as it seems to hold great potential for investigating and categorising canonisation processes.

In a much quoted, yet often underestimated passage from the 1983 essay "The Field of Cultural Production: or, The Economic World Reversed", Bourdieu presented canonisation dynamics in 19th century France as being driven by "three competing principles of legitimacy", which he describes as follows:

> First, there is the specific principle of legitimacy, i.e., the recognition granted by the set of producers who produce for other producers, their competitors, i.e. by the autonomous self-sufficient world of 'art for art's sake', meaning art for artists. Secondly, there is the principle of legitimacy corresponding to 'bourgeois' taste and to the consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class and by private tribunals such as *salons*, or public, state-guaranteed ones, such as academies, which sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant. Finally, there is the principle of legitimacy which its advocates call 'popular', i.e. the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the 'mass audience'. [53]

Bourdieu's account, albeit very time-specific, offers an interesting model for classifying canonisation instances, but requires at the same time to be contextualised within his larger theory of the literary field; otherwise, his use of adjectives like "specific" or "autonomous" or his references to the "dominant fractions of the dominant class" would remain unclear. In order to fully grasp the sociologist's argument, however, one must take a step back and examine first his understanding of the 'social fields' – a concept which serves as a cornerstone for most of his theoretical endeavours. To offer but a rough summary, Bourdieu contends that the historical process of the division of labour has eventually split society into different 'fields of production', i.e. social spaces characterised by their own rules of functioning, inner logics, hierarchies,

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[52] CURTIUS, p. 256.
[53] Pierre BOURDIEU, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed", in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 50-51, previously published in *Poetics* 12, 4-5 (1983), trans. by Richard Nice.

traditions and practices; each individual is inserted within one or more fields (such as politics, industry, art, school etc.) and bound to operate according to their internal laws.

Interactions between agents within their respective fields are then governed by a kind of 'practical sense' which Bourdieu calls *habitus*, and which may be defined as "a system of dispositions shaped by the positions [of the agents in the field] and shaping [their] choices" [54]. Often likened by the author to the sportsmen's intuitive 'feel for the game' [55], the *habitus* acts in other words as a sort of inner guidance which orients the behaviour of individuals and helps them to find the best position possible within their fields. Position-takings are indeed crucial insofar as they influence the chances of each 'player' to obtain what is at stake in his own field, i.e. one of the various forms of capital (economic, but also social and cultural) whose inequal distribution determines the structure of society [56].

Although the literary field fits also into this wider narrative, its mechanisms are discussed more in depth in Bourdieu's seminal book *The Rules of Art* (1992), a comprehensive systematisation of his earlier research on the topic, which builds its theoretical assumption on an extended case study on the nineteenth-century French intellectual *milieu*. Analysing its historical development, the author is therefore able to reconstruct the progressive emancipation ('autonomisation') of the artistic field from the logics of the economic world, which ultimately led to the establishing of a different path of canonisation: among artists, indeed, commercial success became something to be eschewed, while peer recognition was regarded as the supreme form of consecration. In other words, the literary field became

> the site of a struggle between two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, which favour[ed] those who dominate the field economically and politically (for example, 'bourgeois art'), and the autonomous principle (for example, 'art for art's sake'), which le[d] its

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[54] Anna Boschetti, *La rivoluzione simbolica di Pierre Bourdieu*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2003, p. 33, trans. mine. *Le sens pratique* is the original title of one of Bourdieu's major books, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990 [1980], where the notion of *habitus* is thoroughly discussed.

[55] Pierre Bourdieu, "Codification", in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. by Matthew Adamson. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990 [1983], p. 76.

[56] Bourdieu's classic formulation of this argument is to be found in his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979], esp. ch. I-IV. See also Elliot B. Weininger, "Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu's Class Analysis," in *Approaches to Class Analysis*, ed. by Erik Olin Wright. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 82-118.

most radical defenders to make of temporal failure a sign of election and of success a sign of compromise with the times. [57]

A direct consequence of this struggle, then, was the field's split between a 'subfield of restricted production', made of artists producing for a small number of their fellows, and a profit-driven 'subfield of large-scale production', aimed at the mass market; the various players had to position themselves in one of these subfields, and their choice determined the acquisition of different forms of 'capital'. Indeed, while market-oriented cultural producers obtained much money, but little symbolical capital, those who took the other path (*bohémiens*, avant-gardists etc.) had the opposite experience: while put in a 'dominated' position by the heteronomous hierarchy of market economy, they became 'dominant' in the autonomous hierarchy of the art world because of their possession of the field-specific symbolic capital, namely peer esteem [58].

Consequently, the literary field found itself organised around the linear opposition between an 'autonomous' pole of pure art and a 'heteronomous' pole of commercial success, informed respectively by what the sociologist calls the principles of 'internal' and 'external' hierarchisation. Beside this this crucial opposition, Bourdieu highlighted also another dialectal relation, the one between authors already established and writers aspiring to replace them (in the terminology of *The Rules of Art,* between 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy'); combining the two scales, he was able to build some charts which offer a thorough visualisation of the French literary in the nineteenth century, such as in <u>Figure 1</u>.

Eventually, this theoretical framework should be always kept in mind when reading the excerpt from "The Field of Cultural Production" presented above, especially if one considers the essay has served as a sort of preliminary sketch to *The Rules of Art*. Accordingly, the first type of consecration Bourdieu mentions, bestowed by artists on other artists, is the one which clearly yields the highest symbolic dividends to whom receive it, assuming pure aesthetic value both as the highest goal to be pursued and as the yardstick for canonisation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, instead, one finds 'popular' or mass canonisation, for which no guiding

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[57] Pierre BOURDIEU, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emmanuel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995 [1992], p. 216-217.
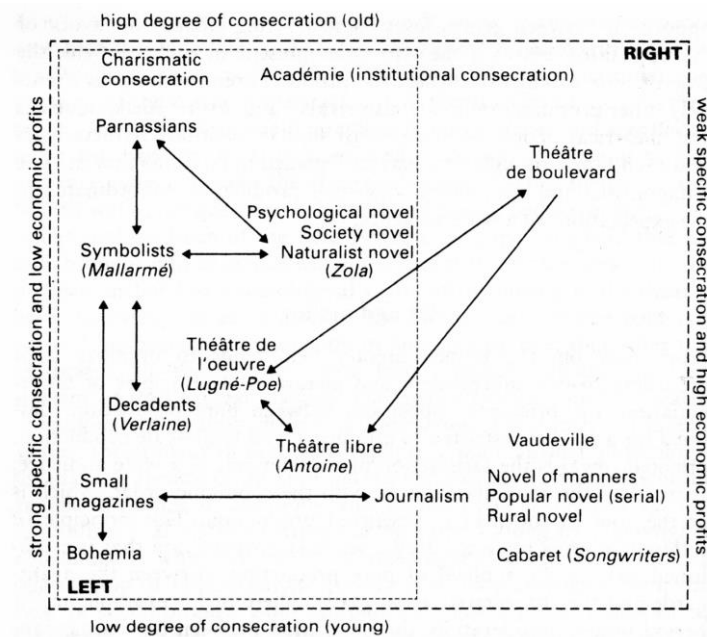[58] BOSCHETTI, p. 60.

Figure 1. Bourdieu's charting of the 19th-century French literary field [59].

criteria are provided but the seemingly erratic choices "mass audience" makes, and which yields essentially economic gratification; in the middle ground, at last, Bourdieu identifies a kind of institutional consecration –in the chronological and geographical environment he is analysing, a "bourgeois" one. What is relevant in this latter form is the taste of the dominant classes, whose judgement is expressed both informally, through private businesses such as art galleries, magazines, reading clubs etc., and formally, through State-backed institution which identify which works are not only aesthetically significant but also beneficial for society [60].

One may wonder, at this point, whether Bourdieu's conclusions about canonisation modes, or even his larger discourse about the literary field as "the economic world reversed", are still relevant beyond his specific case study on nineteenth century France; evidence from a recent study by Mark Algee-Hewitt and other Stanford Literary Lab members actually indicates that in other contexts, such as in the English one, the literary field functions according to rather different logics, and therefore suggests "many empirical maps of literary fields (plural), from

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[59] BOURDIEU, p. 122, reprising a similar version already published in "The Field of Cultural Production", p. 49. PORTER also reproduces these drawings (p. 13) and convincingly argues that the discrepancies between his empirical results and Bourdieu's pioneering work on canonisation modes may derive from the latter's attempt "to graph three dimensions", linked to the three principles of legitimacy he identifies, "on two [Cartesian] axes" (p. 16, n. 31).
[60] BOURDIEU, "The Field of Cultural Production", pp. 51-52. He also links the types of consecration to different genres: while poetry is the one more closely linked to artistic or "charismatic" legitimacy, because of his high social prestige, low profits and restricted audience, theatre is essentially directed to appeal bourgeois taste (although it can later win aesthetic praise) and the novel, born out of a mercantile context, reaches at first a popular audience.

different cultures and epochs" are needed "for the "literary field" (singular) to become a solid historical concept" [61]. Bourdieu's canonisation categories, nonetheless, still provide a convincing overview on different types of canonisation, and thus may still be useful for the present project: in order to confront different canonical trajectories and recognise patterns between them, some categorising device such as the one put forth in "The Field of Cultural Production" is more than welcome.

In applying Bourdieu's typological sketch to a larger scale, however, some difficulties may arise from its being very context-specific and using language and examples which point at a particular instance of the French literary history; not for instance, the prologue of *The Rules of Art*, which serves as an indispensable introduction to the following theoretical speculations, is a detailed discussion of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* [62]. Before any reuse it seems therefore necessary to free these categories from the temporal and spatial boundaries set by the French sociologist, adjusting them to suit a larger socio-historical picture and a wider array of canonical works. For the purposes of the analysis one intends to bring further in the following chapters, then, the three "competing principles of legitimacy" Bourdieu mentions (artistic, bourgeois, commercial) could be tentatively reformulated as follows:

1.2.1 Aesthetic canonisation

The first among the competing canonical agencies, Bourdieu's 'field-specific legitimation', could be more broadly intended as a consecration driven by aesthetic concerns, i.e. depending on alleged features of excellency recognised within the text. Stemming mostly out of individual taste and judgement, this type of canonisation considers aesthetic strength its only validating feature, and defines it, to use the words of one of his champions, Harold Bloom, as "an amalgam of qualities: mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power,

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[61] Mark ALGEE-HEWITT at al. "Canon/Archive. Large-scale Dynamics in the Literary Field". *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet* 11 (January 2016), p. 5, n. 19. The authors also specify their findings "don't necessarily falsify [Bourdieu's] thesis, as [they] are working only on novels (to the exclusion of poetry, drama, magazines, and so on), and on a different country and period".

[62] BOURDIEU, *The Rules of Art*, pp. 47-48: "The reading of *Sentimental Education* is more than a simple preamble aiming to prepare the reader to enter into a sociological analysis of the social world [...]. To reconstruct Flaubert's point of view [...] is to have a real chance of placing ourselves at the origins of a world whose functioning has become so familiar to us that the regularities and the rules it obeys escape our grasp".

knowledge, exuberance of diction" [63]. The assertion underlying this discourse, of course, is that "canon is founded upon the eternal values of art" and not upon "social bonds" and "market relations", which will point in turn to institutional and commercial form of canonisation [64]; therefore, any canonical evaluation should be made assuming as starting point the "transcendental autonomy of beauty" [65], free from ideological and material constraints.

According to the French sociologist, writers themselves are the main responsible for this type of canonisation, insofar as they engage with the works of their colleagues in multiple ways (recensions and comments, but also imitations, parodies, reprises, editing etc.) and compose their personal canons according to fully idiosyncratic criteria; Bloom shares this vision, embedding it within his larger theory of the 'anxiety of influence' and stating that "writers […] themselves determine canons, by bridging between strong precursors and strong successors [66]. From a practical point of view, however, this form of canonisation could lead to the emergence of networks based on peer esteem, where phenomena of circular or reciprocal canonisation are not rare (think of the mutual promotion of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound) and sometimes overlook the explicitly text-centred nature of this canonisation.

Authors, nevertheless, are not the only agents in this process: if one extends his look beyond Bourdieu's specific case study, one could see also that other actors have come throughout history to bestow the same aesthetic canonisation. An interesting case, for instance, is represented by the different position academics and literary critics have taken within modern culture: while in setting of "The Field of Cultural Production" they were depicted as expressing "the taste of the dominant", and therefore granting 'bourgeois' or institutional consecration, one may argue that, after the progressive decline in their public role across the last century [67], they lost a great deal of their influence as authoritative sources of canonical judgments for the entire society, and thus they increasingly aligned themselves with the 'aesthetic' camp in assessing and consecrating texts more for their inborn literary qualities than for their social significance.

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[63] Harold BLOOM, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of Ages*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994, p.43, where he also maintains, in keeping with the book's spirit, that "one breaks into the canon *only* by aesthetic strength" (emphasis mine).

[64] Andrea BATTISTINI, "Il canone in Italia e fuori d'Italia". *Allegoria* 29-30 (1998), p. 51, trans. mine.

[65] Massimo ONOFRI, *Il canone letterario*. Roma and Bari: Laterza, 2001, pp. 44-45, trans. mine.

[66] BLOOM, p. 522. On the 'anxiety of influence' see ID., *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

[67] See among others Ronan MCDONALD, *The death of the critic*. London: Continuum, 2007, Terry EAGLETON, *The Function of Criticism*. London and New York: Verso, 2005 [1996], ch. VI, and Peter Uwe HOHENDAHL, "The Use Value of Contemporary and Future Literary Criticism", trans. by David Bathrick. *New German Critique* 7 (1976), pp. 3-20.

1.2.2 Institutional canonisation

While all actors in canon formation could be virtually pictured as 'institutions' – for it is self-evident that "the power of [individuals], and the respective value of their symbolic capital, is insufficient to maintain absolute and unchallenged cultural authority, just as no canon is formed by individual judgments, no matter how assertive" [68] – one should understand the label proposed for this type of literary consecration as a reference to actual organisations, both public and private, which play an active part in the canon-building process, bestowing their consecration to works or authors which are interpreted as functional to the *Weltanschauung* they want to convey to their members or subjects. As this rough definition immediately suggests, institutional canonisation of literature has a strong ideological component; this is reflected also in Bourdieu's original formulation, where the second principle of legitimacy is qualified as "political", insofar as it mixes aesthetic appraisal (because works still require some features of literary quality to be appealing) and ethical evaluation (because works are requested to embody and/or transmit relevant values).

Across Western history, it seems possible to acknowledge in public education, and specifically in the ideological construction of literary teaching curricula, the most effective form of institutional canonisation; one recognises as its main historical actors the Church, which by and large held the monopoly in schooling up to the late 19th century, and then the modern Nation-States. Schools, as extensively demonstrated by John Guillory, have been indeed the institutional *loci* where transmission of canon has been enacted, guaranteeing the preservation and transmission of works deemed 'relevant' to society to younger generations; the process has been always characterised by a strong ethical, prescriptive component, with the ecclesiastical curricula conveying religious values and the public ones aimed first at simply "inculcating obedience and respect for the current status quo" and later, in keeping with the rise of 20th-century nationalism, at transmitting "patriotism as a tool of social cohesion and political loyalty" [69].

Although curriculum inclusion represented undoubtedly a preferential avenue to literary consecration, however, it has been observed there is not a strict consequentiality; in this sense, Virgil Nemoianu has been particularly vocal in remarking the difference between curricula and actual canons, seeing the former as sort of useful but provisional correlatives to

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[68] KOLBAS, p. 70.
[69] James C. ALBISETTI, "National Education Systems: Europe", in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Education*, ed. by John L. Rury and Eileen H. Tamura. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 150-51.

the latter – "negotiated accords between the definitional and hegemonic features of a given historical time and place and the broader and inchoate canonical domain proper" [70]. In his view, indeed, politics may be relevant in the creation of curricula, but he joins in with Grabes in remarking that actual canons are defined by a larger array of forces:

> Curricular choices are heavily influenced by political institutional factors, particularly in interpretation, but sometimes even in selection. By contrast canons are shaped by deeper and less easily formalized categories: sensibilities, communitarian orientations, broad axiological decisions, tacit preferences, modes of behavior and being. [71]

While his comments represent a useful reminder against overestimating the role of curricula and syllabi in canon-building, however, his somehow rigid distinction between the two elements is at least questionable, especially if one takes into account the long-term history of canon: in times and contexts where popular literacy was low and access to further education restricted, indeed, the literary curriculum vehiculated in ground and middle schools came often to represent the only mandatory contact a large chunk of population had with high literature, resulting therefore decisive in shaping the popular perception on which works were to be considered canonical. In this sense, then, canons and curricula might have indeed coincided for a significant amount of time within the popular imaginary, with the homology being reinforced by the school syllabi's static nature and resilience to change.

On another note, institutional possibilities of influencing canons have across the ages extended beyond the literary curriculum, manifesting themselves in various ways, from the most patent (monuments, plaques, naming of streets and public buildings after relevant writers) to the most symbolically poignant, such as the use of great national authors as namesakes for major institutions of cultural promotion [72]; public celebrations, from Renaissance poetic laureation to modern festivals and commemorations, are also to be cited, while the bestowing of official prizes would warrant a more nuanced analysis, insofar as it struggles to combine a strong degree of institutionalisation (they are awarded by highly

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[70] Virgil NEMOIANU, "Literary Canons and Social Values Opinion", in *The Hospitable Canon: Essays on Literary Play, Scholarly Choice, and Popular Pressures*, ed. by Virgil Nemoianu and Robert Royal. Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991, p. 220; reprinted in ID., *Postmodernism and Cultural Identities: Conflicts and Coexistence*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010, ch. xi.

[71] NEMOIANU, p. 222.

[72] Within the *European Union National Institutes for Culture* (EUNIC) network, 6 members follow this naming convention: the German Goethe-Institut, the Spanish Instituto Cervantes, the Italian Società Dante Alighieri, the Portuguese Instituto Camões, the Polish Instytut Adama Mickiewicza and the Hungarian Balassi Intézet. Outside Europe, one should mention at least the Chinese Confucius Institute (Kǒngzǐ Xuéyuàn).

recognised, often State-sponsored academies and organisations) with some declared search for aesthetic quality and, especially in modern times, with the marked economic interests of the publishing houses involved [73].

1.2.3 Commercial canonisation

The latter type of canonisation, which Bourdieu links to the tastes of mass audience, is at the same time the most evident (for being widely read is an intuitive predictor of canonicity) and yet the most difficult to define, insofar as it follows logics which deny the status of alterity traditionally granted to literature and, in a full materialistic view, place it within the context of market economy. It is also, as evidence suggests, the form of literary consecration which has gained more momentum in the latest centuries; as hinted earlier, it has indeed experienced a dramatic rise since the mid-eighteenth century, going as far as to bring Freedman, perhaps a bit hurriedly, to postulate that "[i]t is in mass and not in high or official culture that the value of literary canon is [now] preserved" [74].

It comes as little surprise that this emblematic reversal of established hierarchies has been seen as controversial; labelling Freedman's assertion as "populist optimism", Kolbas has instead remarked that "the process of canonization depends […] on the relative *authority* of those groups with institutional influence on the evaluation and reproduction of selected works of literature" – an authority, he implies, 'blind' market forces do not possess. Even the previous step to canonisation – what he calls, in an avowedly Bourdieusian fashion, 'cultural familiarity' – cannot stem, in his view, only from marketing logics or broad audience appraisal: "[c]ultural familiarity may not be transparently universal […] but neither does it result from individual assertiveness, *popular acclaim*, or discursive contestation alone" [75].

Kolbas, while rightly aligning with Nemoianu and Winko in refuting univocal explanations of canonisation modes, seems however to underestimate the actual canonising power of the market: as the case of recent bestsellers demonstrate [76], fully-fledged capitalist

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[73] A key study on the topic is James F. ENGLISH, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value.* Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

[74] Jonathan FREEDMAN, "Autocanonization: Tropes of Self-Legitimation in 'Popular Culture'". *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 1, 1 (1987) p. 208.

[75] KOLBAS, p. 66, emphasis mine.

[76] The first example which comes to mind is the tremendous success enjoyed by J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (1997-). The ways in which books described as fairly conventional *Bildungsromane* have obtained universal acclaim and subsequent critical attention have been analysed, among others, by Jack ZIPES, *Sticks and stones: the troublesome success of children's literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*. New York and London: Routledge,

economy seems indeed able to grant access to literary Pantheon to works according to the mere volume of their sales, although canonical persistence in the long term is, for obvious reasons, yet to be tested. According to this trend, however, canonisation modes seem indeed to have begun being affected less by internal properties of the works, such as alleged aesthetic excellency or compliance with some kind of political or social vision, and more from external, context-bound factors, such as the commercial performances – which are, by the way, often artificially enhanced by the great publishing houses' marketing departments. Furthermore, even on a surface level, it is telling that many recent bestsellers have been nonchalantly described in public discourse as 'instant classics': an "oxymoron", it has been noted, that is "indicative of the commodification of culture by which the historical distinction of canonical literature is effaced in a market flooded with cultural goods" [77].

Eventually, this sketchy reformulation of Bourdieu's categories did not alter significantly his original tripartite scheme; it did, however, enlarge its applicability, substituting some narrow, context-bound determinations (such as the 'bourgeois' label) with broader categories, which were in turn better described with respect to their long-term features. To sum up, then, the three competing principles of legitimacy outlined in "Field of Cultural Production" could be interpreted as giving rise to three forms of canonisation: aesthetic canonisation, bestowed by authors, critics, academic and other members of the intellectual élite; institutional canonisation, bestowed by various apparatuses and emanations of modern States and, to a lesser degree, of the Church, with the school system in pole position; commercial canonisation, apparently bestowed by market performances but in true directed, at least partially, by efforts of marketers and editors.

Literary quality, social value and economic profit could thus be considered the three main criteria of canonisation throughout history, each one with its relative weight and modes of attribution: if one employs them as summarising categories, it would likely be possible to individuate in the consecration paths of disparate literary works some common patterns which may help to verify Porter's claims. As good scholarly practice requires, however, any attempt at theoretical explanation should start with some thorough empirical research; accordingly, next chapter will busy itself with the reception histories of a sample of Western canonical works, examining their individual routes to fame and detailing the forces behind their canonisation.

2001, esp. ch. VIII. For a marketing-informed view, see Stephen BROWN. "Marketing for Muggles: The Harry Potter way to higher profits". *Business Horizons* 45, 1 (2002), 6–14.
[77] KOLBAS, p. 67.

2. Case Studies

2.1 Issues of sampling

There is little doubt that processes of literary evaluation and canon-building are inherently context-bound: in John Guillory's words, "there can be no general theory of canon formation that would predict or account for the canonization of any particular work without specifying first the unique historical conditions of that work's production and reception" [1]. If one wants to verify the accuracy of Porter's claim about canon dynamics, then, it is imperative to check carefully the interactions between canonical works and the socio-cultural milieus which were responsible for their early canonisation and, at least in the Stanford scholar's hypothesis, influenced their subsequent position within the canon.

Pursuing this goal, however, was no straightforward task, as the project had to face some operational difficulties right from the start. A great deal of issues came, not surprisingly, from the notoriously slippery consistency of the canon, whose true form is not that of an authoritative list of cultural monoliths, but rather of a loose galaxy of works with different canonical strength, ranging from the 'hyper-canonical' ones (such as Cervantes, Dante or Shakespeare) to others whose canonicity is still disputed. Canon has no boundaries but the ones imposed from time to time by critical taste, local perspectives or socio-political expectations, which separate it from the mass of soon-to-be-forgotten writings in the 'archive' [2]; any attempt to circumscribe it is a provisional and arbitrary act, which freezes what is in truth "an *imaginary totality of works*" [3] into a concrete, more manageable form.

Even taking some actual instance of canon (like a college reading list) as the basis for the test, then, there were two other aspects to be considered: on one side, the array of texts selected should have been representative of literature as a whole, since Porter's argument does not mention specific temporal or spatial frameworks, while on the other it must have had an extension compatible with in-depth scholar research. Dealing with the combination of these two requirements, however, appeared difficult both for traditional and data-driven research methodologies. Indeed, quantitative approaches, such as the ones employed by Porter and his Stanford Literary Lab colleagues, are ideal to process sheer amounts of data, but some intrinsic

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[1] GUILLORY, p. 85.
[2] For an attempt at distinguishing between canon and archive on formal grounds, see the essay by Mark ALGEE-HEWITT et al., pp. 5-13. (= §2, "Morphological Features").
[3] GUILLORY, p. 45.

limitations, such as the lack of factual evidence for older centuries or the difficulty to process meaningfully the various canonisation instances, prevent them from offering a reliable picture of canonisation dynamics in the longer period [4]. On the other hand, 'qualitative' or traditional analyses, based on the careful scrutiny of scholarly sources, are likely to provide better results on single cases, but they would also become impossibly time-consuming if applied to large clusters of data; therefore, their utility in explaining wider trends in canonisation is limited.

In order to break this deadlock, it seemed wise to try to make the best out of the two approaches, combining their strengths and mitigating their shortcomings; on a practical level, this translated into employing first quantitative devices to determinate a 'working canon' to begin with, and then recurring to traditional criticism to examine the features and the behaviour of its components. Of the two steps, the first appeared naturally as the more crucial, since the reliability of the entire study depended from its result: failure to find a representative, yet manageable number of canonical texts would have affected negatively any conclusions drawn from them, and ultimately left Porter's claim untested.

As quantitative research practices suggested, the safest choice to reach the study goals was resorting to statistical instruments, and in particular to the stratified sampling technique [5]; it was still to be determined, however, from which sources the sampling should draw. The priority was, understandably, to maximise accuracy and representativeness while avoiding one-sidedness in evaluation: as Algee-Hewitt and McGurl underline, "incorporating more and more sources of authority into the larger collective judgment of universal literary worth, one might achieve a sort of subtraction-by-addition of biases in aesthetic appraisal" [6]. Accordingly, one chose to turn to extensive online compilations of canonical texts, and namely those maintained by Robert Teeter and Shane Sherman [7], which collected and indexed a plethora of canons from various backgrounds (academic, editorial, journalistic, commercial, etc.). These two repositories, built according to the same format but with different methodological choices and outcomes, seemed thus an adequate starting point for the enquiry, but they had to undergo a painstaking process of refinement and optimisation before they were ready for sampling [8].

The first catalogue, compiled by librarian Robert Teeter for his website, merges advice

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[4] J.D. PORTER, "Popularity/Prestige". *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet* 17 (September 2018), p. 19.

[5] For a theoretical introduction see Van L. PARSONS. "Stratified Sampling", in *Wiley StatsRef: Statistics Reference Online*, ed. by Narayanaswamy Balakrishnan et al., 2017, pp 1-11 [online resource].

[6] Mark ALGEE-HEWITT and Mark MCGURL, "Between Canon and Corpus: Six Perspectives on 20th-Century Novels". *Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet* 8 (January 2015), p. 15.

[7] Robert TEETER, "Great Books Lists" [http://sonic.net/~rteeter/greatbks.html]; Shane SHERMAN, "The Greatest Books" [https://thegreatestbooks.org/].

[8] All data have been accessed and elaborated in August 2019; later updates have not been considered.

from a variety of different sources, ranging from critic polls to editor's choices, with significant openings on eastern and contemporary canon. Among them one may find some of the most widespread "Great Books" list, including appendixes from Harold Bloom's *Western Canon* (1994), Mortimer [9] and Van Doren's *How to Read a Book* (1972, 2nd ed.) and Clifton Fadiman's *Lifetime Reading Plan* (1988, 3rd ed.), but also multiple university reading lists (Columbia, St. John's, Aquinas) and publishers' picks (Modern Library, Harvard Classics, etc.). Teeter's database, encompassing both fiction and non-fiction, follows the author-title format; biographical data, nationality and language are given for each writer, while individual titles are accompanied by the initials of the lists which recommended them. It should be noted, however, that no formal ranking device is available – meaning, for example, that board lists from lesser-known magazines have the same weight of broad surveys by more accredited institutions.

By contrast, Shane Sherman devised a seemingly efficient, but arbitrary ranking method, which assigns to each source list a reliability score based on a number of factors (lack of geographical or language bias, clear selection criteria, etc.). This influences how works from certain sources will weight in the general list; as the editor admits, he "generally trust[ed] 'best of all time' lists voted by authors and experts over user-generated lists" [10]. His database, impressively drawing from around 120 sources, can also be filtered by fiction/non-fiction, although this setting does not always work properly. The format employed is title-author; specific pages with supplementary details are automatically created both for authors and titles, including how a single work ranks in each list it features in.

Taken together, the two corpora hold a remarkable number of texts: Sherman includes more than 2,000 entries, while Teeter around 3,500 [11]. Both lists, however, were not immediately suitable for sampling. First, they required some degree of formal clean-up: if Sherman needed little adjustments, since the website itself allows filtering out all non-fiction entries and downloading the result as a .csv file, Teeter called for more substantial work. After excluding all the non-fiction titles and cutting therefore the size to one similar to Sherman, indeed, one to undergo a long and laborious process of adjusting the list to the practical needs

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[9] The figure of philosopher and educator Mortimer J. Adler (1902-2011) was instrumental in refuelling the Great Books movement in the United States. Apart from authoring the influential *How to Read a Book* (1940; extensively reviewed with Charles Van Doren in 1972), he cooperated with University of Chicago president Robert Hutching in developing Encyclopaedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World* series (1952, 1990).

[10] Shane SHERMAN, "How is this list generated?". *The Greatest Books* [https://thegreatestbooks.org/].

[11] It should be noted both compilations include many entries referring to selected/complete works of a certain author or certain parts of his production (e.g. plays, short stories). This is certainly unfortunate, since measuring the impact of, say, the whole of Ibsen's plays is by no means the same as assessing *Doll's House*'s canonical weight. Even though some solutions were considered, such as proportionally redistributing the weight of these editions to individual works by the same author, none proved feasible; the final cut included relatively few of them, though.

of the study. A main source of problems, for instance, was Teeter's decision to group literary works by author: since the analysis focused on canonical works, and not canonical writers, it was necessary to revert the format, assigning manually to each work its author.

Another possible issue was the lists' massive chronological and geographical scope, insofar as they both included a wealth of titles from every age and cultural background, ranging from Greek tragedies to African contemporary novels. In order to avoid exceeding the author's fields of expertise and thus offering shallow or lacking analyses, it seemed necessary to shrink down this large pool to a more manageable, yet still significant size. In practice, both the Teeter and Sherman catalogues were vetted in order to keep only texts written approximately from the late Middle Ages up the 20th century (i.e. in the timespan 1250-2000) and produced within the perimeter of a broadly intended 'Western culture' – at least until the last century, when more inclusive criteria were adopted.

Behind these choices, of course, there were several theoretical and practical concerns. First, the exclusion of older texts, especially from the Greek and Latin milieu, was motivated by the peculiar path they took to canonicity: since only a minimal fraction of classical texts was able to get through the socio-political upheavals of the early Middle Ages, they were almost all welcomed by Humanist scholars within the Renaissance canon they were building [12]. Even if one might trace with confidence the canonisation forces behind their earlier consecration, then, there is little doubt their later rediscovery and entrance into the 'modern' canon was mainly due to their *material survival*; including them in the present research, given their troubled reception history, would have been displaying a form of 'survivor bias'. A simpler motivation, instead, lies behind the decision to put the upper cap at the end of the XX century: since the debate on recent works is still ongoing, and they have not yet withstood the test of time, there are presently not enough elements to confirm their canonicity,

The geographical restrictions, on the contrary, were due mostly to the difficulty of producing a coherent and substantial account for such a wide array of cultural systems; issues in information retrieval about older non-Western texts were also taken into account. A more inclusive approach, however, was taken for the 20th century, where works from non-European backgrounds, and especially from the postcolonial context, were increasingly distributed, read and included within canonical compilations. Therefore, if pragmatic reasons advised for

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[12] This applies, of course, to narrative and poetical texts; technical literature was gradually dismissed as soon as scientific development progressed. This necessarily limited and rough account of the *traditio* of classics could be integrated with texts such as Leighton REYNOLDS and Nigel WILSON, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 4th ed. Oxford: OUP, 2013, or Luciano CANFORA, *Conservazione e perdita dei classici*, 2nd ed. Bari: Stilo, 2006.

excluding titles such as, say, the Chinese age-old classics *Water Margin* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, singling out books by the likes of Gabriel García Márquez, Chinua Achebe or José Luis Borges never seemed an option, insofar as they were products of an age where literature, in Franco Moretti's words, was beginning to "unmistakably" turn into "a planetary system" [13].

Once imposed these limitations, however, a couple of issues still needed to be addressed. On one hand, the two lists did not guarantee the works within them were *surely* canonical: each standing at round 2,000 titles, they were simply too large to be composed only of undisputed "classics", and indeed they hosted plenty of titles whose canonical status was at least arguable. Teeter's collection, for example, included by default all writers which received at least one recommendation from his sources, and even writers with none, provided they were Nobel Prize winners [14]: sampling directly from this pool would have meant works featured in almost all source lists, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* (14 recommendations) or Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (12), would have had the same chance of being selected as erudite or uncommon titles such as Vélez de Guevara's *El Diablo Cojuelo* or John Cheever's *Bullet Park* (both 1).

Therefore, in order to obtain a pool of undisputed canonical works, it seemed necessary to increase the lists' 'canonical strength' by cutting their size. Where to set the bar was, of course, a fully arbitrary choice, and much depended from the catalogues' features: while Sherman's ranking system [15] provided an easy instrument for progressive refining, Teeter offered fewer options, and one had eventually to recur to the only useful information he gives, i.e. the number of individual recommendations received by a given title. Albeit an admittedly rough method, cutting works with less than 3 recommendations lead to the constitution of a restricted corpus of 260 titles whose canonicity, although with different degrees, seemed surer. Once extracted an equal amount of texts from Sherman (the first 260 in his ranking), it was possible, at last, to merge the two lists – which overlapped for more than the 72% – and get the definitive sampling population of 359 texts.

A review of the chronological and linguistic features of this composite canon may,

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[13] Franco MORETTI, "Conjectures on World Literature". *New Left Review* 1 (2000), p. 54, reprinted in Franco MORETTI, *Distant Reading*. London: Verso, 2013, p. 45.

[14] Tellingly, a large group of Nobel Prize winners did not receive a single recommendation for their works from other sources. It must be noted, however, that the Swedish Academy awards the prize according to Alfred Nobel's will, whose wording ("for the most outstanding work in an ideal direction") allows plenty of space for interpretation and does not require works to be canonical or presumed to become so. See Kjell ESPMARK, *The Nobel Prize in Literature. A Study of the Criteria behind the Choices*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991.

[15] As a matter of fact, Sherman included also some 330 unranked entries, mainly from Peter Boxall's *1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die* (2006); they were removed because there was no tool available to rank them properly.

however, give the impression that it fails to be truly representative: albeit reaching a certain equilibrium between different estimates of canonicity within the framework of modern Western literature, it still overrepresents a cultural area (the Anglosphere) and a temporal frame (the 20th century). This comes as little surprise, as it reflects the biases from the hundreds of unique lists Teeter and Sherman drew from; but if some preference accorded to Anglo-American literature, which surely calls forth vexed questions of cultural and political hegemony, did not affect the study's intended geographical frame, as they still pertain to "the West", chronological imbalance posed a bigger threat. Indeed, since only 35% of the works listed come before last century, there was a strong chance that any sampling attempt from the whole data pool would end up drawing only recent titles, and thus making any analysis of diachronic development of canonical consecration impossible.

To solve this problem, the pool was divided into chronological subsets and sampling was conducted separately for each one; the number of items sampled for each period was proportional to the subset's size. The easiest solution would have been, of course, sampling a fixed number of works from each period, but this would have altered the results' statistical representativeness, since some works would have had more choices to be sampled than others. In statistical terms, then, it would have meant abandoning stratified sampling in favour of its non-probabilistic version, quota sampling, whose accuracy is lower and outcomes more questionable [16]; even under the pretension of taking into account all the material and aesthetic factors which lie behind the overrepresentation of recent literary works, such an arbitrary decision was deemed as unacceptable.

Once cleared these issues, then, it was finally possible to sample the desired study object from the Teeter-Sherman pool; this was realised through an elementary Windows Excel macro, which was instructed to randomly sample a list of 20 texts out of the whole pool of 359, respecting the proportional quotas assigned to each century. Some centuries, however, had percentual shares so tiny that they did not reach the unit; according to raw statistics, for example, one should have sampled only 0,6 texts from the 17th century. This, obviously, did not make any sense, and would have further penalised the already underrepresented older ages: therefore, in order to widen representativeness, one decided to round up every number to the superior unit (e.g. 0,6 to 1), thus obtaining two supernumerary works which increased the list's extension to 22 (Figure 1). From a statistical point of view, there was no other meaningful way

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[16] See Carl-Erik SÄRNDAL, Bengt SWENSON e Jan WRETMAN, *Model Assisted Survey Sampling*. New York: Springer, 2003, pp. 100–109.

to deal with the question, as ignoring those items was not possible and removing them would have been arbitrary; thus, a little integration seemed acceptable.

Centuries	No. texts in the original pool	Percentual shares (≈)	No. texts in the sample (est.)	No. texts in the sample (≈)
XIV to XVI	9	2%	0,4	1
XVII	22	6%	1,2	2
XVII	14	4%	0,8	1
XIX	81	23%	4,5	5
XX	233	65%	13	13
Total	359	100%	20	**22**

Figure 1. Sampling statistics.

Eventually, the sample was ready (Figure 3): a 22-texts list, ranging from the Dante's *Inferno* (1314) to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981), and comprising both texts whose canonicity was immediately perceivable (one may think of Cervantes, Molière or Dostoevsky) and other which were lesser-known. Looking at these titles, it was difficult not to think once again about the issue of representativity and wonder if conclusions drawn from such a small sample did have some real strength. The canon's magmatic nature, coupled with its evasive perimeter, made however difficult to find solutions other than extracting a restricted group of texts for close analysis: despite some overtly discussed limitations, stratified sampling seemed to remain the most convincing way to deal with the issue, generating a fully randomised corpus wherein Porter's hypothesis could be tested without prejudices. A thorough study of the whole 359-texts corpus would, of course, have brought better results, but it was beyond the scope and the material possibilities of the present study, whose outcomes should therefore be seen just as the first step towards a comprehensive explanation of the matter.

Sampling tool

Pool: 359 titles from the Teeter-Sherman canon

Sample size: 22 titles

Inferno	To The Lighthouse
Don Quixote	Steppenwolf
The Misanthrope	All Quiet on the Western Front
Tristram Shandy	The Good Earth
Frankenstein	Loving
War and Peace	The Iceman Cometh
The Mill on the Floss	The Makioka Sisters
Uncle Vanya	The Tin Drum
Heart of Darkness	Cat's Cradle
Lord Jim	The Crying of the Lot 49
Kim	Midnight's Children

Figure 2. Texts sampled (screenshot from the Excel sampling macro).

2.2 Paths to canonical status

On statistical grounds, the 22-texts sample obtained from the Teeter-Sherman corpus seemed in any case to meet the initial expectations in terms of balance and comprehensiveness. Texts included covered quite smoothly the whole research timespan, although they oddly tended to cluster around some crucial moments, such as the turn of the 20th century (Chekhov, Conrad, Kipling) or the late Twenties (Woolf, Hesse, Remarque, Buck); from a linguistic point of view, the quota of non-English language items exceeded slightly the pool average (36% against 32%). On a further note, then, the list displayed a wide array of narrative possibilities within the field of fiction, both in terms of contents and form (not only novels but also dramatic pieces and poetry), which hopefully improved the reach of the analysis.

The project's next step, as previously outlined, regarded the sampled texts' reception history: if one wanted to verify Porter's claim, it was imperative to get a picture as clear as possible of the different canonical forces behind the literary consecration of the 22 works

selected. Bourdieu's three main forms of canonisation immediately appeared as the suitable tool for this operation, but instead of immediately applying his categories to the sample and hastily constructing an actual model of canonical persistence, it seemed wiser to first investigate *thoroughly* each work's individual destiny. This was pursued through the elaboration of brief profiles on the reception history of each work which, while strongly rejecting any pretension of giving an utterly accurate depiction of such a complex matter, are intended to suggest instead the general lines along which a specific work went down to posterity; a more systematic interpretation of the findings will take place in the next chapter.

- Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* (1314, Italian)

Reviewing thoroughly the reception history of Dante's *Inferno* is by no means a task which could be accomplished here; after seven centuries of critical evaluations, oscillating between "periods of notable contestation and resistance as well as unalloyed celebration" [17], all types of prestige have become eventually attached to the poem, to the point that the original roots of its success have been overshadowed. Nonetheless, it has been attempted here to recall at least the main historical features of the process, taking into account the obvious overlapping of the poet's reputation with the work's assessment and, when possible, also the difference in canonical evaluation between the whole *Divina Commedia* and the *Inferno*, which was the sampling's actual pick [18].

To begin with, early reception of Dante's masterpiece was positive both in terms of popularity and critical appraisal: while exegetic activities (commentaries, glosses, Latin paraphrases etc.) thrived, the text circulated among a diversified audience, ranging from mendicant friars to lay intellectuals, merchants, notaries and other professionals, and was reproduced in many high-quality copies, to an extent "unprecedented in the history of medieval book production" [19]. Its fame, at least in Florence, extended beyond educated circles: public readings of the poem, inaugurated by Boccaccio in 1373, helped it to reach "a broad-based public that almost certainly included illiterate city dwellers", which came into contact with the

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[17] Anna PEGORETTI, "Early Reception until 1481", in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Simon Gilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 245.
[18] For the sake of clarity, it must be pointed out that the Teeter-Sherman canon included both the *Divine Comedy* as a whole and the *Inferno* as standalone entry: one should consider it a testament to the canonical influence of the first canticle, which outweighs that of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, and whose historical reasons are outlined below.
[19] PEGORETTI, p. 248. It is worth noting that, one century later, the *Commedia* would be also the first book in vernacular to be printed in Italy (the Foligno 1472 edition, at the hands of wandering printer Johannes Neumeister).

poem also through artistic depictions and mentions in popular preaching [20].

Apart from popularising it, Boccaccio played also a major role in consolidating the perception of Dante's eminence among intellectuals, likening him to classical writers and establishing him at the centre of the new Italian literary canon alongside Petrarch – who was far less enthusiastic in his judgements about the illustrious predecessor [21]. At the same time, the unique presence of the *Commedia* within the Florentine culture grew gradually stronger: while, by the end of the fourteenth century, the cultural influence of Dante's *Commedia* had extended beyond Italy but only within the ranks of intellectual and political elites, in the poet's birthplace it was still widely circulating, being owned by private citizens and taught in schools.

In this context, it comes as little surprise the Medicean government appropriated the poem, and Dante's overall figure, as an endless source of civic pride and a cornerstone for the construction of the city's municipal identity: by the time "the vernacular [had] acquired an undisputed status as a legitimate literary language [...] the fortune of the *Commedia* had reached a climax and guaranteed to its author a magisterial authoritative status" [22]. From the sixteenth century, however, the tide began to turn: within the literary debate, Pietro Bembo's harsh judgements on Dante, and specifically on the *Inferno* [23], together with his canonisation of Boccaccio and Petrarch as better models for prose and poetry, pushed the Florentine to the corner, while Petrarchism had free rein to spread throughout Europe. The following century, scholars agree, was the lowest point in the history of Dante's fame, with only three editions and no comments being printed. Ignored by the opposite camps of Classicism and Baroque, enjoying scarce readership outside and inside Italy, the *Commedia* was also targeted by the Tridentine Church for its anti-clerical contents: to sum up, it almost seemed all types of Bourdieusian prestige were stolen away from it, as intellectual, institutional and commercial approval dried.

Its gradual recovery began in the eighteenth century: while still disregarded by Enlightenment thinkers, as Voltaire's famous comments show [24], Dante caught the attention of the Romantics, which appreciated especially the *Inferno* for its graphic representation of human

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[20] PEGORETTI, p. 250.

[21] On Boccaccio and his Dante-related activities, including his *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (ca. 1357-61), see Jason M. HOUSTON, *Building a Monument to Dante: Boccaccio as Dantista*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. On the difficult relationship between Petrarch and Dante – an early example of Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' – see Zygmunt G. BARANSKI and Theodore J. CACHEY Jr., *Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.

[22] PEGORETTI, p. x.

[23] See especially Bembo's *Prose della volgare lingua* ("Discussions of the Vernacular Language", 1525) II, 20.

[24] In the "Dante" entry of his *Dictionnarire philosophique* (1764), he discards the *Commedia* as "a salmagundi regarded as a beautiful epic poem" and the *Inferno* as "bizarre"; he also had contacts with Saverio Bettinelli, the most strenuous opposer to Dante among 18th-century Italian literati. Further notes in Felice DEL BECCARO, "Voltaire". *Enciclopedia Dantesca*. Roma: Treccani, 1970 [online].

society. In this period, indeed, the prejudice which regards the first canticle as the *Commedia*'s best instalment gained momentum, to the extent that foreign translations of the poem were often limited to it. By mid-nineteenth century, anyway, Dante's role at the core of the European highbrow canon was no more open to discussion, fuelled by the sustained praise of generations of intellectuals (from Coleridge and Foscolo to Byron, Keats and Shelley) and a strong presence in the visual arts.

Apart from gaining almost unanimous intellectual recognition, however, the *Commedia* and the figure of Dante returned also to be powerful political symbols: if in earlier centuries they were considered "pillars of Florentine civic identity" [25], the late 17th-century revolutionary imaginary put them at the centre of the newfound cult of literature as the new 'national religion', with the Tuscan poet outshining other classical Italian authors as the most representative voice of the national conscience [26]. At the height of the phenomenon, during the Risorgimento [27], Dante received full institutional canonisation "both as a precursor of Italy's national identity and as the '' 'founder' of the Italian language" [28]; the lavish 1865 celebrations for the sexcentenary of Dante's birth were thus a public display of the deeply-held belief that the country's soul was shaped by the works of its most illustrious writer – an assumption which probably found its better formulation in the much-quoted remarks of militant intellectual Giovanni Antonio Borgese:

> Italy was not the creation of kings and warriors; she was the creature of a poet, Dante. The foreigners who identify Italy with Dante are essentially right. His character and work had a decisive influence which grew in the centuries, until they became paramount to the leading class of the Italian people. It is hardly an exaggeration to hold that he was to Italy what Moses may have been to Israel. [...] The *Divine Comedy* created a nation. [29]

- Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605-1615, Spanish)

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[25] David G. Lummus, "Dante's Inferno: Critical Reception and Influence", in *Critical Insights: The Inferno*, ed. by Patrick Hunt. Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2011, pp. 66-67.

[26] Carlo Dionisotti, "Varia fortuna di Dante", in *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*. Torino: Einaudi, 1967, p. 258, already published in *Rivista storica italiana* 78 (1966), pp. 544-83.

[27] For an extensive discussion see, among others, the essays by Luzzi, Jossa, Braida and Arduini in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, ed. by Aida Audeh and Nick Havely. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 13-88.

[28] Fabio Camilletti, "Later Reception from 1481 to the Present", in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante's 'Commedia'*, p. 265.

[29] Giovanni A. Borgese, *Goliath: The March of Fascism*. New York: Viking, 1937, p. 7 and p. 20-21.

As with Dante, systematically tackling the reception history of a work which has been defined "the center of gravity around which Hispanic civilization rotates" [30] would exceed a book-length study; again, all types of prestige (academical, institutional, popular) seem to conflate within it, suggesting a unique prominence within the literary canon. *Don Quixote*'s achievements are indeed stunning, insofar as it is commonly billed as the most translated, the most reprinted and the most adapted novel ever [31]; despite having already sold an estimate of more than half a million copies, it remains so contemporary that, five hundred years after its publication, it still topped an authoritative poll between modern authors on the best and most central literary work of history [32].

Nonetheless, it is still possible to sketch at least some lines along which its fame grew and consolidated itself, starting from its publication context. On one hand, one must underline the momentous commercial success the novel enjoyed: the first instalment, *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, was reprinted six times in 1605 alone; new editions followed virtually every year until the *Segunda Parte* was published in 1615 and the two parts began to be marketed together. The size of this success surprised Cervantes and his editor, Francisco de Robles, who had initially required the 10-year royal privilege only for Castille and had therefore to require extensions to other Iberic territories in order to prevent the circulation of pirated copies [33]; moreover, they had also to face the unauthorised spinoffs which came out near the expiry of the initial privilege, like Avellaneda's spurious sequel (1614), which Cervantes himself mocked mercilessly in his own continuation.

Albeit no 'bestseller' (literacy rates were too low to allow such a definition) [34], it is sure the book was able to find a comparatively large public, and the readers' enthusiasm rapidly crossed national borders: within ten years from its original publication the complete *Don Quixote* was translated into English, French and Italian, and then into Dutch and German. Its cultural impact was relevant, especially in terms of inspirations for derivative works: as Mancing claims, "[w]ithin half a century after Cervantes' death, *Don Quixote* was an established

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[30] Ilan STAVANS, "*Don Quixote*: Sloppy, Inconsistent, Baffling, Perfect". *Literary Hub*, 7 October 2015 [online].
[31] Figures from Howard MANCING, *Cervantes' Don Quixote: A Reference Guide*. Westport, CO: Greenwood, 2006, p. ix.
[32] In 2002, a panel of 100 world-leading authors from 54 nations, including the likes of Milan Kundera, Doris Lessing, and Salman Rushdie, was asked from the Norwegian Book Club (an affiliate to the Nobel Prize organisation) to name the ten best works of imaginative literature of all time. Don Quixote was the overwhelming winner, receiving 50% more preferences than the runner-up, Proust's *Recherche*.
[33] José BELLIDO, Raquel XALABARDER and Ramón CASAS VALLES, "*Don Quixote*'s Privilege (1604)", in *Primary Sources on Copyright (1450-1900)*, ed. by Lionel Bently and Martin Kretschmer, 2011 [www.copyrighthistory.org].
[34] David VIÑAS RIQUER, "The phenomenon of the bestseller in the Iberian Peninsula", in *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*, vol. II, ed. by César Domínguez, Anxo Abuín González and Ellen Sapega. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2016, p. 482.

European phenomenon, particularly in England and France, by then the two most important nations in Europe", arousing "some interest [also] in Italy and Germany", while Spain, after the first burst of popularity, "had already fallen so far into cultural, intellectual, and historical decline that the novel was published, read, adapted, and imitated more abroad than at home" [35]. England, in particular, proved itself to be an early site of canonisation: there appeared the book's first "critical" edition (1738), sponsored by Lord Carteret, through which "Cervantes passe[d] from the ranks of a popular writer to those of a classic" and "bec[ame] – in English eyes, at least – part of the canon of great writers" [36].

Recognition from other artists – the first type of consecration according to Bourdieu – was equally favourable: with the notable exception of Lope de Vega, Cervantes' lifelong rival, other literary heavyweights of the period, such as Francisco de Quevedo or Calderón de la Barca, demonstrated their appreciation through adaptations and rewritings [37]; the trend continued ever since, both in terms of positive judgments and the production of derivative works which reprised, in various degrees, the works' characters, themes or inner philosophy (what Harry Levin famously called "the quixotic principle" [38]). The strongest influence *Quixote* exerted in its afterlife, however, was to be found within the political discourse: starting from the 1800s, intellectuals and commentators saw it as a powerful metaphor of the spiritual and social situation of Spain, embodying the ideal values behind its former imperial success but depicting also its present decadence.

Furthermore, the novel seemed to hold a promise of renewed greatness for the whole Hispanic civilisation as the most representative title in Spanish, the language which was bound to conquer again the world in place of the imperial armies [39]. It comes as little surprise, then, that public admiration towards *Don Quijote* assumed soon the form of a national cult, with the celebrations for the book's third tercentenary (1905) definitively propelling it as seminal text for the Spanish identity: this shift was testified by the pervasiveness of public discourse about the *quijotismo*, which emerged as one of the major cultural features for the nation, and was discussed between others by Ortega y Gasset, Ramón y Cajal, Azorín, Machado, Blasco Ibáñez,

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[35] MANCING, p. 155.

[36] MANCING, p. 157.

[37] Lope de Vega famously remarked that "…ninguno hay tan malo como Cervantes ni tan necio que alabe a *Don Quijote*" ("no [writer] is as as bad as Cervantes or foolish enough to praise *Don Quixote*"). Calderón wrote a comedy, today lost, on the knight-errant's adventures, while Quevedo published the burlesque poem "Testamento de Don Quijote" ("Don Quixote's Last Will", ca. 1615). See Adrián J. SÁEZ, "De Cervantes a Quevedo: testamento y muerte de don Quijote". *La Perinola* 16 (2012), pp. 239-258.

[38] See Harry LEVIN, *The Quixotic Principle: Cervantes and Other Novelists*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.

[39] Henry KAMEN, *Imagining Spain: Historical Myth and National Identity*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, p. 162-164.

Menéndez Pelayo – with Miguel de Unamuno offering a characteristically "anticervantine" reading, according to which the novel's excellency superseded even that of its author [40].

- Molière, *The Misanthrope* (1666, French)

Looking at the number of performances, the sixteenth comedy by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, the self-styled *sieur de Molière*, seems to have done quite well in its debut year: it totalised 34 re-runs while managing to avoid the controversy which surrounded previous works such as *Tartuffe* (1664) and *Don Juan* (1665), both banned by the French government. A comparison with the rest of his corpus, however, changes the perspective: all his other plays were performed more often within his lifetime than *Le Misanthrope* [41], and its box-office takings (on average income per performance) were poor [42]. It seems also the decision to stage it straight at the Palais-Royal theatre, without the usual Versailles preview, proved unsuccessful: the city audience, "used to more farcical and less thoughtful comedies", found the play scarcely interesting, with the attendance starting to swindle after the first two shows; for its part, the Court resented not having seen it in advance, and the dramatic piece was never subsequently acted before Louis XIV [43].

If the audience reaction was somehow cold, the opinion of critics and fellow writers seemed more favourable and soon the play achieved an high standing within Molière's corpus: a couple of years after the playwright's death, for example, his friend Boileau could already epitomise him as "l'auteur du *Misanthrope*" [44]. The play's definitive canonisation, however, came only a couple of centuries later, and was driven mainly by institutional forces: as Ralph Albanese Jr. has shown, the cradle of Molière's long-lasting fortune was the late nineteenth-century French educational system, where a number of ideological and cultural factors – including the rise of nationalism, the political activism of the bourgeoisie, the progressive laicisation and democratisation of the State and the institutionalisation of French as national language – concurred in establishing some classical authors and works, such as *The*

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[40] Pedro LAÍN ENTRALGO, "Quijotismo". *El País*, 13 November 1991 [online]. See also Miguel de UNAMUNO, *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*. Madrid: Austral, 1985.
[41] Fabienne WOLF, *Molière, "Le misanthrope"*. Paris: Editions Bréal, 2003, p. 23.
[42] Jan CLARKE, "The Material Conditions of Molière's Stage", in *The Cambridge Companion to Moliere*, ed. by David Bradby and Andrew Calder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 35-36.
[43] Julia PREVOSTO, *Le Misanthrope de Molière*. [n.p.]: Profil littéraire, 2016, p. 40.
[44] Nicolas BOILEAU, *L'Art poétique* II, 400.

Misanthrope, at the core of the school curriculum [45].

The reasons behind this operation were by and large ideological: the French Third Republic, emerging from the debacle of Sedan, was indeed eager to rebuild social cohesion and shared values among its citizens and literature was seen as integral to this process, insofar as classical authors such as La Fontaine, Racine, Corneille and above all Molière were deemed to embody the bourgeois values of moderation, reason and order the new Republique was to be founded upon. Thus, writers from the *Grand Siécle* were regarded as the "the most authentic teachers of France's moral conscience" [46], and their works as repositories of moral values which ought to be transmitted in all levels of public education; in other words, "literature transformed [...] into a vast programme of moralisation", driven by the "desire of evangelising a culture perceived under the form of a new secular religion" [47].

It is also worth of note that a relevant role in the process was played by professional literary critics, such as Désiré Nisard and Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, whose role at the time was still, in broad strokes, the one described by Bourdieu in "The Field of Cultural Production": acting as spokespersons for the established bourgeois order, they formulated aesthetic judgements which had actual influence in shaping not only the contents of the literary curriculum, but also its teaching strategies [48]. Thus, the academic cult of Molière's works, testified also by intellectual enterprises such as *Le Moliériste* magazine (1879-89), was able to evolve into a mass phenomenon, insofar as extensive classroom usage of dramas such as *The Misanthrope* eventually solidified their status as representative texts of French culture.

- Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67, English)

As these first profiles clearly show, the fortune of a book appears often linked to the general reception of its author: although there are some cases, such as the *Quixote*, which follow the inverse path, the general tendency sees individual works pushed by their author's overall renown. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* follows arguably a similar path,

[45] Ralph ALBANESE Jr., "Molière républicain: La réception critique et scolaire de son oeuvre au XIXe siècle", in *Homage to Paul Benichou*, ed. by Sylvie Romanowski and Monique Bilezikian. Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1994, p. 308-9. See also his full-length study, *Molière à l'école républicaine. De la critique universitaire aux manuels scolaires (1870-1914)*. Saratoga, CA: ANMA Libri, 1992.

[46] Ralph ALBANESE Jr., "Molière and the Teaching of Frenchness: *Les Femmes Savantes* as a Case Study", in *The Cambridge Companion to Moliere*, p. 152.

[47] ALBANESE, "Molière républicain", p. 310, trans. mine.

[48] ALBANESE, p. 311. On Sainte-Beuve's role, in particular, see Antoine COMPAGNON, "Sainte-Beuve and the Canon." *MLN* 110, 5 (1995), pp. 1188–99, and Harold WATSON, "Sainte Beuve's Molière: A Romantic Hamlet". *The French Review* 38, 5 (1965), pp. 606–618.

insofar as it represents a case study on how literary recognition for a book could be built, propelled and consolidated by the first-hand efforts of its writer. The debut novel of a relatively obscure York clergyman, suffering an early editorial rejection and ultimately published at the author's expense, *Tristram Shandy* would have probably been little more than a modest success if Laurence Sterne had not taken the matter into his hands, travelling to London to promote its work and transforming it, through a deft marketing strategy, into a commercial and critical hit.

Instrumental to his goal was the choice of adopting the mechanism of serialisation for the book, whose nine volumes were released in five instalments from 1759 to 1767: as Keymer notes, Sterne's determination to "maximise his profile and sales among the broadest possible constituency of readers" meant he progressively adapted the contents of newer volumes "to the shifting trends of its ongoing cultural moment", including topics relevant to contemporary audiences and even exploiting the Grub Street hacks which *Tristram Shandy* spawned [49]. Furthermore, he was aware that mid-eighteenth-century audiences "were increasingly interested in authors as 'personalities' rather than simply as artistic makers" [50] and his public appearances had therefore to be staged carefully in order to maximise mediatic attention he received; at the same time, however, he knew he still needed an official sanction by recognised tastemakers in order to achieve lasting celebrity.

Sterne was able to balance the two instances successfully: while on one side he built a public persona modelled on the novel characters of Yorick and Tristram, which gained him prompt visibility, he pursued on the other "more traditional authorial patterns – seeking proper introductions, courting aristocratic patrons, collecting subscriptions, being presented at court, and so on" [51]. His quest for highbrow recognition, remarkably, did not entail approaching literary heavyweights such as Dr Johnson or Richardson: he sought instead the support of actor David Garrick, being aware that for a late bloomer like him (*Tristram Shandy* was published almost in his fifties) the shortest path to success was in association with the theatrical world, where careers could be built and maintained out of a single success, as in the case of Garrick himself [52].

If this short-term strategy proved successful, securing him financial success and job opportunities, further reception, which was unmanaged by Sterne, seemed less enthusiastic.

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[49] Thomas KEYMER, "Introduction", in *Laurence Sterne's 'Tristram Shandy': A Casebook*, ed. by Thomas Keymer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 8.

[50] Peter BRIGGS, "Laurence Sterne and Literary Celebrity in 1760", in *Laurence Sterne's 'Tristram Shandy': A Casebook*, p. 86.

[51] BRIGGS, p. 98.

[52] Garrick quickly rose to theatrical fame through his 1741 portrayal of the title role in Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

His second novel, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), overshadowed the first both among critics and general public, becoming "in almost all countries the more popular and more frequently translated novel of Sterne's, though (or precisely because) it was formally less innovative" than *Tristram Shandy* [53]; at the same time, his choice to disregard the judgement of contemporary literati made Samuel Johnson, the most relevant canon-maker of his age, to pronounce his name soon to be forgotten [54].

The afterlife of *Tristram Shandy*, eventually, followed a path quite common among books which owed their first canonisation more to commercial success than to aesthetic praise: as the text lost its topicality and number of readers dwindled, it begun conversely to acquire more prestige among intellectuals; notably, there was a surge of appreciation especially among foreign intellectuals, such as Schopenhauer and Goethe, which justifies Voogd's and Neubauer's remark that Sterne "has always fared much better outside England" [55]. Thus, the novel gradually became a treat for connoisseurs and then an object of academic interest; its early canonisation, however, remained firmly rooted in its popular success, testified not only by impressive sales figures but also by an enduring impact on the English vocabulary [56].

- ## Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818, English)

As the example of *Tristram Shandy* shows, the author's active cooperation in the promotion of his works is often instrumental in propelling them to literary renown and thus planting the first seeds of long-lasting canonicity. While Sterne was indeed able, through his deft marketing strategies, to boost his book's commercial performances, Mary Shelley (née Godwin) failed to achieve the same result: it has been argued, indeed, that the absence from London of the writer and her husband, the renowned poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (they went to live in Italy, and the widowed Mary would return in England only five years later), caused her Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* to go largely unnoticed [57]. Lacking any editorial or authorial publicity puff, the book's early reception was favourable but not

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[53] Peter de VOOGD and John NEUBAUER, "Introduction: Sterne Crosses the Channel", in *The Reception of Laurence Sterne in Europe*, ed. by Peter de Voogd and John Neubauer. London and New York: Continuum, 2006, p. 4.

[54] In 1776, eight years after the novel's last instalment, he commented its waning success as follows: "Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last" (James BOSWELL, *Life of Johnson*, ed. by R. W. Chapman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970 [1791], p. 696).

[55] VOOGD and NEUBAUER, p. 6.

[56] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Sterne's novel was indeed responsible for introducing into English the words "shandean" and "cervantic".

[57] Charles E. ROBINSON, "Frankenstein: Its Composition and Publication", in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, ed. by Andrew Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 19.

enthusiastic: the anonymously published piece garnered some positive reviews, notably from Walter Scott in the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, but it failed to sell out the first 500 copies and was not immediately reprinted.

Eventually, the turning point in *Frankenstein*'s reception was represented by Richard Brinsley Peake's decision to adapt it for theatre: his *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823) – later followed by Henry M. Milner's *The Man and The Monster* (1826) – was extremely popular, to the point that William Godwin advised his daughter to ride the wave and have a new edition published (1823), this time with her name on the cover. In this early phase, then, *Frankenstein*'s success did depend mostly on these "notorious retellings, brought to public attention not only by the stage productions but by the righteous outcry against them" [58]; only with the third and revised edition (1831) the focus shifted again on the actual novel, which benefitted from the inclusion in Bentley and Colburn's 'Standard Novels', a series which aimed at reprinting 'significant' English literary works in an inexpensive, one-volume format. As a consequence, the number of copies available to the public rose dramatically, and several reprints ensued [59]: the novel was eventually starting to come into its own.

Although copyright issues prevented new editions until the beginning of the twentieth century, the case for canonical status of *Frankenstein* was already under way: when the book resurfaced, it was directly into editorial series which boasted to offer selections of allegedly 'canonical works', such as 'The Ideal Library', 'Everyman's Library', or the 'Gem Classics'. The bottom line was, as Hitchcock notes, that publishers "wanted to convince the reading public that *Frankenstein* belonged in everyone's library" and "was a classic", although "its literary merit", at least from a scholarly point of view, "was still in question" [60]. While these efforts at early canonisation were clearly driven by the desire to make the maximum profit out of books no longer copyrighted, though, they also revealed how editors acknowledged *Frankenstein* as an already established cultural milestone and therefore expected it to sell well.

As cultural histories such as Hitchcock's underline, indeed, Shelley's literary creation had by the time already escaped the boundaries of genre fiction and become a pop phenomenon, routinely referenced in public discourse and featured in the arts; as in its early reception, however, *Frankenstein*'s enduring fame seemed to keep depending more on its ongoing adaptations (with the first film appearing as early as 1910) than on the actual book, which maintained nonetheless a sizeable readership and later experienced a consistent

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[58] Susan T. HITCHCOCK, *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*. New York: Norton, 2007, p. 88.
[59] ROBINSON, p. 21.
[60] HITCHCOCK, p. 116.

academic reappraisal.

- ## Lev Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (1869, Russian)

As customary at the time for long prose works, Tolstoy's novel first appeared as a serial, which was published, under the title *The Year 1805*, in the pages of the literary journal *Russian Messenger* (1865-66); later, the writer decided to take matters in his own hands, changing the title to *War and Peace* (*Vojna i mir*, Война и мир), making some substantial rewriting and directly overseeing its multi-volume publication (1867-69). These troubled publishing circumstances, in fact, contributed to diversify the book's reception: while its early instalments were met by lukewarm responses, the definitive version was a wild success [61] among readers, as testified by the unusual inflation of its selling prices [62].

Positive market feedback, however, was somehow sobered by negative comments from established literature professionals; as Knowles summarises, "[a]lthough there was some praise, the majority of the critics were more or less abusive, more or less denigratory" [63]. More than from aesthetic disagreements, the detractors were moved mostly by political aims: if the right criticised Tolstoy's unflattering view of national myths, the radical left complained about the elitism and conservativism of his narrative choices. For his part, the author paid little attention to these condemnations, but he did care for the opinion of fellow writers, which was in turn extremely positive: symbolical capital, in the form of the praises by Goncharov, Turgenev, Leskov and Dostoyevsky, quickly piled up together with financial revenues, strongly channelling the book towards canonicity.

Although mainly pushed by achieved aesthetic and commercial recognition, *War and Peace* eventually came also to gain also some institutional consecration, mainly in conjunction with the rise of Tolstoy's public persona to nationwide prominence – at the time of his death, in 1910, he was arguably "the most famous man in Russia" and its "greatest moral authority", with a large international following [64]. Given his public relevance, it came as little surprise that, one decade later, the Bolshevik government tried to exploit his figure and assimilate him, together with his literary works, into their new ideology: Lenin was both a critic and admirer of Tolstoy

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[61] Henri Troyat, *Tolstoy*, trans. by Nancy Amphoux. New York: Grove, 2001 [1965], p. 299.

[62] Lev Sobolev, "*War and Peace* as Read by Contemporaries". *Russian Studies in Literature* 45, 4 (2009), p. 9.

[63] Anthony V. Knowles, "Tolstoy's Literary Reputation before 'War and Peace' ". *The Modern Language Review* 72, 3 (1977), p. 627.

[64] Rosamund Bartlett, *Tolstoy: A Russian Life*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011, p. 5. On Tolstoy's public role see also Michael Denner, " 'Be not afraid of greatness…': Leo Tolstoy and Celebrity". *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42 (2009), pp. 614-45.

and supported the ambitious project of realising a collected edition of his writings, which began, despite Stalin's scarce support, at the author's centenary (1928) [65]. The Second World War, by its part, helped further cement the national role of *War and Peace*, which was widely read by soldiers in the battlefields and provided an interpretative lens through which war events could be read [66].

- <u>George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860, English)</u>

Taking advantage of the huge success of *Adam Bede* (1859), Eliot's first novel, *The Mill on the Floss* had a jump start on the market, selling 6,000 copies in the first two months, but sales began quickly to slow down, much to the unsatisfaction of publishers Blackwood & Sons [67]. At the same time, critical appreciation from literary magazines was "decidedly more guarded" [68] than the lavish one reserved to the previous work, especially because it had become known, by the time, that 'George Eliot' was just a pen name for a woman, Mary Ann Evans, whose public image was not an example of Victorian respectability (she lived with a married man, the philosopher George Henry Lewes, and translated heterodox German writings by Feuerbach and D. Strauss).

Even though *The Mill on the Floss* failed to achieve the same widespread popularity of *Adam Bede* – a feature which will return frequently throughout Eliot's career, leaving the impression she always lived off the loyal readership and the critical attention she acquired with her debut novel [69] – it was nonetheless, at least in broad terms, well-received both by critics and readers. Furthermore, as Wheeler notes, the novel's mild contents, consisting mainly of scenes of rural provincial life, made it popular in educational contexts, such as the Sunday schools, where it was awarded as a prize for attendance and generally thought to be suited for thirteen-year-olds [70].

After Eliot's death, however, her entire work came under stricter scrutiny for its supposed cold didacticism – an indictment which the austere, hagiographical biography by her

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[65] BARTLETT, p. 425 ff. On Lenin's intellectual relation with Tolstoy see Roland BOER, "Lenin on Tolstoy: Between Imaginary Resolution and Revolutionary Christian Communism". *Science & Society* 78, 1 (2014), pp. 41-60.
[66] Jochen HELLBECK, "War and Peace for the Twentieth Century". *Raritan* 26, 4 (2007), p. 24.
[67] David CARROLL, "Introduction", in *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by David Carroll. London and New York: Routledge, 1971, p. 12.
[68] James E. ADAMS, "The Reception of George Eliot", in *A Companion to George Eliot*, ed by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 221.
[69] John RIGNALL, "Reception", in *The Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by John Rignall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 326.
[70] Helen WHEELER, *"The Mill on the Floss" by George Eliot*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 84.

husband John Cross (1885) did little to dispel. Disliked by critics and little read by the general public, Eliot's novels, including *The Mill on the Floss*, experienced a severe backlash in terms of public esteem, to the point that, some fifty years later, literary critic David Cecil could say that "her reputation has sustained a more catastrophic slump than that of any of her contemporaries", and that "[i]t is not just that she is not read, that her books stand on the shelves unopened", but "[i]f people do read her they do not enjoy her" [71]. After the second World War, however, the author began to experience a critical reappraisal which eventually ushered her definitive canonisation: prefigured by the positive commentary by modernists writers such as Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust, it found indeed its strongest expression in F. R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition* (1948), a classic in its own among canon studies, which advocated a place for Eliot among the four greatest English novelists (the others being Austen, James and Conrad) and thus revamped scholar interest in her books.

- <u>Anton Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya* (1899, Russian)</u>

As already shown with Molière, any analysis of the reception of dramatical pieces would be incomplete without taking into account the material context of their early performances: factors such as publicity, location or staging, however temporary, are indeed crucial not only in granting short-term success but also in building momentum for a long-lasting cultural presence which may eventually prelude to the work's canonisation. From this perspective, the circumstances of the early reception of Chekhov's *Dyadya Vanya* (Дядя Ваня) were quite unfavourable: on one side, a print version of the pièce has been circulating since 1897, to negative reviews by critics, while on the other many knew it was a reworking of *The Wood Demon* (1889), an earlier drama whose glaring failure had kept the playwright away from the scenes for almost a decade [72]. Its first productions, however, seemed well-received by the public of the provinces; widespread scepticism in St. Petersburg and Moscow, instead, prompted the Imperial Theatres committee to request the playwright several revisions and cuts to the text before allowing the staging [73].

Upon Chekhov's refusal the production was entrusted to the recently established Moscow Art Theatre (MAT), which pioneered a modern, naturalistic style of acting opposed to

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[71] David CECIL, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*, London: Constable, 1934, p. 318.
[72] Donald RAYFIELD, *Understanding Chekhov: a critical study of Chekhov's prose and drama.* Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999, p. 177.
[73] RAYFIELD, p. 178.

the traditional Russian melodrama [74]; this choice proved to pivotal for *Uncle Vanya*'s success, insofar as the opening, on the 26th of October, was an outstanding triumph and was followed by twenty-five more performances in that season [75]. It was the collaboration with the MAT, actually, which made of Chekhov a household name among the general public; previously, he had received mostly intellectual recognition, testified by the 1888 Pushkin prize and the praise from Tolstoy and Gorky [76]. Furthermore, while his reputation had until then rested more on his collection of short stories than on his theatrical work, the MAT productions contributed to highlight his achievements also as playwright: particularly effective, to this aim, was the Western *tournée* the Muscovite theatre did in the 1920s, which is traditionally credited for establishing *Uncle Vanya* and the rest of Chekhov's dramas at the core of the international dramatic repertoire [77].

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899, English)

Opening as a contribution to the thousandth issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, where it was serialised in three instalments, *Heart of Darkness* attracted at first little attention: friends of Conrad did appreciate it, but it was "hardly a popular success" [78]. Later, when it got published in book form, it was sandwiched between two other short stories, "Youth" and "The End of the Tether", and not even mentioned in the title. One may infer from this editorial choice that Conrad himself considered it a minor work, and thus it was received by critics and reviewers; even though they gradually became aware of its own importance [79], the tale remained underrated, both critically and commercially, until the post-war period, when it was rediscovered and quickly rose, in Knowles' words, to be "the writer's masterwork, a seminal modern classic and a touchstone of contemporary intellectual and cultural practices" [80].

The main drive for this rapid canonisation of *Heart of Darkness* was, apparently, its classroom usage: especially in the North American educational context, where the twentieth-century spread of general education programs required to individuate 'great books' to use as

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[74] Tatiana SHAKH-AZIZOVA, "Chekhov on the Russian Stage," in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, ed. by Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 165.

[75] Donald RAYFIELD, *Anton Chekhov: A Life*. New York: Henry Holt, 1998, p. 500.

[76] James N. LOEHLIN, *The Cambridge introduction to Chekhov*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 163.

[77] LOEHLIN, p. 167.

[78] Gene M. MOORE, "Introduction", in *Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness": A Casebook*, ed. by Gene M. Moore. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 4.

[79] Owen KNOWLES, "Introduction", in Joseph Conrad, *Youth, Heart of Darkness, The End of the Tether*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. lvi.

[80] KNOWLES, p. lxiii.

teaching material, it was widely employed both in high schools and universities, "finding its way with astonishing regularity into introductory, literary historical, genre, and interdisciplinary courses" [81], insofar as the text proved highly suitable for fashionable Freudian, existentialist and New Criticism-inspired readings [82]. By the 1970s, then, its place in the high literary canon seemed already undisputable, and the wave of criticism by Marxists, feminist and above all post-colonial theorists, such as Chinua Achebe, failed in promoting a significant revision of its canonical status [83].

While institutional consecration, driven by academic appraisal but put into practice by school curricula, is to be acknowledged as the main source of canonisation for Conrad's novel, one should also not forget the significative role of popular media in consolidating its public presence. A further boost in popularity, indeed, has come from its various adaptations and, above all, from Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam film version, *Apocalypse Now* (1978), whose role in *Heart of Darkness*' reception history is difficult to understate: most critics credit the movie with the effect of "fixing Conrad's text in Western popular culture" [84], i.e. transforming an already canonical high modernist work into a postmodernist product available for mass consumption and thus further boosting its canonical clout.

- Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1900, English)

As already hinted, Conrad's early career was not met with immediate recognition, especially in economic terms: for someone who left his career of seaman, at 38, to pursue the uncertain path of writing without any other stable income, it was quite a serious issue, and the critical praise he received for its first novels, such as *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) was hardly an asset when general public remained mostly indifferent and financial support from publishers ran low. According to Ian Watt, his early difficulties were indeed a textbook example of "the deepening chasm between the highbrow and the mass audience" which many twentieth-century novelists experienced [85] – a phenomenon which may be described, in Bourdieusian terms, as the increasing distance between a restricted audience

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[81] Brian W. Shaffer, "Teach the Conflicts: *Heart of Darkness* in the Classroom". *Conradiana* 24, 3 (1992), p. 163.
[82] Peter E. Firchow, *Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015, p. 3.
[83] Cedric Watts, " 'Heart of Darkness' ", in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. by John H. Stape, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 52-53.
[84] Linda J. Dryden, " 'To Boldly Go': Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' and Popular Culture". *Conradiana* 34, 3 (2002), p. 155.
[85] Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979, p. 128.

of like-minded intellectuals, bestowing aesthetic appreciation but barely sufficient to support authors economically, and a larger audience whose popular taste was at odds with the writers' refined outlooks and yet proved necessary to their livelihood.

Broadly speaking, the first reception of *Lord Jim* fits into this pattern: although it sold quite well [86] – for all his anxieties, Conrad was always able to sustain himself decorously – it was not a bestseller; only in the 1910s, with the serialisation of *Chance* and the Doubleday edition of *'Twixt Land and Sea*, would the author enjoy substantial monetary gains [87]. The true consecration it received, however, came in form of intellectual praise: the novel was hailed by reviewers on newspapers and magazines as Conrad's best work so far and, most pleasing to him, drew comparisons with established authors such as Henry James. In addition to James' own positive comments about the book, they seemed indeed to confer on Conrad "the kind of literary identity he had sought since he began as novelist" [88], i.e. that of a highbrow writer, thus pointing directly to a predominantly aesthetic canonisation.

- Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (1901, English)

When Kipling's Indian novel appeared in book format, in the autumn of 1901, the text had already widely circulated on both sides of the Atlantic, having been already serialised both in the American *McClure's Magazine* and the British *Cassell's Magazine*; the response of early reviewers was positive, with many considering it a masterpiece [89]. Its reputation, however, quickly dwindled together with the author's general approval: from the beginning of the new century "his literary attainments were more and more ignored by critics, or assumed not to exist outside the popular fancy", and even the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907 "did little to reinstate him as a great writer" [90]. Even from a less dramatic perspective, *Kim* seemed indeed to represent a turning point in Kipling's career, wherefrom the assessment of his works changed, and critical acclaim began progressively to run out.

Although part of this decline may be attributed to Kipling's alleged incapacity to produce

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[86] WATT, p. 357.

[87] Norman SHERRY, "Introduction", in *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Norman Sherry. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 2-5.

[88] John BATCHELOR, *Lord Jim*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988, p. 27. While proud of the comparisons with James, Conrad did not comment on the critics' likening of *Lord Jim* to the oeuvre of Robert Luis Stevenson, an author more popular but less prestigious – thus making clear in which field he, at least ideally, intended to position himself.

[89] Patrick BRANTLINGER, "Kim", in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, ed. by Howard J. Booth. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 127.

[90] Roger L. GREEN, "Introduction", in *Kipling: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Roger L. Green. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971, p. 22-23.

any other major works after his forties [91], the main issue was likely represented by his political stances: as time passed, indeed, the author's image as a staunch and uncompromising supporter of British imperialism grew outdated and affected negatively his legacy, pushing him out of syllabuses and curricula and looming over any attempt of critical reappraisal, such as T.S. Eliot's (*A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, 1941), at least until a new surge of interest was ushered by post-colonial studies – with Edward Said, the leading scholar in the field, introducing the 1987 Penguin Classics edition of *Kim*. Political criticisms, at least in the first decades after the writer's death, did however little damage to his readership: as Orwell remarked, "[d]uring five literary generations every enlightened person has despised him, and at the end of that time nine-tenths of those enlightened persons are forgotten and Kipling is in some sense still there" [92].

Actually, Kipling's enduring popularity among readers might be considered the true drive behind his eventual canonisation, insofar as book sales remained consistent throughout most of his career. *Kim* made no exception, and the measure of its success is given by the sum the publisher McClure was willing to pay for the serial rights: if he accepted to fork out for the novel 25,000$ – two hundred times the money he needed in 1895 to buy just one story from the *Jungle Book* series, Kipling's other popular success – it was clearly because he estimated the audience wide enough to make substantial and ongoing profits. Even though this inflationary process was ultimately detrimental to Kipling's popularity in America, which was built first on pirated editions of his earlier tales, and then on inexpensive paperbacks [93], the case of *Kim* still demonstrated how a large public, mostly ignoring the author's political commitments, kept on being fascinated by his work and therefore contributed, across the decades, to ensure its survival, regardless of academic neglect and mounting social criticisms by younger generations [94].

- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927, English)

Upon a first look, commercial success does not seem a likely canonisation source for the book: although *To the Lighthouse* had better market performances than Woolf's previous novels, they were scarcely comparable with her bestsellers *Orlando* (1928), *Flush* (1933) and

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[91] Norman PAGE, *A Kipling Companion*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984, p. xiii. A similar view was already held by Kipling's contemporaries: see e.g. Gordon WILLIAMS, "Rudyard Kipling and His Critics". *The Australian Quarterly* 8, 30 (1936), p. 66.

[92] George ORWELL, "Rudyard Kipling". *Horizon*, February 1942, p. 150 [online].

[93] James D. HART, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1950, p. 197.

[94] David GILMOUR, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling*, 3rd ed. London: Penguin, 2019, p. xii.

The Years (1937) [95]; furthermore, the writer consistently failed to maximise her profits through common devices such as hiring literary agents or agreeing to serialisations in magazines and newspapers [96]. In turn, contemporary critics like Q. R. Leavis already considered her works as belonging to 'highbrow art', a form of literature to which the twentieth-century common readers had allegedly become alienated [97]; to some extent, this impression was shared also by Leonard Woolf, the keeper of her wife's financial records, who also pointed at the later, more popular novels of Virginia as a primer for the reappreciation of her earlier production [98].

At the time of its publication, critical praise for *To the Lighthouse* was unusually sustained; in contrast to "the typically hostile reviews that much of her work received during her lifetime" [99], even longstanding detractors such as Arnold Bennet and F.R. Leavis admitted the novel's excellency. More than critics, however, the real power brokers behind the novel's canonisation were her fellow writers, and in particular the members of the highly influential Bloomsbury group to which Virginia belonged. The warm reception by the likes of Roger Fry, Lytton Strachey and E.M. Forster paved indeed the way for the novel, building for it an attentive and emphatical audience of like-minded intellectuals: as Whitworth underlines, "Woolf's position in the 'intellectual aristocracy', coupled with her father's reputation [100] gave her a network of contacts in the literary world as good as any that an agent could provide" [101].

Aesthetic recognition translated, eventually, in some degree of institutional attention, insofar as *To the Lighthouse* soon entered university curricula as a representative texts of Modernism: as early as in the Thirties, indeed, it was preserved and disseminated in the syllabi of English literature courses both in the United Kingdom and abroad [102], and its college popularity remained high also in the following decades, where the book lent itself readily to close reading and formalist and structuralist analyses [103]. The token of its definitive academic

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[95] Robin MAJUMDAR and Allen MCLAURIN, "Introduction", in *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, p. 5.

[96] Michael H. WHITWORTH, *Virginia Woolf*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 79-80.

[97] "The novels are in fact highbrow art. [...] *To the Lighthouse* is not a popular novel (though it has already taken its place as an important one), and it is necessary to enquire why the conditions of the age have made it inaccessible to a public whose ancestors have been competent readers of Sterne and Nashe (Queenie D. LEAVIS, *Fiction and the Reading Public*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1932, p. 223, quoted in MAJUMDAR and MCLAURIN, p. 6).

[98] "[...] up to 1928 Virginia, although widely recognized as an important novelist, was read by a small public. [...] she had to write a bad book and two not very serious books before her best serious novels were widely understood and appreciated" (Leonard WOOLF, *Downhill All the Way*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967, p. 147, quoted in MAJUMDAR and MCLAURIN, p. 6-7)

[99] Jean MILLS, "*To the Lighthouse*: The Critical Heritage," in *The Cambridge Companion to 'To The Lighthouse'*, ed. by Allison Pease. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 160.

[100] She was the daughter of the eminent Victorian critic and author Leslie Stephen (1832-1904).

[101] WHITWORTH, p. 80.

[102] Robin MAJUMDAR and Allen MCLAURIN, p. 24.

[103] Raphaël INGELBIEN, "Intertextuality, Critical Politics and the Modernist Canon: The Case of Virginia Woolf". *Paragraph* 22, 3 (1999), p. 282.

consecration had come, however, already in 1946, when Erich Auerbach included a chapter on *To the Lighthouse* in his monumental survey of Western literature, *Mimesis:* as Jane Goldman argues, the essay played a pivotal role in "ensuring Woolf's place on most academic reading lists [...] during the post-war years of canon-making" and "securing the reputation of *To the Lighthouse* as a (if not *the*) major twentieth-century work of fiction" [104].

- ### Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf* (1927, German)

Twentieth-century literature had few authors with such a troubled reception history as Herman Hesse: it is well-know, indeed, that the career of the German-Swiss author continuously oscillated between periods of high public esteem and years of disregard and criticism. Within this pattern, *Der Steppenwolf* marked a moment in which the tide had begun to turn against the writer: the positive echo of *Demian* (1919), which had struck responsive chords among the post-war youth in search of spiritual orientation, had waned, while the resurgent German nationalism, both in the academia and in the press, had begun to attack Hesse for his pacifist stance. In addition to this criticism, Hesse's support of Jewish writers like Franz Kafka and Stefan Zweig helped turning the Nazi regime against him, to the point that by the late 1930s his works had gradually disappeared from bookdealers' shelves, publishers' catalogues and intellectual debates within the Reich [105].

The unfavourable political climate, however, was not the only reason behind the book's lukewarm reception (it was even refused serialisation [106]): while the author was criticised for "being a poor patriot", he was also indicted as "a poor writer" and "a man without morals", thus targeting also its style and themes [107]. Even though these criticisms eventually subsided, Hesse's literary reputation remained far from settled; around the turn of the twentieth century, he rose again to nationwide prominence, mainly as a consequence his Nobel prize (1946), but after the late 1950s he was marginalised and *Der Steppenwolf* failed to secure a solid place in the post-war canon, dominated by "socio-politically committed authors such as Bertolt Brecht, Günther

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[104] Jane GOLDMAN, *Virginia Woolf: 'To the Lighthouse', 'The Waves'*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 35. See also Erich AUERBACH, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*. Bern: A. Francke, 1946, pp. 467-93. (= chapter XIX, "Der braune Strumpf").

[105] Rudolf KOESTER, "Terminal Sanctity or Benign Banality: The Critical Controversy Surrounding Hermann Hesse". *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association* 27, 2 (1973), p. 60.

[106] Volker MICHELS, " ,Teils ausgelacht, teils angespuckt, teils den sentimentalen Leserkreisen überlassen'. Zur Hermann Hesse-Rezeption in Deutschland", in *Hermann Hesse und die literarische Moderne: Kulturwissenschaftliche Facetten einer literarischen Konstante im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by. Andreas Solbach. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004, p. 35.

[107] Joseph MILECK, *Herman Hesse: Life and Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, p. 182.

Grass and Peter Weiss" [108].

Quite surprisingly, however, Hesse's novel found its path to canonicity on the other side of the Atlantic, where his oeuvre had, until then, elicited scarce response from readers and critics. From the 1960s, however, the American youth participating in hippie counterculture and psychedelic movements began to take his books as inspirational texts and read them with relentless enthusiasm; the extent of their veneration for Hesse was such that some scholar could comment, "Timothy Leary seems to have been more powerful in the cause of Hesse than the Nobel prize committee" [109]. Accordingly, *Der Steppenwolf*, which Leary indicated as his favourite novel, gained in the USA the status of cult book and a resonance among young readers comparable, in some respects, to the one Goethe's *Werther* had in eighteenth-century Europe [110]; as a consequence, Hesse's corpus began also to attract also significant critical and academical attention [111]. Eventually, the echo of this success reached back to the Continent, sparking a commercial revival also in the 1970s Germanies [112]; by the time, however, the popular American reappraisal had already done enough to consolidate the writer's stance within the canon, in spite of the persisting intellectual disregard within German intellectual circles.

- ## Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929, German)

When Remarque's war novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* appeared, first as a serial in the *Vossischen Zeitung* (from the 10th of November to the 9th of December 1928), and then in book form by the *Propyläen* imprint (in January 1929), it was a huge commercial success: within three months it sold an excess of half a million copies and was translated in fourteen languages, acquiring international renown and breathing new life into the sluggish German book trade [113]. It was met with enthusiastic reactions by the press but also by some explicit criticism, which

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[108] MILECK, p. 365.

[109] Egon SCHWARZ, "Hermann Hesse, the American Youth Movement, and Problems of Literary Evaluation." *PMLA* 85, 5 (1970), p. 986. See also Theodore ZIOLKOWSKI, "Saint Hesse among the Hippies". *American-German Review* 35, 2 (1969), pp. 19-23. Timothy Leary (1920-1996) was an American psychologist and writer, and one of the most prominent figures in the 1960s hippie counterculture.

[110] Martin SWALES, "*Der Steppenwolf*", in *A Companion to the Works of Hermann Hesse*, ed. by Ingo Cornils. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009, p. 185.

[111] Joseph MILECK, "Trends in Literary Reception: The Hesse Boom". *The German Quarterly* 51, 3 (1978), p. 348.

[112] Egon SCHWARZ, "Ein Fall globaler Rezeption: Hermann Hesse im Wandel der Zeiten". *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 4, 15 (1974), p. 55. Schwartz also offers a useful analysis of the social groups involved in the early German and later American reception of Hesse (pp. 56-58).

[113] Modris EKSTEINS, "*All Quiet on the Western Front* and the Fate of a War". *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, 2 (1980), p. 353.

took the form of several polemical or parodical pamphlets – as Bance notes, "all grist to the publicity mill" [114]. Hollywood was also quick to exploit the phenomenon: Lewis Milestone's film version, released in May 1930, was popular both in Europe and America, winning two Academy Awards and contributing to the novel's permanence under the spotlight.

Scholars agree a essential role in making *Im Westen nichts Neues* "the best known and most widely read German novel of the twentieth century" [115] was played by its publishing house, the Ullstein Verlag; the Berlin-based company accepted to publish the manuscript after it was rejected by leading editor S. Fischer and was responsible for orchestrating a sales campaign unprecedented at the time, which included the dissemination of a large number of review copies and massive public advertisement. According to Schneider, it seems possible to explain Ullstein's unusual marketing effort with political calculations: the publisher intended to use the novel to promote pacifism as a viable alternative to the aggressive revisionism and nationalism which was gaining momentum in the Weimar Republic. Therefore, the text was reviewed, with the Remarque's agreement and cooperation, in order to present it more as a persuasive autobiographical testimony rather than mere fiction; explicitly proposing it as a canonical text for war literature and beyond,

> Ullstein and Remarque aimed for nothing less than to install *Im Westen nichts Neues* as a national monument for the First World War, a memorial which would describe the war as a disillusioning experience for millions of veterans, who lacked any sense of purpose in fighting, and who found that it served only to destroy civilized values. [116]

In this context, economic success was ostensibly less important than influencing public war discourse, but the book's popularity certainly helped to convey its message with greater resonance. It is worth noting that, in the short run, critics did indeed accept the interpretative framework set by the Ullstein campaign, assuming the novel as a factual representation of the war experience, but the text ultimately itself failed in changing the already cemented image of the Great War, by the end of 1930 conservative critics were able to gain the upper hand, branding the book both as a historical fake and a propaganda piece written by someone who

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[114] Alan F. BANCE, "*Im Westen Nichts Neues*: A Bestseller in Context". *The Modern Language Review* 72, 2 (1977), p. 360.

[115] Brian MURDOCH, *The Novels of Erich Maria Remarque*: *Sparks of Life*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006, p. 2.

[116] Thomas F. SCHNEIDER, "The Truth about the War Finally". *Journalism Studies* 17, 4 (2016), p. 495. The article draws its material from Schneider's earlier full-length study, *Erich Maria Remarques Roman »Im Westen nichts Neues«: Text, Edition, Entstehung, Distribution und Rezeption (1928–1930)*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004, esp. pp. 285-408.

had actually never been in the trenches [117]. Despite this ideological failure, and although *Im Westen nicht Neues*' public prominence quickly spiralled down in correspondence with the rise of Nazism (Milestone's film adaptation was banned as early as in 1930, and Remarque's writing were among those publicly burned in 1933, before being fully censored in the Third Reich), it seems however its bestseller status was enough to guarantee its survival and, after the war, its definitive canonisation: regardless of the alleged aesthetic unworthiness some critics attributed to it [118], the novel's enduring presence on the shelves up to the twenty-first century represented the strongest argument for its entry into canon.

- Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth* (1931, English)

According to contemporary sources, Buck's Chinese novel was a huge popular success: benefitting from the inclusion in the Book-of-the-Month Club program, the book sat for two years at the top of the American bestsellers' list, received extremely positive reviews from the newspapers and was subsequently translated in more than 30 languages. Its celebrity status was further boosted by several adaptations in visual media, which were instrumental in keeping the novel under the spotlight: in particular, Franklin's 1937 film, for whose rights Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer paid Buck an unprecedented large fee, attracted large crowds across the globe and contributed to reinforce the popularity of its source[119]. Eventually, its clout was such that scholars argued the novel had a strong impact even on the perception of Chinese people by Americans, shifting sympathies and eventually building public support for China in its war with Japan [120].

While *The Good Earth* collected plenty of popular recognition, however, the lack of peer esteem towards Buck was also pointed, insofar as intellectuals were used to chastise her oeuvre as too simple, moralistic and didactic; when the novelist, in 1938, was the first American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Stockholm Academy's decision was heavily criticised by fellow writers such as Faulkner and Frost, with the second disparagingly

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[117] SCHNEIDER, pp. 497-98.
[118] Brian MURDOCH, "Introduction", in Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*. London: Methuen, 1984, pp. 1-2. It is telling that even a Remarque scholar such as Alan Bance would assert, before discussing the book, that "[n]o one would want to claim for the novel a place in the ranks of *first-class* literature" (p. 490, emphasis mine).
[119] Peter CONN, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 141 and 192.
[120] Sheila MELVIN, "Pearl's Great Price". *Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 2006, p. 27. On Buck's extraordinary impact on American perception of the Chinese see Harold R. ISAACS, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India*. New York: John Day, 1958, pp. 155-58.

commenting: "if she can get it, anybody can" [121]. The heyday of Buck's popularity, however, was short-lived: for fifty years, from the 1940s to the 1990s, she experienced a huge fall in critical approval and scholarly interest [122], despite keeping publishing a large deal of fiction and non-fiction works.

Furthermore, her criticism of all nationalisms [123] prompted negative responses from institutional subjects on both sides of the Pacific: US Senator McCarthy wanted to ban her books and accused her of being pro-communism, while PRC officials charged her of misrepresenting Chinese civilisation and of 'cultural imperialism' [124]. Lacking both academic and institutional recognition, *The Good Earth* failed to be integrated in the mechanisms of school reproduction; although the novel did not make it to university syllabi, however, it often resurfaced, quite surprisingly, in high school reading lists [125]. The main factor behind its survival, nonetheless, remained the steady course of its sales performances; its original bestseller status, coupled with its long-term presence in the market, made the strongest case for the novel's canonisation, at least until modern scholarly reassessment joined in providing some degree of intellectual acknowledgement.

- Henry Green, *Loving* (1945, English)

If Bourdieu, in the "Field of Art Production", had used twentieth-century British literature as his case study, he could have not probably found a better example of his 'field-specific' or 'artistic' consecration than the parable of Henry Green (pen name for the British industrialist Henry Yorke); the most common description of this author, indeed, has always been that a "writer's writer", i.e. a writer who finds his elective public (only) among other authors. It is impressive, indeed, to review the list of Green's admirers during his heyday, between the 1940s and the 1950s, which ranged from Modernist heavyweights such as T.S. Eliot to younger novelists such as Evelyn Waugh, Christopher Isherwood, Anthony Burgess or W.H. Auden, which proclaimed him to be the best English novelist alive [126].

In line with Bourdieu's predictions, however, this wealth of symbolic capital never

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[121] Quoted in James C. THOMSON, "The Day Pearl Buck and the Nobel Committee Shocked the World". *Washington Post*, 22 December 1988 [online].
[122] Ann W. ENGAR, "Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973)", in *American Women Writers, 1900-1945: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. by Laurie Champion. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000, p. 58.
[123] See Qian SUOQIAO, "Pearl S. Buck as cosmopolitan critic". *Comparative American Studies* 3, 2 (2005), pp. 153-72.
[124] Andrew J. FALK, *Upstaging the Cold War: American Dissent and Cultural Diplomacy, 1940-1960*. Amherst, MA and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010, p. 194; THOMSON [online].
[125] MELVIN, p. 29.
[126] Nick SHEPLEY, *Henry Green: Class, Style and the Everyday*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 7.

morphed into capital of other sorts, such as commercial success or public recognition. During his lifetime none of his novels sold more than 10,000 copies, and even after his death efforts to popularise his work fell largely flat: despite John Updike's passionate advocacy [127], attested also by multiple introductions to the British author's books, Green's opus was seldom reprinted, with some of his works being utterly neglected. Similarly, academic interest in Green remained low: Frank Kermode's inclusion of Green among the subjects of his 1978-78 Norton lectures at Harvard, beside the likes of *Ulysses* and the Gospels, failed to make it fashionable among scholars, and the trend seems to have begun to turn only in the last twenty years [128].

The case of *Loving*, often cited as Green's *chef d'œuvre*, is in this sense exemplary. Already from its publication context – the prestigious Hogarth Press, led at the time by Leonard Woolf and John Lehmann – it was indeed clear it was not intended for mass audience; despite enjoying at first a minor success and briefly entering US best-sellers lists in the 1940s [129], the book knew indeed changing fortunes, and in its most remarkable reissue (1978) it appeared together with two earlier works, *Living* (1929) and *Party-Going* (1939), as a sort of filler in a larger collection [130]. As with its early reception, sales remained low also at the end of the century, while praise continued to come, as common for all Greene's works, "from practising writers", such as Sebastian Faulks, "rather than literary critics" [131] – with the notable exception of the editors of *TIME's Best 100 English-language Novels* (2010), whose picking up of *Loving* contributed to reigniting the debate on the book's merits.

- Eugene O'Neill, *The Iceman Cometh* (1946, English)

As with Chekov's *Uncle Vanya*, some commentary on the context of *The Iceman Cometh*'s opening may lend useful clues about its subsequent canonisation, especially if one considers that the play marked O'Neill return to theatre and Broadway after a ten-year hiatus, during which, in spite of receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature (1936), his public prominence had dwindled and his works were not often restaged. It is understandable, then, that debut at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York was concocted as "a stellar event, […] surrounded by secrecy"

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[127] See e.g. John UPDIKE, "Saint of the Mundane". *The New York Review of Books*, 18 May 1978 [online].
[128] Leo ROBSON, "The Novelist of Human Unknowability". *The New Yorker*, 10 October 2016 [online]. Kermode's lectures were eventually collected in *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.
[129] David LODGE, *The Practice of Writing*. London: Vintage, 2011, p. 113.
[130] Lorin STEIN, "Introduction", in Henry Green, *Loving*. London: The Folio Society, 2013, p. 8.
[131] Patrick MACDERMOTT, *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical: A Reading of the Novels of Henry Green Through the Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2009, p. 5.

attracting great expectations both from public and critics; furthermore, in an uncommon and potentially risky move, the work's publication in print was held back until the première, effectively entrusting its immediate – and decisive – reception to Eddie Dowling's stage production [133].

According to sources, however, audience response was not exalting: the play ended up running for 136 performances, a number in line with other major O'Neill works but a far cry from its main commercial successes, *Strange Interlude* (426 runs) and *Ah, Wilderness!* (nearly 300) [134], while critical assessments were mostly positive but raised some doubts on the quality of the script and its length. In overall, *The Iceman Cometh* performed at least to an expected level, but it seems it failed to restore O'Neill's former role as the foremost American dramatist; in fact, Miller argues, it was just a "short-lived glare of publicity" [135] before the conclusion of the playwright's career, marked by the failure of his last piece, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1947).

The case for the canonicity of *The Iceman Cometh* was in fact posthumously made by the 1956 revival at the *Circle in the Square Theatre*, directed by José Quintero: rescuing the work from the faint praise it extolled in its first production, this new enactment was hugely successful both with critics and public, now perhaps more responsive to the work's troubling themes [136]: according to Hawley, it was "pivotal […] in the scholarly revaluation of the play", while totalising also had the longest run of any O'Neill play ever (565 performances). The acclaim gathered was such that even a third notable production, which debuted in 1973 mixed reviews, seemed unable to modify the play's already consolidated status as part and parcel of the American canonical heritage: by that date, "O'Neill's play had gained enough of a reputation as a classic to survive even a mediocre production" [137].

- Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *The Makioka Sisters* (1946-48, Japanese)

As outlined in the introductory remarks, the inclusion of twentieth-century non-Western works within the 'Western canon' may still be debatable, but finds some justification

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[132] William R. REARDON, "O'Neill Since World War II: Critical Reception in New York". *Modern Drama* 10, 3 (1967), p. 289.

[133] William HAWLEY, "*The Iceman Cometh* and The Critics--1946, 1956, 1973". *Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 9, 3 (1985), [online].

[134] Brenda MURPHY and George MONTEIRO, "Chronology", in *Eugene O'Neill Remembered*, ed. by Brenda Murphy and George Monteiro. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2016, pp. xvii-xviii.

[135] Jordan Y. MILLER, "The Georgia Plays of Eugene O'Neill". *The Georgia Review* 12, 3 (1958), p. 279.

[136] Normand BERLIN, "The Late Plays," in *The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*, ed. by Michael Manheim. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 85-86.

[137] HAWLEY.

in the world-scale literature has assumed in the last century; therefore, it should not come as a surprise the sampling of Tanizaki's work, the only entry from the Far East in the case study list. The author's credentials, by the way, are impressive: often quoted as the greatest Japanese modern writer, he was acknowledged already during his lifetime as a leading intellectual both in his home country, where he received all types of official consecration [138], and abroad; to cite the most visible tokens of his international recognition, he was shortlisted for the Nobel (1964) and was inducted, the first Japanese to receive this honour, into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

His major novel, *Sasameyuki (*細雪, roughly meaning "light snow", but translated in English as *The Makioka Sisters*), is often cited as instrumental in propelling the author's rise to fame, but its early reception was in fact quite troubled. The context of its first serialisation, which took place from 1943 in the prestigious cultural magazine *Chūō Kōron*, was indeed unfavourable: government censors found the work – a family epic centred on the lives of the eponymous Osaka sisters, painstakingly described in the style of Heian chronicles [139] – lacking the necessary patriotic, emboldening spirit which, in times of war, literature should have conveyed. As a result, the publication was discontinued, and a later attempt by Tanizaki to circulate some privately printed editions was also halted by the police [140]; only after the end of conflict (1946-48) he eventually succeeded in publishing all the three instalments of *Sasameyuki*.

Once overcome institutional diffidence, though, the novel began to rapidly gather public praise. Although no detailed data on sales are available, one could attach to *The Makioka Sisters* some commercial success, testified also by several mediatic adaptations (three films and five serials in the 1950-1980 period); its true consecration, however, seemed to have come from the critical milieu, as demonstrated by the award of two of the main Japanese literary prizes (the *Mainichi*, in 1947, and the *Asahi*, in 1949). This high degree of intellectual appreciation had also the side effect of drawing attention to the book outside Japan: through translations and the growing academic field of Tanizaki studies the book was able to notch up a steady success – in

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[138] He was, among other honours, the recipient of the Japanese Order of Culture (1949) and a designated 'Person of Cultural Merit' (1952), becoming therefore entitled to a government-sponsored lifetime pension.
[139] Gwenn BOARDMAN PETERSEN, *The Moon in the Water: Understanding Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Mishima*. Honolulu, HI: The University Press of Hawaii, 1979, p. 48-51.
[140] Anthony H. CHAMBERS, *The Secret Window: Ideal Worlds in Tanizaki's Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994, p. 71.

Mizumura's words, "one of those happy instances when, thanks to translation, a work of modern Japanese literature [was truly able] to enrich the world view of those in the West" [141].

- <u>Günther Grass, *The Tin Drum* (1959, German)</u>

Among all the authors of the sample, Grass has the singular distinction of having been already referred to, by some critics, as a case study for Bourdieu's theory of the literary field [142]; the reception history of *Die Blechtrommel*, indeed, seem particularly suited to be described with the categories outlined in "The Field of Cultural Production". To begin with, one could attribute the early acknowledgement of the novel's literary qualities to the intellectual milieu, and namely to the *Gruppe 47*, a gathering of avant-gardist West German literati which awarded Grass its influential prize after reading two chapters from *The Tin Drum*'s manuscript. Upon *The Tin Drum*'s publication, most critics (with the notable exception of Marcel Reich-Ranicki [143]) shared their enthusiasm, and their praise contributed to build a substantial reserve of symbolic capital to back the novel's bid for fame. The book's controversial contents, however, were at first ill-received in institutional contexts: its break from established popular taste one resulted in lawsuits for profanity, book burnings and in the much-discussed refusal of the Bremen administration to award Grass the city's top literary prize despite the jury's vote in his favour [144].

In a few years, however, Grass' work lost its provocative aura and was able to gain the institutional sanction it initially lacked: as a review of school curricula demonstrate, the book that in the 1960s was still condemned by detractors as *jugendgefährdend* (morally corrupting young people) became, in the space of ten years, mandatory reading in many educational institutions of the Federal Republic [145]. Official recognition went along with commercial success, to the point that, at the beginning of the Eighties, *The Tin Drum* was described as the most sold book of German post-war literature [146]; in a sense, the canonisation process was virtually over, for the text's canonical qualities were no more up to discussion and its

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[141] Minae MIZUMURA, " 'The Makioka Sisters': An Aberrant Masterpiece". *Huffington Post*, 4 February 2015 [online].
[142] Stefan NEUHAUS, "Vom Skandalroman zum modernen Klassiker: Die Rezeption von Günter Grass' Roman *Die Blechtrommel* im deutschsprachigen Raum", in *The Echo of "Die Blechtrommel" in Europe*, ed. by Jos Joosten and Christoph Parry. Leiden: Brill, 2016, p. 30.
[143] See Marcel REICH-RANICKI, "Auf gut Glück getrommelt". *Die Zeit*, January 1960.
[144] Hartmut EGGERT, "Der späte Prozeß über ‚Entartete Kunst'. Zum Skandal um *Die Blechtrommel* in den sechziger Jahren", in *Tabu und Tabubruch. Literarische und sprachliche Strategien im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Hartmut Eggert and Janusz Golec. Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2002, p. 139.
[145] Siegfried MEWS, *Günter Grass and His Critics: From "The Tin Drum" to "Crabwalk"*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008, p. 52.
[146] NEUHAUS, p. 32.

prominence within Germany and abroad was undeniable.

Further boosts in popularity, moreover, came from the film version by Volker Schlöndorff (1989), which won both the Cannes Palme d'Or and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, and ultimately from Grass' Nobel Prize (1999). Interestingly, the Nobel was considered by most commentators as motivated only by the *Blechtrommel* and thus read as a confirmation that the book's reception had become in the years fully independent from that of his author: while the novel remained virtually untouchable, enshrined as a classic of modern German literature, the author's reputation had to some extent declined in connection with his growing political activism [147]. In the last analysis, then, one may read *The Tin Drum*'s reception history not as an exception to Bourdieu's model, as Joost and Parry do [148], but rather as a demonstration of its mechanisms in the context of late twentieth-century literature, where different types of consecration may actually combine and overlap: thus, early aesthetic consecration has soon been supplemented by institutional acknowledgement and considerable commercial success, to the point that the book's popularity became so strong it remained virtually unaffected by the controversies which had later involved its author.

- Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (1963, English)

At the time of *Cat's Cradle*'s publication, Vonnegut was arguably at the lowest point of his career: the sales of his earlier works were floundering, and he saw few perspectives of improving its stance in the literary world [149]. Up to that moment, indeed, he had achieved a mild popularity as a writer of genre fiction, with his biggest success being *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), but his recognised status of paperback sci-fi novelist had prevented serious criticism of his works, which consisted at the time of several short stories, written mostly to make ends meet, and a couple of little-considered postmodern novels. His literary output, in fact, was sharply divided, both in terms of reading public and authorial aspirations, between "scores of stories read by a mass popular audience and a group of curious novels acknowledged by only the

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[147] Veronika SCHUCHTER, "Von der ,epileptischen Kapriole' zum Nobelpreis: *Die Blechtrommel* als Paradigma der deutschsprachigen Literaturkritik", in *The Echo of "Die Blechtrommel" in Europe*, p. 53-54.

[148] Jos JOOSTEN and Christoph PARRY, "Reading *Die Blechtrommel* throughout Europe: Introduction", in *The Echo of "Die Blechtrommel" in Europe*, p. 20. Considering *The Tin Drum*'s reception to deny "Bourdieu's assumption that the 'commercial pole' and 'cultural pole' usually mutually exclude each other", they forget that the sociologist's model of canonisation is strongly time- and place-specific; as demonstrated by Algee-Hewitt et al., canonisation dynamics vary greatly between different social and literary environments.

[149] Jerome KLINKOWITZ, "Kurt Vonnegut Jr.: The Canary in a Cathouse", in *The Vonnegut statement*, ed. by Jerome Klinkowitz and John L. Somer. New York: Delacorte Press, 1973, p. 11.

smallest of intellectual elite" [150].

Cat's Cradle, however, was to change things, insofar as it was able to tune in with the "changing Zeitgeist" of the 1960s and thus find a new and larger audience for his works [151]. As Allen contends, indeed, the short novel addressed a different audience in comparison to Vonnegut's previous works: while the war themes of *Mother Night* (1961) were suited for the writer's own generation, "*Cat's Cradle* caught hold with a younger audience – the college crowd that would by the end of the decade make Vonnegut the most popular writer in America" [152]. The paperback success of the book prompted indeed the reissue, in the same format, of his whole corpus, and the high availability of his fiction, still marketed under the appeasing label of genre fiction, was indeed spot-on in attracting students' interest and eventually prompting a cult following [153] which, in 1969, would be instrumental in making of *Slaughterhouse-Five* Vonnegut's most successful novel. With the publication of his masterpiece, indeed, the writer exchanged "twenty years of […] obscurity and neglect" for an "almost overnight […] celebrity and wealth" [154], which resulted also in larger consideration also in academic circles and higher education contexts; as for *Cat's Cradle*, however, its bid for canonicity was already solidly grounded on its large consumption and widespread presence in the paperback industry.

- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965, English)

The context of the first publication of Pynchon' slim novella marks a shift in the type of consecration the up-and-coming postmodernist writer was receiving: if its acclaimed debut novel, *V.* (1963), was mainly a critical success, lauded by intellectuals but with little commercial returns, *The Crying of the Lot 49* aimed at a different public. Reportedly written with financial concerns in mind [155], the novel was actually promoted by serialising some excerpts in two magazines, *Esquire* and *Cavalier*, whose readership consisted not in avant-gardist intellectuals but rather in literate and affluent men; by doing that, Young argues, "Pynchon refashion[ed] himself as a mainstream author, forsaking the artistic pose attendant on small magazines",

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[150] Jerome KLINKOWITZ, "The Literary Career of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr". *Recent American Fiction*, special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* [= 19, 1] (1973), p. 59.

[151] Peter FREESE, "The Critical Reception of Kurt Vonnegut". *Literature Compass* 9 (2012), p. 2.

[152] William R. ALLEN, *Understanding Kurt Vonnegut*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991, p. 54.

[153] Vonnegut's role among the American youth of the 1960s appears similar to that of fellow sampled authors Hesse and Pynchon; the author himself partially investigated the phenomenon in a 1970 essay, "Why They Read Hesse" (in *Horizon* 12, pp. 28-31; cfr. J. KLINKOWITZ, "Why They Read Vonnegut", in *The Vonnegut Statement*, p. 18).

[154] Donald E. MORSE, "Bringing Chaos to Order. Vonnegut Criticism at Century's End." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 10, 4 (2000), p. 395.

[155] John K. YOUNG, "Pynchon in Popular Magazines". *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 44, 4 (2003), p. 389.

where he published his earlier short stories, "for the commercial viability conferred by major-market publication" [156]. This move, which was ill-suited to the notoriously reclusive public persona the author was starting to devise, had however a positive influence on the book's sales, but not to the point of making it a bestseller – a goal which Pynchon will reach only with his recognised masterpiece, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973); at the same time, critical reviews were mixed, with most critics finding it not on par with his first novel.

As opposed to this lukewarm commercial and aesthetic recognition, *The Crying of the Lot 49* enjoyed, quite surprisingly, some institutional support in the form of its dissemination in higher-education courses: according to multiple scholars, indeed, it was featured within teaching modules on postmodernism with a frequency higher than any other work [157], mainly because its reduced size and scope made it suitable to classroom usage [158]. As a foremost consequence of this college popularity Pynchon was able to gain, in the span of few years, a solid readership among students, which assured *The Crying of the Lot 49* a moderate but steady commercial success; the same audience resulted later instrumental in paving the way for the success of *Gravity's Rainbow*, the book which consecrated definitively Pynchon as a major literary icon [159].

- Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981, English)

As Ahmed notes [160], it is possible to recognise two distinct moments in the canonisation process of Rushdie's most famous novel. The first one coincided with its early reception, marked by enthusiastic pre- and post-publication reviews from virtually all major media outlet both in Western countries and in India, and by an unexpected commercial success [161]; this heyday peaked with the 1981 Booker Prize – an award whose "impact on the economics of book trade is such, that it can be accepted as the pinnacle of commercialization of English-language

[156] YOUNG, p. 391.
[157] Brian JARVIS, "Thomas Pynchon," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945*, ed. by John N. Duvall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 220; J. Kerry GRANT, *A Companion to "The Crying of Lot 49"*, 2nd ed. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011, p. xviii. The study of Michael BÉRUBÉ, *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers: Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992, has been unfortunately inaccessible.
[158] Richard POIRIER, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon." *Twentieth Century Literature* 21, 2 (1975), p. 153.
[159] See Gerald HOWARD, "Pynchon from A to V.". *Bookforum*, Summer 2005 [online].
[160] Taj-uddin AHMED, "The Importance of Being Accepted by the 'Postcolonial Patron': *Midnight's Children* and the Politics of Reception", in *Mapping out the Rushdie Republic: Some Recent Surveys*, ed. by Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharyya. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016, p. 96.
[161] Andrew TEVERSON, *Salman Rushdie*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007, p. 80.

literature" [162]. Actually, in a curious reversal of usual prestige dynamics, it has been argued that that the success of *Midnight's Children* was so outstanding it boosted the popularity of the prize itself [163], enhancing its later influence in canon-building; furthermore, the link between the novel and the award became so tight that the book went on winning two more 'Best of Booker' awards in 1993 and 2008.

These later celebrations, however, had arguably political undertones: the second wave of Rushdie's popularity, indeed, came after the controversy over his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1989), culminating in the *fatwa* issued by Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini which called for the writer's assassination. The episode provoked public outcry and a surge of support and interest in the West, testified by the dramatic rise of his books' sales; *Midnight's Children*, which had by the way also experienced some mild Muslim criticism upon its publication, received renewed public attention and thus consolidate its position at the core the contemporary canon, both in terms of public perception and academic appraisal.

The main drive behind the novel's canonisation, however, remained arguably the early sanction, driven perhaps by aesthetical considerations but fully institutionalised in its form, it received by the Booker Prize. Such award, indeed, transformed a little-known author from the peripheries of the former Empire in a major cultural icon for post-colonial literature and a main theoretical referent thereof [164]; benefitting from his privileged position as an Eastern writer at the heart of Western civilisation, Rushdie came indeed to attain literary stardom, and even a canonising power in his own [165], while his masterpiece was taken as representative of an entire cultural milieu (in this case, the post-Raj India).

[162] AHMED, p. 99.
[163] Norbert SCHURER, *Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children': A Reader's Guide*. New York and London: Continuum, 2004, p. 83.
[164] James PROCTER, " 'The Ghost of Other Stories': Salman Rushdie and the Question of Canonicity?", in *A Black British Canon*?, ed. by Gail Low and Marion Wynne-Davies. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 44.
[165] Ana Cristina MENDES, *Salman Rushdie in the Cultural Marketplace*. London: Routledge, 2016 [2013], p. 38, which describes Rushdie's role as that of "cultural broker" and "gatekeeper […] in the metropolitan literary industry".

3. Being in the Canon

3.1 Canonical and hypercanonical

As the profiles of the sampled works have shown, it is not always easy to determine which source of canonisation had the main influence in consecrating a given work; in some cases, more than one type of sanction seems to have been present right from the early reception. By contrast, it has been easier to pinpoint the position of the sampled works within modern canon – a passage necessary to prove Porter's claims about canonisation dynamics. To this aim, one chose to replicate the method the American scholar adopted in his essay, which was in turn indebted to the one devised by Algee-Hewitt and his colleagues for a previous Stanford Literary Lab pamphlet (No. 11, January 2016); in its simpler formulation, it consisted in charting the canonical space according to two metrics, popularity and prestige, which roughly embody the difference between 'what is popularly read' and 'what is critically praised'.

The choice of these parameters is not arbitrary but surely debatable: there are several other legitimate ways to define canonicity, and Porter himself goes to some lengths to justify the adoption of his framework [1]. The use of Cartesian graphs, instead, is coherent with current scholarship in the digital humanities, which often aims at "arranging literary history in […] a conceptual, spatial format" [2] – an operation which may reveal, to quote Moretti and Sobchuk, phenomena "hidden in plain sight" [3], and becomes thus fundamental in quantitative studies. While some issues within the Stanford methodologies will be discussed later, their approach seemed nonetheless the most effective and was thus imitated: however, since earlier projects focused on the canonical strength of authors, and not works, new data had to be collected to comply with the perspective of the present study [4].

To measure popularity, both the Literary Lab studies and this dissertation employed the number of ratings in Goodreads, the world's largest site for book recommendations, currently

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[1] PORTER, pp. 4-5.
[2] PORTER, p. 21.
[3] Franco MORETTI and Oleg SOBCHUK, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Data Visualization in the Humanities". *New Left Review* 118 (2019). See p. 86: "[Visualisation is a] field-defining practice [, insofar as] it involves the formation of corpora, the definition of data, their elaboration, and often some sort of preliminary interpretation as well [; and] practices – what we learn to do by doing, by professional habit, without being fully aware of what we are doing – often have larger theoretical implications than theoretical statements themselves".
[4] Data collected on the 1st of February 2020.

boasting 90 million members, 2.6 billion titles added and 90 million reviews [5]. This source has the advantage of offering a contemporary (the website was born in 2007) and easily available picture of what people read today; its main drawback – but by this time it has become clear it – is its bias towards English-language authors and books. On an operational level, then, one collected the number of user ratings for each of the 22 sampled works: since Goodreads lists as separate titles different editions for the same book, all these ratings were collapsed when their number was statistically significant (>1000) – to make an example, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* appears both as an autonomous entry and as a part of some 'collected plays' editions, whose ratings have been thus added to the total count in order to avoid underestimating its readership.

To measure prestige, the selected source was the MLA International Bibliography, from which one extracted the number of occurrences of a given work as 'subject' in scholarly materials between 2000 and 2019. As Porter notes, employing MLA statistics meant emphasising the role of academia in canon-building over other sources of prestige, such as peer esteem or prizes; he defends this choice declaring his support for John Guillory's understanding of the 'school' as the most influential factor in the shaping of the literary canon. While this justification is broadly acceptable, however, it must be remembered that Guillory does not equate 'school' only with university-level teaching, but with the educational system as a whole [6]; furthermore, as hinted in Chapter One, there is a substantial difference between what is taught in the universities – a curriculum devised by intellectual elites and proposed to an already selected audience – and what is taught in middle and high school, where a wider audience of students, whose attendance to classes is most often mandatory, is exposed to a general curriculum which does not necessarily reflects the university one.

According to this premise, this study follows and actualises Bourdieu's categories insofar as it likens the scholarly prestige bestowed by modern academia to the aesthetic recognition from fellow writers, and considers the traditional school dissemination, acted especially in its lower branches, as a source of institutional, State-sponsored consecration. Cartesian graphs, however, do not allow to chart three dimensions on two axes and this fact, as Porter correctly points out, "suggests a serious flaw in Bourdieu's sketch[es]" from *The Rules of Art* and "The Field of Cultural Production" – although the French sociologist tried to solve the

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[5] Statistics as of 31st January 2020, from [www.goodreads.com/about/us].
[6] GUILLORY, p. 38.

problem introducing 'no consecration' as the fourth category of recognition [7]. For the purposes of the present study, the binary format based on the popularity/prestige dichotomy has been retained because of its effectivity in giving instant visualisation of canonical fields; further analysis, nevertheless, reintroduced the (updated) Bourdieusian tripartition.

Once transferred the data on the chart [8], the resulting map (Figure 1) immediately conveyed the idea of the asymmetries within canon: while most works are crammed near the axes' origin, few titles manage to escape the blob by virtue of their extreme popularity (*Frankenstein*) or high prestige (*Don Quixote*, *The Divine Comedy*). A clearer picture emerges if one scales the axes logarithmically (Figure 2): while this representation alters the distances between the dots (*Frankenstein* appears near to *Heart of Darkness*, though it has more than the double of Goodreads ratings), it also dramatically improves the visualisation, allowing to grasp at a glance the various canonical positions.
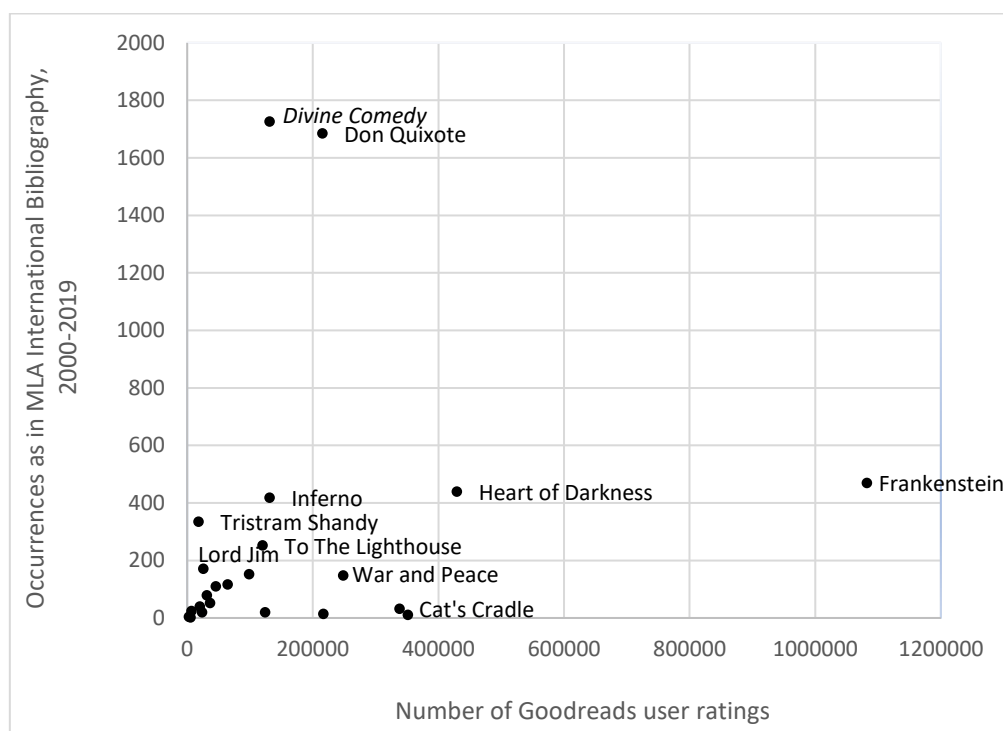

Figure 1. A map of the sampled works' positions within the contemporary canon, on a linear scale.

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[7] See the graph on page 49 of BOURDIEU's "The Field of Cultural Production*",* whose four corners read: 'no audience', 'mass audience', 'bourgeois [= institutional] audience', 'charismatic audience'.

[8] The chart presents all 22 works sampled plus an extra marker for Dante's *Divine Comedy* taken as a whole: since many MLA contents on the *Inferno* are tagged only with the larger poem as 'subject', including only data with the *Inferno* tag would have massively dwarfed its perceived prestige – which is, actually, quite on par with Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Accordingly, the extra marker has been added to improve the chart's accuracy.
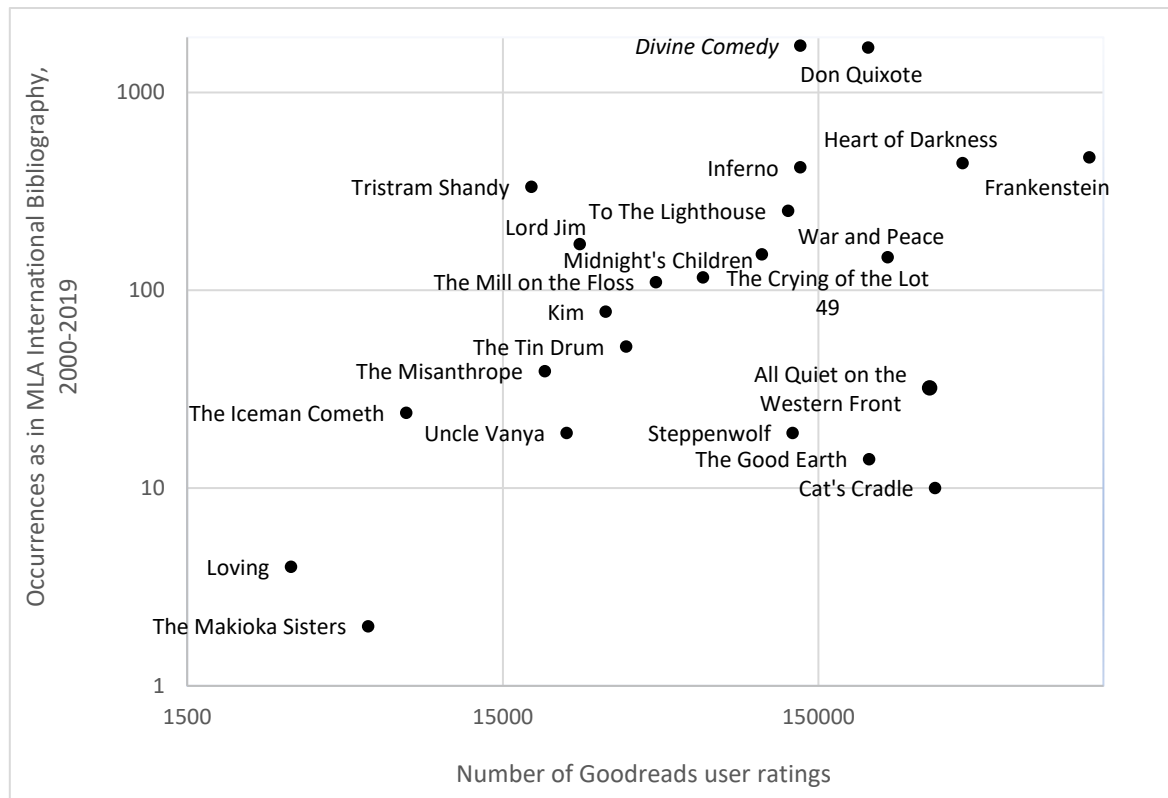
Figure 2. A map of the sampled works' positions within the contemporary canon, on a logarithmic scale.

An even better option is temporarily removing the two texts whose values are clearly out-of-scale – in this sample, the exceedingly prestigious *Don Quixote* and the exceedingly popular *Frankenstein*. In this way (Figure 3), it is possible to draw what Porter terms the four 'canonical quadrants', i.e. the four possible combinations arising from the different intensity of popularity and prestige, which one can visualise splitting the graph into four parts while using the sample's mean as splitting point. In the resulting chart, the Southwestern zone contains the works with low canonical weight; due to logarithmic scaling, this applies especially to the titles nearer to the axes' origin, such as Green's *Loving* or Tanizaki's *Makioka Sisters* (which is obviously penalised by his belonging to a non-Western cultural and linguistic space).

The same quadrant, however, hosts also both the dramas sampled (O'Neill's and Chekhov's), suggesting the metrics are somehow imprecise in assessing canonical value of performative works, and a good deal of titles from different epochs. The Northwest, for its part, is dominated by those strong in academia but with little readership, such as *Tristram Shandy* or *Lord Jim*; at its opposite, the Southeast features popular works with little academical recognition (at the moment), such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *Cat's Cradle*. The Northeast, eventually, is the site of the hyper-canonicals, the works which are both widely read

and studied, representing the true core of canon – a six-members group which, under linear scaling, would be reduced only to the triad of *Don Quixote*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Frankenstein*.
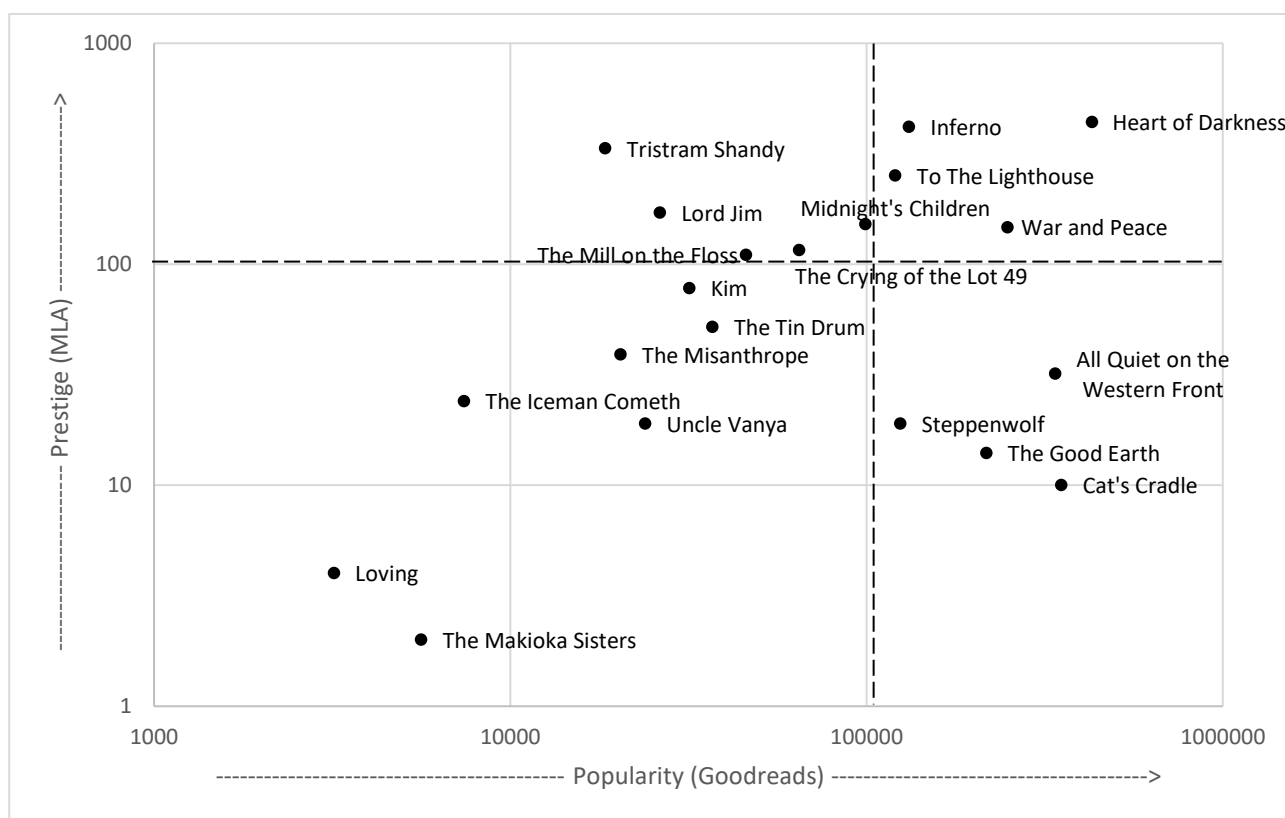

Figure 3. Close-up on canonical quadrants (logarithmic scaling).

Eventually, the graph seems to give a plausible panorama of the sampled works' position within the contemporary canon, even though a more accurate picture, benefitting from the insertion of supplementary metrics both for popularity and prestige, would be welcome – but also problematic in terms of data collection and visualisation. Once established this framework, it was finally possible to see if, as per Porter's hypothesis, any link existed between the works' early sources of canonisation and their stance in modern canon; in order to do so, it was necessary to convert the more discursive profiles presented in the previous chapter, which were undoubtedly useful in delineating the main reception features for each sampled element, into the simpler categories devised by Bourdieu and later actualised for the present study.

For most books listed one canonisation source appeared clearly more relevant than the others: if one had to offer a summary in Bourdieusian terms, it could be said that aesthetic consecration was prevalent for Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters*, Green's *Loving* and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*; institutional consecration for Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Pynchon's *The Crying of the Lot 49* and Molière's *The Misanthrope*;

and commercial consecration for Kipling's *Kim*, Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Buck's *The Good Earth*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*. For some works, however, even after profiling it remained difficult to weigh properly the canonisation forces behind them. The canonisation of Grass' *The Tin Drum*, for example, involved all the three types of sanction, evolving from an aesthetic recognition into market success; Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* were successful both among critics and readers/viewers (though the second only with the 1956 revival); Dante's *Inferno* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* followed a similar path, but enjoyed also a later – and, in the broader picture, arguably more influential – institutional consecration.

These peculiarities were taken into account when drawing the last graph, the one altering Figure 3 to show not the works' names, but the sources of their historical canonisation; the Bourdieusian categories of recognition (aesthetic, institutional, commercial) were marked with the tags [AESTH], [INST] and [COMM], adding an asterisk for the cases where the main category had been indicated but the influence of the others was equally strong. The resulting chart (Figure 4) begins to answer, at least with regards to the sampled texts, to the question posed by Porter about the link between the way in which some texts entered canon and their actual position within it.
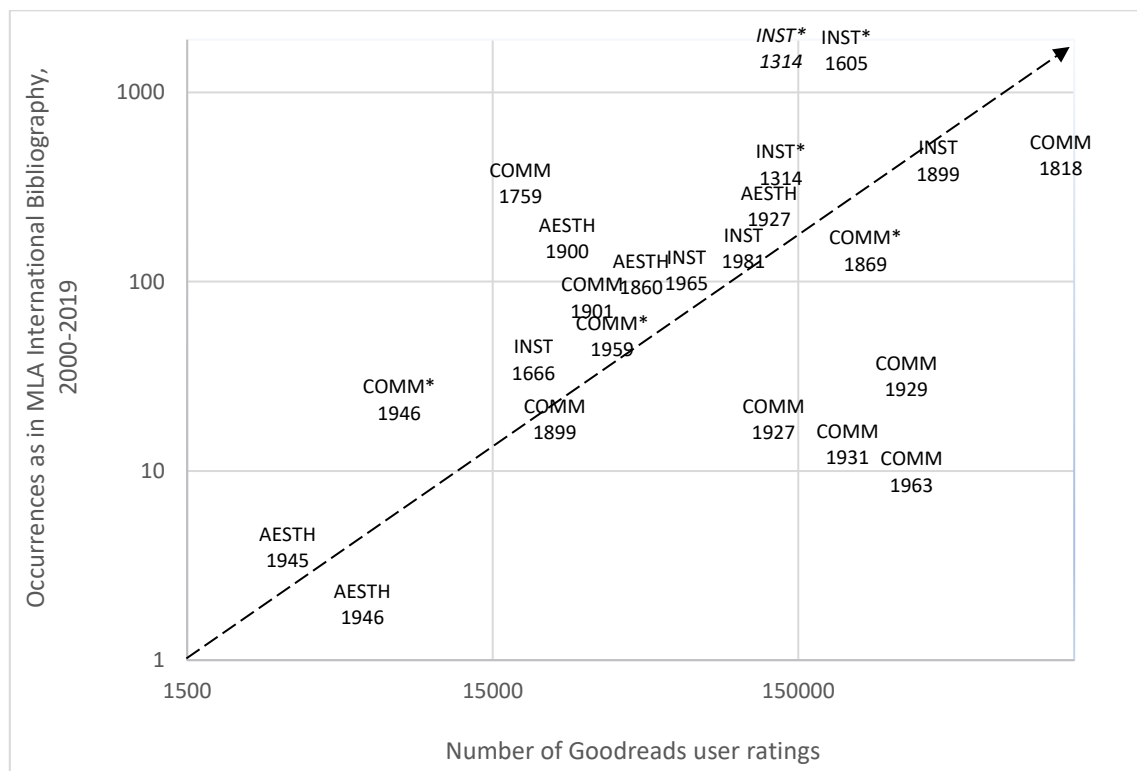

Figure 4. The names of the works are replaced with their source of

early canonisation and their publication years (logarithmic scaling).

The suggestion from the "Popularity/Prestige" pamphlet was that different canonisation methods, based on prestige or popularity, propelled works to different zones of the map and had far-reaching influences also on their later reception. Looking at the graph, this seems to work quite fine especially with works canonised primarily through commercial recognition, provided they are recent: all the works in the South-eastern quadrant (by Buck, Hesse, Vonnegut and Remarque) are from last century, while older market successes, such as *Tristram Shandy*, have by the time come to depend on prestige to survive. Aesthetic recognition, by its part, seems to be actually on a sliding scale with popularity: while this already Bourdieusian concept is criticised by Porter, who points at the cases of the North-eastern quadrant as demonstrations the two types of prestige could effectively be combined, the larger picture shows how work pushed only by intellectuals fail to achieve true canonical greatness – only one work, Woolf' *To the Lighthouse*, barely enters the 'hypercanonical' group, and not without some help by its institutional dissemination in schools.

What is really interesting, though, it following the path of the arrow bisecting the graph, which is meant to represents a steady, balanced increase of both popularity and prestige across time; if a work manages to follow its course, it is bound to eventually reach the North-eastern quadrant and join the other members of the 'hypercanon'. Looking at this arrow, one notes how most works canonised through institutional means, regardless of their actual canonical strength, are on its course, while aesthetically and commercially recognised works are scattered more widely across the graph. This seemingly trivial finding needs to be interpreted properly, insofar as institutional consecration is not a direct offspring of this graph, which allocate works only through academic prestige – which, according to the updating of Bourdieu's categories, is a form of aesthetic recognition – and market popularity.

Before further analysis, however, it seems proper to recall once again how the charts presented are just snapshots of the diachronic development of the canon: Figures 1-3 gave an essentially contemporary image of the canon, focused on the beginning of the XXI century, while Figure 4 introduced a historical dimension, featuring the early canonisation forces behind each work's consecration. There is ostensibly a gap between the two moments, which is difficult to cover due to missing data; if one was able to bridge it, one might end up with an animated history of canon evolution [9] – a narration showing, for example, how an 18th-century bestseller such as Sterne's has gradually slid into the prestigious position it occupies, or how *Frankenstein*

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[9] PORTER, p. 19.

has kept being popular while increasing steadily its clout in academia. At the same time, it must be also remembered that the size of the sample analysed remains limited, and for all its efforts in representativeness, much more data would be necessary to validate any conclusion drawn from it.

Data collected for this project, however, could still suggest some tentative answers to Porter's proposals, broadly confirming its claims but also calling attention on the institutional consecration he mainly overlooks [10]. On one side, early canonisation modes do leave some traces in later canonical arrangements, especially in the short term, as the 20th-century group of bestsellers in Figure 4 confirms; as time passes, though, it becomes difficult for any work to keep enjoying the same degree of popularity or prestige, and later reception comes thus involve other canonising forces. Accordingly, bestsellers may after some time arouse scholarly interest, and thus climb higher on the prestige ladder, as Sterne or even Kipling did; more rarely, works promoted by intellectuals may gain a wider audience – compare Updike's unsuccess in championing Henry Green with Alice Walker's successful efforts in imposing Zora Neale Hurston to the public attention [11].

Within this framework, the role of institutional consecration should however be stressed: while it comes out often as a supplementary canonising source, building on pre-existing popularity or prestige, it appears also extremely effective in granting canonical permanence, as Figure 4 suggests: most works with the tag [INST] have indeed a fair balance of popularity and prestige – for school dissemination, for example, requires book to be sold and studied – and they are prevalent also in the North-eastern quadrant. According to this sketch, the bestowing of this type of consecration is a strong predictor of canonicity for newer works: not for chance, Figure 3 shows how the work nearer to enter the hypercanonical quadrant it is the institutionally consecrated *Midnight's Children*, which needs just a moderate increase in readership to achieve its goal – being the most recent work on the list (1981), it may still be in time to make it, as the other syllabus regular, the slightly older *The Crying of Lot 49*. Institutionalisation, more than popularity or prestige, seems the key to true canonical strength

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[10] The reason behind this disregard is eminently practical: Bourdieu's concept of institutional (bourgeois) consecration, which he linked to the Académie Française and which the present study tied to the educational system and beyond, would be difficult, if not impossible, to operationalise with success (PORTER, p. 12, n. 22).

[11] Example cited by PORTER, p. 22: for Hurston, he notes, "a boost in prestige, driven by scholars and practitioners, and mediated through the classroom, led to a boost in popularity" – the 'classroom' bit, as the next paragraph argues, might have been however more relevant than intellectual consecration. Hurston's legacy remains however contested: see further, pp. 79-80.

– a conclusion which would likely please supporters of Guillory's theses, but is no by no means uncontested.

3.2 Popularity-prestige dialectics

While the present dissertation aimed primarily at testing Porter's claims against an empirical, carefully vetted background of historical works, its conclusions cannot but spur some theoretical reflections on the different ways to getting into the canon. The graph presented, indeed, could be read not only as an illustration of how early canonisation modes influenced subsequent positions within canon, but also as an indication about their different strength: it is quite evident, indeed, how aesthetic canonisation scores poorly in comparison with commercial consecration, and how institutional sanction has the lion's share among the hypercanonical works. These findings, however, must be contrasted to the larger scholarly debate, where the issue of canonisation seems to have been polarised – after the progressive dwindling of the proponents of the primacy of aesthetics-based consecration, marked by the deaths of Harold Bloom and George Steiner – between those who think readers have the greatest influence in shaping canons, and those who credit institutional apparatuses with this role.

A significant example of the first group is Moretti himself, at least in his earlier writings: behind one of his most influential essays, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" (2000), there is the assumption that canons are built by readers, not professors; according to him "academic decisions are mere echoes of a process that unfolds fundamentally outside the school", and that involves, in its simpler form, readers buying and reading certain works, generation upon generation, until they became canonised [12]. Although the root of this commercial success lies, in his view, in morphological and thus somehow 'aesthetic' features (as the famous case of Conan Doyle's usage of 'clues' shows), consecration by restricted groups of intellectuals alone is ineffective: changes in the academic canon have no real influence on what is read, published and disseminated [13].

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[12] Franco MORETTI, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature". *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, 1 (2000), p. 209.
[13] Interestingly, a footnote in "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" (p. 209, n.3) explicitly criticises *Cultural Capital* upon the (quite common) misconception that the 'school' Guillory speaks of coincides with academia only; according to Moretti, university teachers are able to change the canon only when its contents have become socially irrelevant (like it happened with the canon of poetry in the 18th century).

In some respects, it seems that in later years the Italian scholar watered down his position, coming to accept some degree of scholarly influence in canon definition: he was indeed one of the six authors of the eleventh Literary Lab Pamphlet, "Canon/Archive" (2016), the first to introduce the binary schema popularity/prestige to assess canonical weight [14]. His belief in popular choice as the main canonising factor, however, was not isolated: more recently, it is worthy of note also the much more articulated position of Nemoianu, for whom the readers' community plays a critical role in defining and preserving the canon: while academic labour and "elite taste preferences […] are highly important in the construction and maintenance of literary institutions", "their true effectiveness begins only after a certain communitarian consensus has set in" [15], i.e. after an author or a book has been continuously popular over a significant period, as in the cases of Homer, Shakespeare or Goethe. Long-lasting canonisation, in other words, is a "democratic process":

> Scholars, institutions, ideologies, groups of writers, or (last but not least) individuals may propose, initiate, pressure, and manipulate as much as they wish. The power to dispose is reserved to a much wider reading public which, standing for the community as a whole, over longer stretches of time adopt certain works and authors as representative for themselves. It is simplifying, but not false, to say that canonical works are the bestsellers of historical majorities as against those of local temporal minorities. [16]

Furthermore, the scholar notes, institutional manipulations can do little to affect the canon: a notable example he cites is the Stalinist-era crusade against Dostoevsky, by the time already a venerable name in the pantheon of Russian literature, whose works managed to survive twenty years of State-sponsored neglect and re-emerged virtually unscathed in terms of public esteem. If administrative censures have limited effects, then, the same could be said for ideological criticisms: dispelling the "misconception that, in the past, it was ideologies that impelled the prominence and eventual selection to canonical status of particular authors and

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[14] Metrics employed to measure the writers' prestige (like Porter, the project was author-centred) included occurrences in the MLA International Bibliography (20th century), in the *Dictionary of National Biographies* (DNB) and in Stanford PhD exam lists from 1976 to 2016.
[15] NEMOIANU, p. 226.
[16] NEMOIANU, pp. 231-32.

works" [17], audiences continue to appreciate allegedly controversial authors such as T.S. Eliot, Evelyn Waugh or Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

At first blush, it seems that Nemoianu's stance is the polar opposite of Guillory's, which is built around the notion that institutional agencies, best exemplified by the educational system, are decisive in shaping the canon. In his vision, the canon is indeed the product of the process of preservation, dissemination and teaching with happens within the school, the institution meant to enable – but also regulate – the access to such a peculiar form of 'cultural capital' [18]. Albeit other agents play a role in the process, the school remain crucial because of its influence in the *longue durée*; as Guillory points out,

> ... while the school is not exclusively the agent of canon formation – obviously publishing houses, commercial anthologies, and the mass market enter into the process of establishing the contemporary reputation of a given author – even the most successful contemporary reputation is insufficient to ensure the canonicity of an author. Canonicity is a function of the reproduction of a work over time, and the market for such reproduction is the school. [19]

Comparing the two approaches – which one may term, with some approximation, the 'reader-oriented' and the 'institution-oriented'– one realises however that they have, despite their differences, something in common: both Nemoianu and Guillory emphasise the role of time as a crucial component of canonicity, insofar as canonical works achieve their status by remaining relevant across the centuries, read by "historical majorities" and reproduced over time in curricula and syllabi. Although it may seem a plain truism, insistence on the time-bound nature of canon is actually quite common in scholarly literature, especially with regards to modern projects of canonical reformation; indeed, when partisans of the 'opening of the canon' try to smuggle some recent works within the canonical perimeter by force of their ideological beliefs, it ought to be remembered that

> [n]ew or historically underappreciated works are unlikely to be canonized without corresponding social, institutional, and material changes sufficient to promote their

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[17] NEMOIANU, p. 229.

[18] John GUILLORY, "Canonical and Non-Canonical: A Critique of the Current Debate". *ELH* 54, 3 (1987), p. 495. This essay will later serve as the basis for the first chapter of Guillory's *Cultural Capital* (1993).

[19] John GUILLORY, "Canon, Syllabus, List: A Note on the Pedagogic Imaginary". *Transition* 52 (1991), p. 45, n. 5.

reproduction, dissemination, and familiarization. [...] Canonicity requires an historical quality that is not so quickly obtained. What newly acclaimed works lack – no less than those that have belatedly become, or had once been, popular – is a *cumulative* history, a continuum of judgments and rewritings over extended periods of time. [20]

Reproduction within the school, in Guillory's account, is aimed precisely at bestowing this cumulative approval on the works which are meant to be canonised, effectively granting their consecration; from this perspective, canonisation processes appear just as the literary manifestation of the larger reproduction strategies of societal structures through educational systems which Bourdieu and Passeron described in his *Reproduction in Society, Education and Culture* (1970). Such an analysis dispels, of course, the romantic view of canonical books as timeless masterpieces, unaffected by historical upheavals in taste and mentalities, and prevents at the same time the confusion between "the fact that [such] texts have endured" and "the claim that they have some distinctive right to endure, when in fact the reasons for the endurance involve nostalgia, conservative political pressures, stock rhetorical needs, and the inertia of established power" [21] – an array of elements deeply embedded in those classroom practices which Bourdieu singled out as acts of "symbolic violence" meant to impose some arbitrary cultural values [22].

Eventually, the results of the empirical investigation on Porter's claims seem to support Guillory's argument about the primacy of institutional canonisation – although the role of the reading community, as in Nemoianu, should not be discounted. Let one, once again, turn to Figure 3, and precisely to the hypercanonical quadrant, where the sampled works whose canonical status is virtually undebated dwell. Among the six works included (*Don Quixote*, *Inferno*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Heart of Darkness*, *War and Peace*, *Frankenstein*), half are indeed marked by strong institutional consecration: Cervantes' and Dante's works are national monuments in Spain and Italy, with a central role not only in educational curricula but also in national identity itself, while Conrad's comparatively recent novella has received a significant push by becoming a staple text in the teaching of English.

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[20] KOLBAS, p. 66.
[21] Charles ALTIERI, "Canons and Differences", in *The Hospitable Canon: Essays on Literary Play, Scholarly Choice, and Popular Pressures*, p. 6.
[22] Pierre BOURDIEU and Jean-Claude PASSERON, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. by Richard Nice. London: Sage, 1977 [1970], p. 5 ff.

Hints of institutional consecration, moreover, could be recognised also in the reception of *War and Peace* and *To the Lighthouse*; despite Tolstoy's reputation peaking during Soviet era and then somehow declining until today, its main work remained central in secondary and higher education [23], whereas the canonisation of Woolf's novel, despite relying mostly on the possession of high field-specific capital, benefitted from inclusion into teaching curricula as well. Only Shelley's *Frankenstein*, apparently, established its position without any institutional assistance, relying instead on the exceptional popularity it was able to maintain through ongoing rewritings and adaptations; all the other works, the majority within the 'canon élite', were to different extents assisted by extensive reproduction and dissemination in the school and in other official contexts, thus eventually attaining an unmovable position at the core of Western literature – think, again, of the failed mid-twentieth century attempts to disqualify Conrad because of its alleged racist and imperialist overtones.

What these results suggest, ultimately, is that canon is above all a matter of endurance, and not all the forces of canonisation have the same strength in ensuring not only long-term survival but also extended centrality in public discourse. Indeed, if academic attention or excellent market performances are sometimes not enough in themselves to grant escape from the 'slaughterhouse of literature', as the cases of Henry Green and Pearl Buck show, presence in the school or other institutional contexts seems indeed the safest way to remain relevant across the centuries. In other terms, even if one accepts, with Nemoianu, that their original selection was "a chaotic and natural process that remains ultimately unpredictable even though it is shaped by a number of parameters [24], how these cultural products fare in the longer period can be explained with the canonisation forces behind them.

A different way of framing the question, then, would eventually be considering the canon as the method of delaying, as long as possible, the fall into oblivion of literary pieces, i.e. the 'cultural death' Oleg Sobchuk spoke of in a recent article (prompted, coincidentally, by a discussion he had with J.D. Porter at Stanford). The starting point for his analysis, in that case, was a previous paper by Christian Candia and others, which used quantitative means to explore the decay of cultural forms; its conclusion was that new cultural products, such as films, songs or academic papers, experience first "a short-lived and fast-decaying phase connected to

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[23] See e.g. Zoya BLUMINA, Evgenia ABELYUK and Konstantin POLIVANOV, "Программа по литературе 10-11-е классы. Профильный уровень". *Литература* 15 (2003) [= "The program for literature, Grades 10-11. Profile level". *Literature* 15 (2003)] [online]. On Tolstoy's current stand in Russian society, see Ellen BARRY and Sophia KISHKOVSKY, "For Tolstoy and Russia, Still No Happy Ending". *The New York Times*, 3 January 2011 [online].
[24] NEMOIANU, p. 220.

communicative memory", the one consisting in the oral transmission of impressions and experiences about them, and then "a longer-lived and slower-decaying phase connected to cultural memory", the one based on their physical recordings [25].

Sobchuk's contribution, then, was notable in highlighting the *disposability* of most cultural objects, insofar as they are normally consumed just once and then replaced with new instruments of entertainment or information. Such a consumption pattern, however, seems at odds with the traditional notion of canonical work: to quote Calvino's much-abused description, 'classics' are meant to be "book[s] that [have] never finished saying what [they have] to say", thus warranting continued rereading and remaining always relevant in their cultural contexts [26]. According to this idealistic vision, canonical literature should be not respond to the logics of 'disposability' and somehow escape the 'decay process' described by Cardia and his colleagues – a phenomenon which is inherently "quantitative", and remembers "a slow process of collapsing" in which cultural items gets nearer and nearer to irrelevance but still survive until their last hard copy – and its memory – is obliterated [27].

One might discount Calvino's vision as more poetic than factual: inclusion in canon doubtless represents a powerful tool for enhancing survival across centuries but is by no means a conclusive guarantee of everlasting relevance. A convincing metaphor for its role is found, as early as in the fourteenth century, in Chaucer's depiction of the House of Fame: the building sits upon an ice boulder, where all the names of famous folks are engraved, and while on one side, exposed to the sun, the names had melted and begun to disappear, on the other the castle's protective shade has conserved them intact. The literary canon works, in all respects, like the House's shadow; as experimental findings confirm, different canonisation instances cast a longer or shorter shadow on literary works, granting a more or less effective shield from the ravages of time, but it seems inevitable that, at a certain point, the sun of history will begin to turn around and Chaucer's elegiac remark will be confirmed: "But men seyn, `What may ever laste?' " [28].

To offer a visualisation of this process, and in particular of the slow fading from cultural memory of an allegedly unmovable literary icon such as Shakespeare, Sobchuk resorted to Google Ngram Viewer, an online tool which measures the occurrences of a given word in the

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[25] Cristian CANDIA et al., "The universal decay of collective memory and attention". *Nature Human Behaviour* 3 (2019), p. 88. On issues of cultural memory see the works of Jan and Aleida Assmann, starting from Jan ASSMANN, *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München: Beck, 1992.
[26] Italo CALVINO, "Why Read the Classics?", trans. by Patrick Creagh. *The New York Review of Books*, 9 October 1986.
[27] Oleg SOBCHUK, "The (slow) dying of cultural forms". *Medium*, 26 February 2019 [online].
[28] Geoffrey CHAUCER, *The House of Fame*, in *The Poetical Works of Chaucer*, ed. by Fred N. Robinson. London: Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 343, line 1147.

centuries-long wealth of books digitised by Google, thus offering a panorama of shifting cultural interests across time [29]; though his claims on Shakespeare deserved further elaboration, and the use of the tool itself has been met with some criticisms [30], it seemed useful to borrow his method in order to offer a different perspective – a sort of confirmation that, as evidence from the sample suggested, certain types of consecration were more efficient than others in granting canonical permanence, but also a reminder that no work, for all its canonical clout, can ultimately escape the dynamics of cultural decay.

While charting together all the sampled works made little sense, for the varying length of their reception history would have prevented meaningful comparison, Ngram Viewer was nonetheless useful in illustrating some conclusions drawn from them, such as the endemic weakness of purely aesthetic consecration: as Figure 3 shows, only Woolf' *To The Lighthouse*, managed to avoid being relegated to secondary roles within an author's corpus (think of Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* as against *Middlemarch*, Conrad's *Lord Jim* as against *Heart of Darkness*) or sliding outrightly to the peripheries of canon (as Henry Green's *Loving*). In other words, intellectual recognition, strong as it may be, seems to have not been an effective antidote to cultural decay, and this appears most evident if one assumes, for once, an author-based approach. Compare, indeed, the fate of two very different authors such as John Donne and Zora Neale Hurston, which have in common only an effort by established critics to propel them to full canonicity [31]: while the impact of these critical reassessments is recognisable in the pattern of their cultural presence (Figure 5), it was not enough to prevent, after a few decades, the writer's popularity from starting to dwindle again.

Far more interesting, however, is visualising the behaviour of institutionally sanctioned works, and assessing it in the light of Guillory's theories about the decisive role of school reproduction. Looking at Figure 6, which tracks the social clout of the six 'hypercanonical' works across the twentieth century, one gets indeed the impression that, despite physiological fluctuations (such as *Don Quixote*'s spike at mid-century), works promoted by institutional

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[29] For details on the Ngram Viewer project, see Jean-Baptiste MICHEL et al., "Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books". *Science* 331, 6014 (2011), pp. 176-182.

[30] Some issues regarding the scholarly use of Ngram Viewer are outlined in Eitan A. PECHENICK, Christopher M. DANFORTH and Peter S. DODDS, "Characterizing the Google Books Corpus: Strong Limits to Inferences of Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Evolution". *PLoS ONE* 10, 10 (2015) [online].

[31] Without overestimating their influence, it seems safe to assume that the strongest push for Donne's and Hurston's reappreciation came from the essays by T.S ELIOT, "The Metaphysical Poets". *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 October 1921, and Alice WALKER, "In Search of Zora Neale Hurston. *Ms.*, March 1975, pp. 74–79, 85–89. On Eliot's strong influence on the (academic) canon see also John Guillory, "The Ideology of Canon-Formation: T. S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks", in *Canons*, special issue of *Critical Inquiry* 10, 1 (1983), pp. 173-198, reprised in his *Cultural Capital*, ch. III.

structures enjoy an higher degree of *stability*: preservation and dissemination within the educational system, alongside with official praise in the case of 'national authors', seem to direct the reception towards a steady course, which ensures relevance across a large span of time.
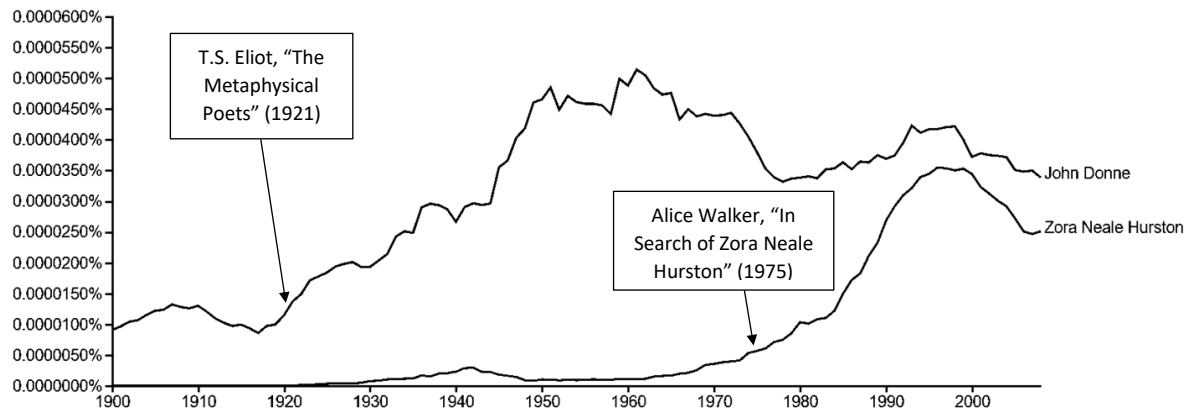

Figure 5. Cultural presence of John Donne and Zora Neale Hurston in the Google Books [eng_2012] corpus.
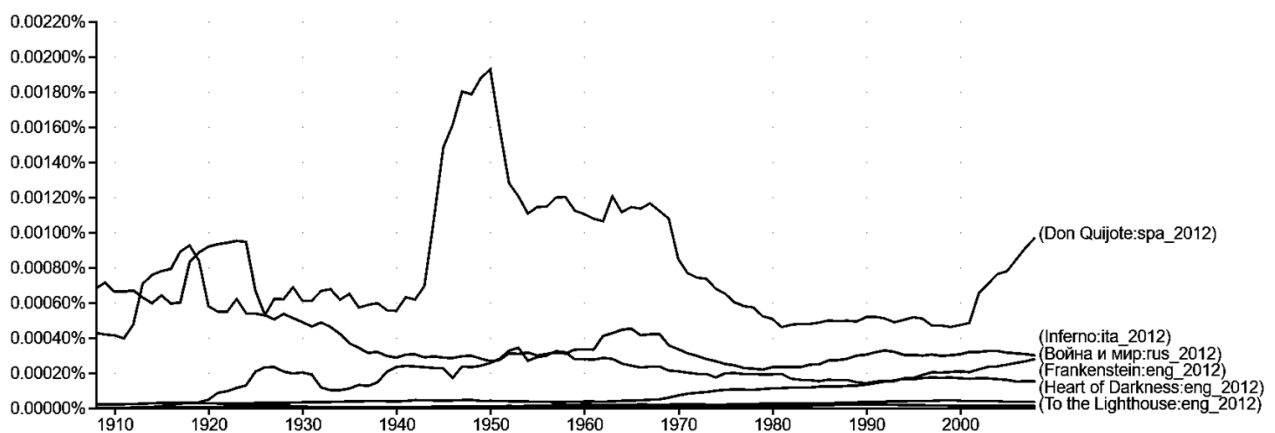

Figure 6. Frequency of hypercanonical titles in different linguistic corpora (Google Books, 2012).

In other words, there are strong hints that institutional consecration acts as the optimal life support for literary texts, surpassing both the weak aesthetic canonisation and the fleeting commercial success – stronger at the beginning, but unable to remain consistent throughout time unless the work is subjected to continue reinventions to the point of taking up the form of

pop icon, as it happened for *Frankenstein* [32]. Dynamics of popularity and prestige, as the Literary Lab studies confirm, are certainly essential to frame a certain cultural item within public understanding; official recognition, and especially inclusion in the mechanisms of the school, is however to be credited for attaching an additional tag of worth which enhances survival chances – and whose removal, as in the cases of works with low canonical strength, may even result in radical downsizing or loss of canonical status [33].

One may wonder, eventually, if this pattern is bound to continue – if institutional appraisal will maintain its pre-eminent role in pushing some works to the core of the canon or in preserving the ones already in. As easily understandable, it is a question which exceeds the scope of this dissertation; all hypotheses about the future of canon, if not supported by substantial empirical evidence, are always at risk of being little more than educated guesses. Sobchuk's comments about Shakespeare, nonetheless, suggest a possible line of enquiry, which cannot be fully developed here but may be somehow epitomised by a look, for example, at the current canonical stance of the so-called 'national authors', i.e. those writers which received the highest degree of institutional consecration in their native countries. Employing once more occurrences in the Google Books' corpora as a rough measure for cultural influence (Figure 7), it emerges indeed that the process of cultural decay postulated by Candia et. al, though still slowed down by their massive social clout, seems to have begun also for of literary icons such as Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare or Goethe; its true extension, however, is yet to be properly assessed.

Ultimately, the question about the future of institutional canonisation could be understood as a proxy for the larger issue of the survival of the very concept of 'canon' in contemporary culture. Eulogies for the canon have been common in the last fifty years, at least since the American 'canon wars' saw conservative defenders of established literary hierarchies accusing supporters of the 'opening of the canon' (Bloom's "School of Resentment") of working towards the canon's final dissolution; yet, the generally acknowledged victory of the multiculturalists did not signify the end of the canon but rather, as Donadio comments, a sharpening of the division between "those who defend the idea of a distinct body of knowledge

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[32] As GUILLORY notes, there are some rare cases of books remaining consistently popular without being, if not at last canonised, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but this only highlights how "reputation and [school-driven] canonicity are quite different phenomena" ("Canon, Syllabus, List", p. 53, n. 5).

[33] De-canonisation is a topic too large to be tackled here. To make an passing example from the Italian milieu: once household names in classrooms, authors such as Pascoli, D'Annunzio or Carducci, have progressively found less space in contemporary curricula, thus experiencing a sustained loss in canonical status which is captured by the Ngram chart (one has to set [ita_2012] as linguistic corpus and [1900-2008] as timeframe in the interface).
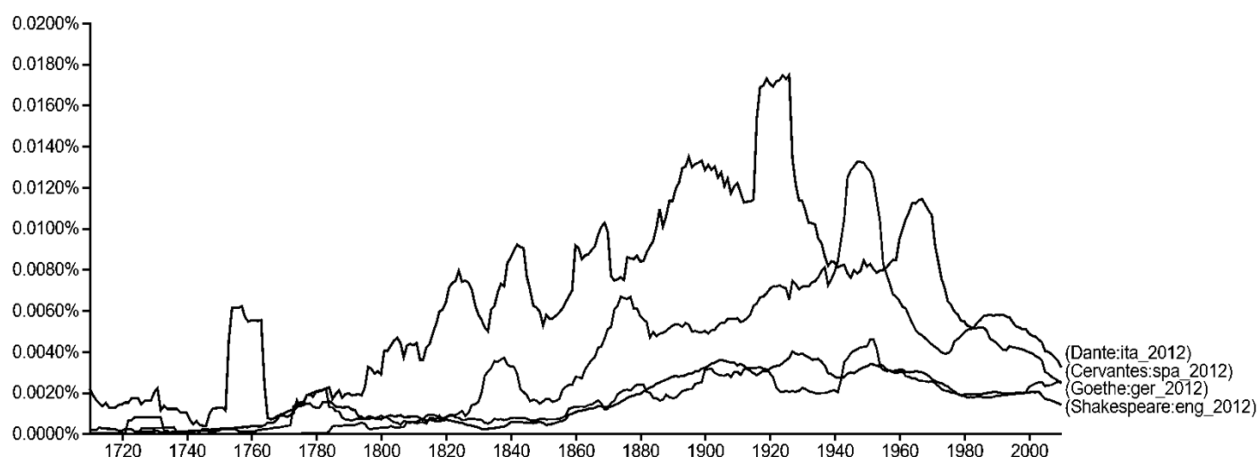
Figure 7. Cultural influence of four major European writers in their respective linguistic environments, 1710-2010.

and texts that students should master and those who focus more on modes of inquiry and interpretation" [34].

Despite this polarisation, it seems that the notion of canon has still maintained some currency in mainstream culture, especially in the form of the popular 'best-book-of-the-century' lists [35]; among academics, however, the romantical view espoused by Nemoianu, in which "[s]lowly and calmly, the centuries seem to accumulate a small number of stubbornly recurrent authors and works in which literate humans recognize themselves more often and better than in all others" [36], appears to have given way to a more articulated, sociologically-oriented understanding of canonisation processes, mainly framed by the dynamics of school reproduction and market performances, and thoroughly explored through the quantitative instruments of the growing digital humanities scholarship.

In the last analysis, arrangements of literary works in the form of canons are unlikely to be dismantled in the short term, both for their practical use as classroom guidance for teaching (as 'imaginary counterparts' to the actual curriculum, Guillory would say) and their intimate connection to the peculiar human need to deal with larger heaps of items through ranking and categorising [37]. Conversely, there are hints that the balance of power between the different canonisation instances will change, with a foreseeable enfeeblement of institutional consecration, linked to the growing irrelevance of literature in Western national identity-

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[34] Rachel DONADIO, "Revisiting the Canon Wars". *The New York Times*, 16 September 2007 [online].
[35] See the multiple attempts at defining an early 21st-century canon by popular media outlets such as *The Guardian*, the BBC, *Vulture* (*New York Magazine*), *La Stampa* (in Italian), *Die Zeit* (in German), *El País* (in Spanish) and so on.
[36] NEMOIANU, p. 225.
[37] See Saul AUSTERLITZ, "Why we rank things". *Boston Globe*, 23 June 2016 [online].

building processes, and a stronger influence of market performances, as the rise of cultural studies, much feared by Bloom and other partisans of pure aesthetics, seems to demonstrate [38]. For sure, more quantitative data and qualitative analyses will be necessary to confirm these early impressions; one has however good reasons to think that, in any case, the issue of the literary canon will long remain central in the "game of culture" – a game from which, as Bourdieu famously remarked, "there's no way out" [39].

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[38] BLOOM, *The Western Canon*, pp. 15 and 519. For an outline of the contemporary book trade see the quantitative study by Burcu YUCESOY et al, "Success in books: a big data approach to bestsellers". *EPJ Data Science* 7, 7 (2018) [companion website: http://bestsellers.barabasilab.com/].

[39] Pierre BOURDIEU, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979], p. 12.

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