

**Beyond Boundaries: Examining the Publishing
Process of Simon and Schuster Canada's Diverse
Fiction Titles**

by

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Abstract

Studies released in 2018 and 2021 by BookNet Canada that explored the "demand of diversity" show that 58% of all respondents agreed that the Canadian readership would benefit from more diverse books. This increase in demand reflects the collective belief of the young, diverse readership that “books by immigrants, foreigners and minorities don’t diminish the ‘classic’ curriculum, they enhance it.” Since 2013, Simon and Schuster Canada has successfully launched diverse authors like Jesse Thistle and Zarqa Nawaz and in 2022, with the establishment of Scribner Canada, initiated a publishing strategy aimed at producing and acquiring titles that brought in global, multidimensional perspectives and met the needs of a diverse readership. This project report examines the publishing processes—from acquisition to editing to production—of five such titles. Through a case-by-case study, this report explains the parameters taken into consideration when acquiring international, diaspora and translated fiction titles, estimating sales potential, how the acquisition and editing of a book written in English differs from a translated literary work, the role of editorial in the marketing and positioning of such titles, and finally, the design treatment for both the interior and jacket of such titles, and how this differs from the Canadian-centric works written by Canadian authors.

Keywords: Diverse Literature; International Fiction; Translated Fiction; Simon and Schuster Canada; Diaspora Literature; Editorial Process

Dedication

To my mother's fire and my father's silent dreams

To Saumya Di, Gargi Di, and Jiju, your tenacity will always inspire me.

*To friends both new and old—Shruti, Ayman, Shubhi, Aanandi, Divjot, Pragya,
Shauryankar, Prashast, Cecilia, Keyvan, Mary and Sarah*

To the people who made me.

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Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgement	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
How do Readers Define Diversity in Literature?	1
Diverse Literature and the Publishing Industry	3
Chapter 2. Acquiring Voices	6
2.1 From Submissions to Acquisitions:	6
Stolen by Ann-Helén Laestadius	6
In the Belly of the Congo by Blaise Ndala	8
The Most Secret Memory of Men by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr	9
Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday by Jamaluddin Aram	10
Sunshine Nails by Mai Nguyen	11
2.2 Co-Published/Joint Venture Titles	12
What are Joint Ventures?	12
2.3 Examining the Parameters for Accepting Manuscripts	14
What are the parameters taken into consideration when acquiring a manuscript?	14
2.4 Calculating the Sales Potential of Diaspora Fiction, International Literary and Translated Fiction Titles	15
Chapter 3. The Curious Case of Translated Fiction	16
3.1 Is Translation Fiction a Genre?	16
3.2 Simon and Schuster Canada's Publishing Strategy for Translated Fiction	16
3.3 The Editing Process of Translated Literary Fiction	17
Comparative Case Study I: The Translation Process	17

Comparative Case Study II: The Impact of Marketing and Publicity Strategies on Meeting Projected Sales Goals	19
Chapter 4. From Margins to Mainstream	23
4.1 Publishing Diverse Literature in the Era of the Internet	23
4.2 BookTok and Bookstagram as Publicity and Marketing Tools	24
The Role of BookTok and Bookstagram in Promoting Diverse Literature	24
Incorporating Book Tok and Bookstagram in Marketing and Publicity Strategies	25
Comparative Case Study III: The Role of BookTok and Bookstagram in the Marketing and Publicity of Diaspora Fiction Titles	26
4.3 How Cultural and Regional Identities of Authors Impact Marketing and Publicity	28
Comparative Case Study IV: The Impact of Author’s Identity on Publicity and Marketing Strategies	29
4.4 Collaborative Workflow between Editorial, Marketing and Publicity	31
Chapter 5. Packaging the Book	32
5.1 Role of Editorial in the Production Process	32
Comparative Case Study V: The Production Process of Joint Ventures Versus Canada-led Titles	33
5.2 How Packaging Affects the Positioning of the Book	34
Comparative Case Study VI: The Designing Process	35
5.3 Impact of Blurbs in Positioning	43
Conclusion	44
References	46

List of Figures

Figure 1. What 'diversity in books' means to readers.....	2
Figure 2. Stills from unboxing videos uploaded by influencers on BookTok	20
Figure 3 Back Cover of Sunshine Nails (Atria Edition).....	36
Figure 4 Back Cover of Sunshine Nails (S&S Canada Edition)	37
Figure 5 Front Cover of In the Belly of the Congo (The Other Press Edition)	39
Figure 6 Front Cover of In the Belly of the Congo (Scribner Canada Edition)	39
Figure 7 Front Cover of Wahala.....	40
Figure 8 Front Cover of Speaking of Summer	40
Figure 9 Descriptive Image for Cover Brief	40
Figure 10 Back Cover of Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday	41
Figure 11 Front Cover of Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday	41
Figure 12 Front Cover of The White Tiger.....	42
Figure 13 Front Cover of Exit West	42

Chapter 1. Introduction

The past decade has witnessed tremendous change in the global socio-political milieu. A growing discourse on diversity and inclusion has permeated the publishing industry, leading to the birth of a readership that demands the integration of the marginalised into the mainstream. According to Hisham Matar, a Pulitzer prize-winning American-Libyan author, the lack of readership of international fiction, both literary and contemporary, only “impoverishes culture and nourishes narcissism.”¹In 2018, BookNet Canada released a free study titled *Demand for Diversity: A Survey of Canadian Readers*.² In the study, 58% of all respondents agreed that the Canadian readership would benefit from more diverse books, and 62% of the respondents claimed that they actively sought out books about diverse topics or experiences or by diverse authors.³ In 2021, BookNet followed up with an update on the previous report titled, *On Diversity: A Survey of Canadian Readers 2021*.⁴ This study explored the “continued demand of diversity,”⁵ by taking a deeper dive into what diversity means for the Canadian readership.

How do Readers Define Diversity in Literature?

According to Roxane Gay, a *New York Times* bestselling author, “diversity in literature is, in part, about representation—who is telling the stories and who stories are told about.”⁶ The constituents of diverse literature vary for each reader, which is perhaps why, quantifying the inclusion of diverse books in the global literary market has proven to be challenging. For instance, in the above-mentioned study, BookNet gave the respondents a series of definitions of “diverse books”⁷ to choose from and these were the responses:

¹ Hisham Matar, “International literature is hugely underrated, while English books are often overrated,” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2018

² BookNet Canada. (2019). *Demand for Diversity: A Survey of Canadian Readers, 2018*. BookNet Canada.

³ Ibid.

⁴ BookNet Canada (2021). *On Diversity: The need for diverse books is still here, 2021*. BookNet Canada.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Abigail Bereola, “The Rumpus Interview with Roxane Gay,” *The Rumpus*, January 4, 2017

⁷ BookNet Canada (2021). *On Diversity: The need for diverse books is still here, 2021*. BookNet Canada.

Figure 1⁸. lists ten definitions of ‘diverse books’ given to the respondents.⁹ The total number of respondents were classified under two categories: readers who belong to a non-dominant identity—people who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or of colour (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ people, differently abled or disabled people, and religious

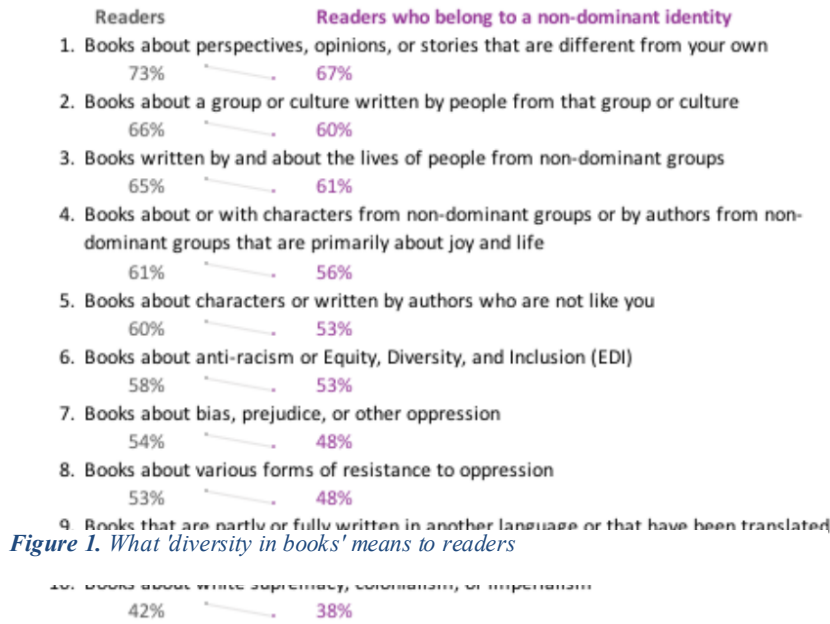


Figure 1. What 'diversity in books' means to readers

minorities—and dominant identity—readers who do not identify as any of the above.¹⁰ All respondents were allowed to choose more than one definition. 73% of all readers agreed that diverse books are “books about perspectives, opinions, or stories that are different from your own”, while only 67% of readers from non-dominant identity agreed with this statement.¹¹ 66% of all readers, and 60% of non-dominant identity readers, agreed that “diverse books are books about a group or culture written by people from that group or culture.”¹²

Based on the different responses, it is evident that diverse literature is an umbrella term that can be used to classify books from any genre—literary fiction, commercial fiction, graphic novels, non-fiction—written about a non-dominant group or culture, or by a person from a non-dominant group or culture, translated books written in another language, books about anti-racism, equity, inclusion, and diversity etc.

⁸ BookNet Canada (2021). *On Diversity: The need for diverse books is still here, 2021*. BookNet Canada.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Diverse Literature and the Publishing Industry

The sales and demand of the different subsets that constitute diverse literature varies with the market, the reading habits of the audience, the region, the language, the format, and the genre of the book. For instance, according to *Publishers Weekly*, Japanese Manga sales continue to dominate the US since 2019, making up 54% of the graphic novel market.¹³ In the Canadian market, according to BookNet, sales in the poetry category increased by 79% in 2016, and between 2016–17 the number of units sold increased by another 154%.¹⁴ This exponential growth was credited to the Canadian poet Rupi Kaur¹⁵, who is considered “a much-needed voice of diversity in a literary scene that’s overwhelmingly white.”¹⁶ However, the share of translated and international fiction published in the North American literary market remains at a seemingly negligible 3% despite the continuous growth in its demand.¹⁷

These increasing sales numbers of different sections of diverse literature not only reflect the collective thought of the young, diverse readership that “books by immigrants, foreigners and minorities don’t diminish the ‘classic’ curriculum, they enhance it,”¹⁸ but also challenge the dichotomy between the “ethical principle of including historically marginalised voices”¹⁹ in publishing, and the “economic imperative of making a profit.”²⁰ For years, the cause of international fiction was championed by small, independent publishing houses that only had access to a minimal readership. However, Amazon Crossing entered the market in 2010 and became the largest publisher of translated fiction in the US.²¹ The Big 5 publishing houses launched authors like Zadie Smith, Rupi Kaur and Sonya Lalli, who became the voices of their communities.

Simon and Schuster Canada, a decade-old imprint of Simon and Schuster, developed a rich list of titles ranging from historical fiction, thrillers, and literary

¹³ Deb Aoki, “Are Sales of Manga Evening Out,” *Publishers Weekly*, April 21, 2023

¹⁴ Ainsley Sparkes, “The Bestselling Books of 2017,” December 17, 2017

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Chiara Giovanni, “The Problem with Rupi Kaur’s Poetry,” August 4, 2017

¹⁷ D. P. Snyder, “Stuck at 3%: Why Can’t We Have More Literature in English Translation,” April 20, 2023.

¹⁸ Courtney Suciu, “Why We Need to Read More Works by International Writers,” *ProQuest*, July 12, 2018.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Anamik Saha, Sandra van Lente, “Rethinking ‘Diversity’ in Publishing,” *Goldsmiths Press, University of London*, 2020.

²¹ Alison Flood, “How Amazon came to dominate fiction in translation,” *The Guardian*, December 9, 2015.

fiction to non-fiction, biographies, and sports memoirs.²² Since 2013, Simon and Schuster Canada has successfully launched diverse authors like Jesse Thistle, the Métis-Cree author of the internationally bestselling memoir *From the Ashes*, and Zarqa Nawaz, author of *Jameela Green Ruins Everything*²³. In 2022, after ten years of building a publishing program which gave the readership commercial, bestselling authors and novels, President and Publisher Kevin Hanson, Vice President, and Editor-in-Chief Nita Pronovost, and then Executive Editor Janie Yoon led the development process for an imprint, Scribner Canada, on the look-out for works of literary excellence and international merit.²⁴ According to Kevin Hanson, “the creation of Scribner Canada will broaden our publishing reach, bring new voices to readers, and grow our already stellar list of authors.”²⁵ The imprint is “dedicated to publishing the best literary fiction and nonfiction from Canada and around the world,”²⁶ and features “works in translation by both Canadian and international authors.”²⁷ They initiated a publishing strategy aimed at producing and acquiring titles that brought in global, multidimensional perspectives and met the needs of a diverse readership.

This report examines the publishing processes—from acquisition to editing to production—of five fiction titles, all exploring a few subsets of diverse literature, across the Simon & Schuster Canada and Scribner Canada lists. Through a case-by-case study, it explains the parameters taken into consideration when acquiring international, diaspora and translated fiction titles, estimating sales potential, how the acquisition and editing of a book written in English differs from a translated literary work, the role of editorial in the marketing and positioning of such titles, and finally, the design treatment for both the interior and jacket of such titles, and how this differs from that of Canadian-centric works written by Canadian authors.

Chapter 1 reflects on the acquisition processes of translated literary fiction titles *Stolen* by Ann-Helén Laestadius, *The Most Secret Memory of Men* by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, *In the Belly of the Congo* by Blaise Ndala, and English-language

²² Simon and Schuster Canada, “About Us”, <https://www.simonandschuster.ca/p/canada-corporate-information>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ This information is provided by Janie Yoon, then Executive Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission from Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada.

²⁵ Simon and Schuster Canada, “Simon & Schuster Canada Launches New Scribner Imprint”, [Press Release] 2022.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

diaspora fiction titles *Sunshine Nails* by Mai Nguyen (published in collaboration with Simon and Schuster US) and *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* by Jamaluddin Aram (a Canadian-led literary fiction title). It grants insight into the financial impact on the acquiring and publishing process of joint ventures with the US versus Canada-led titles and analyses the steps taken throughout the publishing process to ensure the relevance of these narratives within the North American literary market. Chapter 2 examines the production process of translated fiction through a comparative case study of *In The Belly of the Congo*, *The Most Secret Memory of Men* and *Stolen*; how Simon and Schuster Canada navigated across multiple publishing strategies for each title to minimise the cost of translation. Chapter 3 explores the role of current market trends and how the increase in demand for culturally diverse books has led to the publishing of both commercial and literary fiction titles from diaspora authors. Chapter 4 studies and differentiates between the packaging and positioning of international/translated fiction titles from Canadian-centric titles and observes the role of editorial in the packaging of the book and the impact of blurbs on positioning. Lastly, the conclusion sheds light on the future goals of Simon and Schuster Canada and Scribner Canada; how they aim to continue the growth of diverse literature, and additionally, develop a stable position in the niche market of international and translated fiction.

Chapter 2. Acquiring Voices

2.1 From Submissions to Acquisitions:

“How editors choose books to publish remains the most mysterious question for people outside publishing and, indeed, for those inside who never get a proper glimpse of the process.”

— Gill Davies, *Book Commissioning and Acquisition*²⁸

Simon and Schuster Canada depends on a team of editorial experts and a robust network of national and international literary agents in search of manuscripts that fit the editorial profile of the press. Each editor brings to the table their expertise over different genres and connections in the global literary sphere, which aids their pursuit of authors, both discovered and undiscovered. For this report, I focused on the acquisition process of five fiction titles: two translations of successfully published international literary fiction titles, one translation of a celebrated piece of African literature written by a Canadian author, and two vastly different debut works of diaspora literature produced within Canada. Each is a product of the narratives enclosed within its pages and the unique, behind-the-scenes stories woven beyond the boundaries of printed formats.

[Stolen by Ann-Helén Laestadius](#)

Ann-Helén Laestadius is a Sámi author and journalist from Kiruna, Sweden, who made her debut as a young adult author in 2007.²⁹ Laestadius quickly garnered critical acclaim for returning to her roots in her stories and weaving in her Sámi and Tornedalian descent, two of Sweden’s national minorities.³⁰ With several accolades under her belt, her first adult novel *Stöld (Stolen)* was published in January 2021 by Romanus and Selling, an imprint of Bonnier Books.³¹ *Stolen* is a powerful telling of a nine-year-old girl’s struggle to defend her Indigenous heritage amidst the growing

²⁸ Gill Davies, *Book Commissioning and Acquisition*, (London: Routledge)13.

²⁹ Ahlander Agency, “Ann-Helén Laestadius [Author Profile]”, Ahlander Agency Website.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Stolen* by Ann-Helén Laestadius, published in Spring 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

cruelty of a society fuelled by hate.³² In September 2021, the novel won Sweden’s Book of the Year Award, becoming a national bestseller and a favourite among both readers and critics.³³ The rights for the novel were sold to 23 countries around the world.³⁴

Around this time, the editorial team at Simon and Schuster Canada was developing a list for Scribner Canada’s launch in 2022. Kevin Hanson, Nita Pronovost and Janie Yoon met Laestadius’s literary agent, Kaisa Palo, at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2021 and were compelled by the timeliness of this layered narrative about racial injustice, and strongly advocated for adding it to the inaugural list.³⁵ The editorial team identified the huge market for Indigenous fiction in Canada, citing the success of comparative titles like Michelle Good’s *Five Little Indians*, which won CBC Canada Reads³⁶, and Danielle Daniel’s bestselling debut novel *Daughters of the Deer*.³⁷ The growing readership of international titles by Indigenous authors like Pulitzer-Prize-winner Louise Erdrich³⁸ also became a contributing factor to estimate the potential success of *Stolen*.³⁹ While the added expensive cost of translation was a factor to consider, the team believed in the book’s potential for critical acclaim and were confident that they could enlist support from Scribner US as well.⁴⁰ Thus, in November 2021, *Stolen* became the first translated novel from an international author which was jointly acquired to be published by Scribner Canada and Colin Harrison, Editor-in-Chief at Scribner US for Spring 2023.⁴¹

³² Lisa Abend, “Her Culture Was Suppressed for Centuries. Not It Powers Her Best Seller”, *The New York Times*, January 30, 2023.

³³ Ahlander Agency, “Ann-Helén Laestadius [Author Profile]”, Ahlander Agency Website.

³⁴ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Stolen* by Ann-Helén Laestadius, published in Spring 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

³⁵ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

³⁶ Jane van Koeverden, “Michelle Good on her novel Five Little Indians, and the question that guides her writing”, *CBC*, March 14, 2022.

³⁷ CBC Radio, “Danielle Daniel draws on her ancestors’ past in debut novel *Daughters of the Deer*”, *CBC*, June 3, 2022.

³⁸ The Pulitzer Prizes, “The 2021 Pulitzer Prize Winner in Fiction-Winning Work”, *The Pulitzer Prizes*, 2021.

³⁹ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Stolen* by Ann-Helén Laestadius, published in Spring 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

⁴⁰ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission

⁴¹ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Stolen* by Ann-Helén Laestadius, published in Spring 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

[In the Belly of the Congo by Blaise Ndala](#)

Blaise Ndala's *Das le ventre du Congo* came to S&S Canada on submission via The Other Press⁴², a US independent publishing house which specializes in translated literature and had acquired North American rights.⁴³ *Das le ventre du Congo* is an important story of two unforgettable women connected across time, history and continents, set against the socio-political backdrop of Congo's independence from Belgium.⁴⁴ Since Ndala was Canadian, having emigrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Canada in 2007,⁴⁵ the American press thought Simon and Schuster Canada might be interested in publishing in the Canadian market.⁴⁶

An established award-winning and critically acclaimed author, Blaise Ndala was creating a buzz in the French literary market with the publication of this novel, which had already won the Prix Kourouma and the Prix Ivoire for African Literature.⁴⁷ The novel also had two French-language publishers—Mémoire d'Encrier, the French-Canadian publisher⁴⁸, and Le Seuil, Paris⁴⁹—a very rare achievement for a French-Canadian author, hinting towards incredible success and both national and international interest for an English translation.⁵⁰ The editorial team at Simon and Schuster Canada recognized the potential for an English translation of *Dans le ventre du Congo* to introduce English Canadian readers to the colonial legacy of Congo. Not only was Ndala a local author, but the novel was an intergenerational family saga with strong female characters that would appeal to readers of literary fiction authors like Téa Mtonji, Francesca Ekwuyasi and Abi Daré.⁵¹ Partnering with The Other Press and thus sharing the translation cost of the novel, Simon and Schuster Canada acquired

⁴² The Other Press, "In the Belly of the Congo A Novel", Book Categories, *The Other Press*.

⁴³ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *In the Belly of the Congo* by Blaise Ndala, published in Spring 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Blaise Ndala, auteur, "Dans le ventre du Congo", *Blaise Ndala.com*

⁴⁶ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

⁴⁷ Blaise Ndala, auteur, "Dans le ventre du Congo", *Blaise Ndala.com*

⁴⁸ Mémoire D'encrier, "Dans le ventre du Congo", *Mémoire D'encrier.com*

⁴⁹ Seuil, "Dans le ventre du Congo", *Seuil.com*

⁵⁰ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *In the Belly of the Congo* by Blaise Ndala, published in Spring 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission

⁵¹ Ibid.

English Canadian rights, making *In the Belly of the Congo* the first work of translated fiction by a Canadian author on the Scribner Canada list.⁵²

[The Most Secret Memory of Men by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr](#)

Scribner Canada partnered with The Other Press on another acquisition of international translated literary fiction: *La plus secrète mémoire des hommes* by award-winning Senegalese writer Mohamed Mbougar Sarr. A novel about a young Senegalese writer examining a plagiarism case against an African author, *La plus secrète mémoire des hommes* explores the position of African literature in the West,⁵³ and was thus creating buzz in the international market since its release.⁵⁴ This was Mbougar Sarr's fourth novel and a breakout when it was published in France in 2021, becoming a commercial and literary hit.⁵⁵ It won the Prix Goncourt, making Mbougar Sarr the first author from sub-Saharan Africa to win the prize⁵⁶, and was longlisted or shortlisted for virtually every other literary prize in the country. Around the same time, French West African author David Diop's *At Night All Blood Is Black* won the Booker International⁵⁷ and Tanzanian–British author Abdulrazak Gurnah won the Nobel Prize for Literature,⁵⁸ highlighting the increase in the demand for post-colonial and modern African literature. Rights for *The Most Secret Memory of Men* quickly sold in more than 33 countries, including the UK, where Harvill Secker/Penguin Random House won rights in a heated five-way auction.⁵⁹

Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's influence on the post-colonial and modern African diaspora literature readership, especially with his breakthrough in the French literary market, became the driving force behind Simon and Schuster Canada's decision to

⁵² This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *In the Belly of the Congo* by Blaise Ndala, published in Spring 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

⁵³ Ben Libman, "Book Review: 'The Most Secret Memory of Men' by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2023.

⁵⁴ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *The Most Secret Memory of Men* by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, published in Fall 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

⁵⁵ Jon Henley, "Senegal's Mohamed Mbougar Sarr wins top French literary prize," *The Guardian*, November 3, 2021.

⁵⁶ Simon and Schuster Canada, "About the Author- Mohamed Mbougar Sarr," *Simon & Schuster Canada*

⁵⁷ Alex Marshall, "'Frightening' Tale of Senegalese Soldier Wins International Booker Prize," *The New York Times*, September 14, 2021.

⁵⁸ Alison Flood, "Abdulrazak Gurnah wins the 2021 Nobel prize in literature," *The Guardian*, October 7, 2021.

⁵⁹ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *The Most Secret Memory of Men* by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, published in Fall 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

publish this novel in Canada. The book's similarity to Robert Bolaño's critically acclaimed *The Savage Detectives* and inspiration from the true story of Malian writer Yambo Ouologuem, winner of the 1968 Prix Renaudot, who was later, accused of plagiarism, guaranteed appeal to a diverse readership, and major literary award committees⁶⁰. In the fall of 2023, the book was indeed long listed for the 2023 National Book Award in the category of translated literature.⁶¹

[Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday by Jamaluddin Aram](#)

The manuscript for Jamaluddin Aram's *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* was submitted to Scribner Canada in 2022 by the Canadian literary agency CookeMcDermid,⁶² which was also representing another Scribner Canada author, Debra Thompson.⁶³ Aram was a finalist for RBC Bronwen Wallace Award for Emerging Writers in 2020 and was also selected as a mentee by Michael Christie for the Writers' Trust of Canada Mentorship program for his debut novel, initially titled *Marchoba* and now known as *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*.⁶⁴ Apart from his literary accolades, what sparked the interest of Scribner Canada's editorial team was the harrowing tale of peace in a state of war told by a Toronto-based, Canadian author belonging to the Afghani diaspora.⁶⁵ Aram is a documentary filmmaker and writer from Kabul, Afghanistan.⁶⁶ As a child, living in a state of war, Aram picked up the pen to write poetry in Farsi.⁶⁷ With his schooling in Union College, however, he moved on to writing short stories in English; some of them featured in literary magazines like *Numero Cinq*,⁶⁸ among others.⁶⁹

The discovery of Aram's refreshing voice and the timely and authentic subject matter explored in the narrative, especially close to the anniversary of the US

⁶⁰ Laila Lalami, "An ambitious, stinging novel inspired by a real-life literary scandal" *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2023.

⁶¹ Senegal Tunisia, "The National Book Award Interviews: Lara Vergnaud on *The Most Secret Memory of Men*", *Words Without Borders*, October 3, 2023.

⁶² CookeMcDermid, "Author Profile", Cooke McDermid Literary Management.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Writers' Trust of Canada, "Authors-Jamaluddin Aram", *Writers Trust of Canada.com*

⁶⁵ information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* by Jamaluddin Aram, published in Fall 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

⁶⁶ Writers' Trust of Canada, "Authors-Jamaluddin Aram", *Writers Trust of Canada.com*

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jamaluddin Aram, "The Boy and the Dog: Fiction", *Numero Cinq*, Volume VIII, No. 2, February 2, 2017.

⁶⁹ Jamaluddin Aram | Writers' Trust of Canada (writerstrust.com)

withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2020-2021,⁷⁰ and the return of the Taliban rule, built a strong case in favour of acquisition.⁷¹ In Aram, a bright, gifted, local author with connections in the film and literary community, Scribner Canada saw the opportunity to fill the gap in diaspora, and noting the potential literary success of the title, acquired the novel in February 2022 and published in June 2023.⁷²

Sunshine Nails by Mai Nguyen

Mai Nguyen's *Sunshine Nails* is on the commercial end of the diaspora fiction spectrum. Submitted to Simon and Schuster Canada and Atria Books, a US imprint of S&S, the novel was pitched as an upmarket, commercial record of the Vietnamese diaspora.⁷³ What appealed to the Canadian team was Mai's story; a second-generation immigrant from Vietnam, Mai wrote a humorous and heartfelt debut novel inspired by her family's nail salon in Canada and their struggle to keep it up and running.⁷⁴ Nguyen is a National Magazine Award-nominated journalist who has written for *The Washington Post*, *Toronto Star*, and *Wired*, and *Sunshine Nails* became her breakthrough in the fiction world.⁷⁵ The narrative explored the joys and sorrows of the immigrant experience through a multi-generational lens, and shed light on topics like privilege, class, and race.⁷⁶

The editorial team predicted the potential success within both the American and Canadian readership, especially its appeal to readers of *New York Times* bestsellers *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan⁷⁷ and *The Last Story of Mina Lee*⁷⁸ by Nancy Jooyoun Kim. Another factor that garnered interest on the Canadian side was

⁷⁰ Nathan Whitlock, "Where is the Canadian Fiction about Afghanistan?", *The Walrus*, August 10, 2023.

⁷¹ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* by Jamaluddin Aram, published in Fall 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ This information is derived from tipsheets and other promotional material for *Sunshine Nails* by Mai Nguyen, published in Summer 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

⁷⁴ Josefa Cameron, "Halifax-raised author paints nail-salon experience with honest brush in new book", *CBC News*, June 25, 2023.

⁷⁵ Mai Nguyen, "About-Mai in Nguyen", *Mai Nguyen.com*

⁷⁶ Josefa Cameron, "Halifax-raised author paints nail-salon experience with honest brush in new book", *CBC News*, June 25, 2023.

⁷⁷ Janet Maslin, "'Crazy, Rich, Asians': Guilty Pleasure, or Cult of Opulence", *The New York Times*, June 20, 2013.

⁷⁸ Nancy Jooyoun Kim, "Review: The Last Story of Mina Lee", *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 2020.

the local, Toronto setting for the novel.⁷⁹ Although Nguyen was brought up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where she witnessed her family nail salon flourish and struggle throughout her childhood, she set her novel in the Junction neighbourhood, capturing an accurate depiction of modern Toronto.⁸⁰

Owing to the exploration of both local and universal themes, and the potential of an international readership, Simon and Schuster Canada teamed up with Atria Books in a collaborative effort to acquire the novel in a pre-empt.⁸¹ It was acquired in February 2022 with both Janie Yoon and Editorial Director Sarah St. Pierre as editors for the Canadian edition and was co-published with Atria in July 2023.⁸²

2.2 Co-Published/Joint Venture Titles

What are Joint Ventures?

Joint ventures are titles published, often simultaneously, in partnership with international divisions in the publishing house. Joint ventures with other imprints as publishing partners are advantageous as they help reduce the editorial workload and grant access to marketing and publicity channels beyond the normal scope of both imprints.⁸³ On the production end, the work on the interior is handled by one imprint, that is, copy editing, proofing, designing, and typesetting, while the other imprint cross-checks every step and uses the final pass files of the lead imprint. This reduces additional steps and makes the editorial and production process relatively smoother.⁸⁴ For editorial, the teams of both publishing parties work in tandem with each other.

While some elements of the process are collaborative efforts, like reading and reviewing drafts of the manuscript, others are catered to meet the needs of the

⁷⁹ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

⁸⁰ Shinan Givani, "Sunshine Nails: David and Goliath tale in a bonbon of a novel", *Toronto Star*, July 13, 2023.

⁸¹ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

⁸² This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Sunshine Nails* by Mai Nguyen, published in Summer 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

⁸³ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

⁸⁴ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, the Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

respective readerships.⁸⁵ For instance, in the case of *Sunshine Nails*, both Yoon and St. Pierre worked with Loan Le, the Editor at Atria Books⁸⁶ for the novel. However, for the Canadian edition, they solicited blurbs from authors that appealed more to a Canadian readership, reviewed, and edited the front and back matter for the cover, and overall championed and presented the title in in-house.⁸⁷ On the marketing and publicity front, while the teams received crossover support from American media, and shared some marketing assets, the promotional plan for the Canadian edition remained Canada-specific,⁸⁸ including a book launch organized in collaboration with the Toronto International Festival of Authors (TIFA), in the Junction neighbourhood of Toronto.⁸⁹

The production and publishing cost was also divided between the publishing partners based on the market share of both imprints within North America.⁹⁰ Thus, in acquiring the novel via a joint venture, the Canada team was able to launch a local author and her debut with the support and backing of an American publisher and the benefits of a cohesive, intercompany publishing strategy.⁹¹

A similar strategy is also employed in the case of translated fiction titles. The expensive and complicated process of translating literature can be a deterrent to publishing it in the Western literary market. Simon and Schuster Canada developed the key strategy of finding the right publishing partners for translated fiction, as evidenced in the co-publication of *Stolen* with Scribner US, and *In The Belly of The Congo* and *The Most Secret Memory of Men* with The Other Press, making the translation process cost-effective and relatively easier.

⁸⁵ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

⁸⁶ Simon and Schuster, "All Editors-Loan Le", *Simon and Schuster.com*

⁸⁷ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Toronto Festival of Authors, "Toronto Lit Up: *Sunshine Nails* by Mai Nguyen", *Toronto Festival of Authors.com*

⁹⁰ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

⁹¹ This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

2.3 Examining the Parameters for Accepting Manuscripts

What are the parameters taken into consideration when acquiring a manuscript?

For years, the Big 5 publishers have been considered the “gatekeepers” of publishing.⁹² They have the means to offer marketing and publicity along with quality editorial assistance, and they command a huge chunk of the literary market.⁹³

However, the growth of BookTok and the success of self-published authors has challenged that view, and now we're seeing traditional publishers approach self-published authors with offers to re-publish, a reverse of the traditional publishing journey that would see aspiring authors bowing before the “altar of Big Publishing.”⁹⁴

For example, Simon and Schuster has acquired and re-published the works of self-established authors like Rupi Kaur and Hannah Grace, following the trends of the market.⁹⁵ In the case of literary fiction, however, the success of authors and their narratives is dependent on traditional measures of publishing success, such as good sales track, critical reviews, award nods, potential publicity and media, and a well-established network of authors and industry professionals who will support the book via endorsements and promotion—all of which helps secure robust in-store placement.⁹⁶ These are all factors that are taken into consideration before accepting a manuscript.

For example, a manuscript of a novel successfully published in India by one of the Big 5 publishing houses as a bestseller with high sales numbers was submitted to Simon and Schuster Canada for consideration. Despite my cultural and regional affinity to the novel, I recommended passing on the book because the cultural nuances of the narrative would get too lost in translation. Analysing the trends of the market, i.e., knowing your reader, also plays a huge role when deciding to acquire a novel. For instance, it was obvious that the above-mentioned novel was meant for an Indian audience familiar with the socio-political milieu of the book and while its elliptical style of writing would attract an Indian readership used to fables and folktales told in

⁹² Regina Clarke, “Traditional Publishing is an Inadequate Gateway of Authors”, *The Medium*, February 16, 2022.

⁹³ Michael Coffey, “The Myth of the Gatekeepers,” *Publishers Weekly*, May 23, 2014.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Simon and Schuster, “About the Author-Rupi Kaur”, *Simon and Schuster.com*

⁹⁶ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

the same form, Canadian readers who prefer a more direct, yet layered tone of storytelling would not have been captivated by the writing.⁹⁷

2.4 Calculating the Sales Potential of Diaspora Fiction, International Literary and Translated Fiction Titles

The challenge of estimating sales potential of books involves considering a variety of factors, including the genre of the book, its target audience, prevalent market trends, and estimated production costs. These factors are inter-dependent and are subject to variation. An initial estimate is calculated at the time of acquisition, when making an offer to the author.⁹⁸ However, once the work on the book is complete—a promotional plan has been organized, a cover has been designed, the title has been presented, the sales team has pitched the book to sales channels—the initial print run is subject to changes.⁹⁹ Sometimes when a novel generates a buzz higher than anticipated from the time of acquisition, the initial print run is higher. Other times, it might be lower if some element of the promotional plan fell through.¹⁰⁰

For instance, a commercial fiction novel like *Sunshine Nails* with mass appeal, had a much higher initial print run, especially with the exposure to both American and Canadian media channels.¹⁰¹ In comparison, the initial print run for a literary fiction novel, especially an international translated fiction novel like *Stolen* was much lower,¹⁰² as the goals for literary fiction titles are much different. Such titles aim for critical acclaim and steady weekly sales to claim its position in the market as a long-tail bestseller.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ This information is derived from weekly editorial board meetings of Simon and Schuster Canada attended during the course of this internship; used with permission.

⁹⁸ This information is derived from Publishing Board meetings of Simon and Schuster Canada attended during the course of this internship; used with permission.

⁹⁹ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *Sunshine Nails* by Mai Nguyen, published in Summer 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹⁰² BookNet Canada Lifetime Unit Sales accessed through Simon and Schuster Canada's company membership; Sales number cannot be disclosed; proprietary information of Simon and Schuster Canada

¹⁰³ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

Chapter 3. The Curious Case of Translated Fiction

3.1 Is Translation Fiction a Genre?

“Translation is not a matter of words only: it is
a matter of making intelligible a whole culture.”

— Anthony Burgess

Quite often, the inconsistencies in categorising translated fiction hinders sales, leading to yet another cause for hesitation in publishing translated literature. Too many booksellers, publishers and even readers classify translated fiction as a separate category.¹⁰⁴ According to Judith Vonber, “translated fiction is not a genre. It is illogical and unhelpful to suggest otherwise.”¹⁰⁵ The constant “othering” of translated fiction alienates potential readers as they see these titles as “not for them—a category apart from normal fiction.”¹⁰⁶ From the publisher’s perspective, apart from the expensive translation process, another unavoidable challenge is the time taken to translate. Publishing a translated novel is often considered a longer-term investment because the publisher must consider the wait for the translation of the final, edited manuscript before it goes to market.¹⁰⁷ What is needed instead is a special focus on translated fiction—publishing plans designed to tackle a set of challenges faced by these specific titles, while simultaneously building a space for them within the genres of fiction.¹⁰⁸

3.2 Simon and Schuster Canada’s Publishing Strategy for Translated Fiction

Simon and Schuster Canada’s tryst with translated literary fiction began with the launch of Scribner Canada in 2022.¹⁰⁹ The editorial team solicited translations from international literary agents and at book fairs. Marketing and publicity created word-

¹⁰⁴ Sheima Benembarek, “Found in Translation: The gender politics of South Korea,” *Literary Review of Canada*, October 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Simon and Schuster Canada, “Simon & Schuster Canada Launches New Scribner Imprint”, [Press Release] 2022.

of-mouth advertisements, dedicated social media marketing, and a press release announcing the launch and Scribner Canada's aims for the future.¹¹⁰

First and foremost, the strategy of simultaneously co-publishing with partners to tackle the expensive translation costs was introduced. This allowed Scribner Canada to reduce expenditure and share the translation costs with the publishing partner.¹¹¹ Secondly, the marketing and publicity of these titles were aimed at specific media channels, newspapers, magazines, critics focused on representation of minority communities in literature and culture.¹¹² The marketing and publicity plans were thus review-driven, and relied on blurbs and breaking through critically acclaimed award lists.¹¹³ On top of this general strategy, each title has specific focus points like the author's personal experiences that inspired the narrative and their cultural, linguistic and regional identity, which help market and position the book.¹¹⁴ The below case studies explore these points in greater detail.

3.3 The Editing Process of Translated Literary Fiction

Comparative Case Study I: The Translation Process

The original manuscript for *Stolen* was submitted along with an English sample to Yoon by Laestadius's literary agent, Kaisa Palo of Ahlander Agency. The sample was translated from Swedish to English by Rachel Willson-Broyles,¹¹⁵ a freelance translator based in Minnesota who had already worked on Sussane Jansson's *Winter Water* (Grand Central Publishing)¹¹⁶ and Alex Schulman's international bestseller *The Survivors* (Doubleday).¹¹⁷ Usually, in co-publishing partnerships, the lead imprint, which in this case was Scribner Canada, takes charge of both finding and hiring a translator. However, both author and editor were satisfied with the translation—encouraged by Willson-Broyles' extensive list of previous works for bestselling

¹¹⁰ This information is provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² This information is derived from publishing board meetings of Simon and Schuster Canada attended during the course of this internship; used with permission.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, the Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

¹¹⁵ Rachel Willson-Broyles, "About", *Rachel Willson Broyles.com*

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

authors as well her scholarly accolades in Scandinavian Studies¹¹⁸, which aligned with the literary fiction narrative of the novel, and agreed with publishing partner Scribner US on the choice of translator.¹¹⁹ The translation costs were divided based on the market share of the involved publishing parties.¹²⁰ A percentage of the translation cost was also covered by a grant from the Swedish Arts Council¹²¹ for International Promotion of Swedish Literature and Drama.¹²²

In the cases of Ndala's *In the Belly of the Congo* and Sarr's *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, the responsibility of hiring a translator fell to The Other Press, the US-based independent house that had initially acquired the English translation.¹²³ The translation costs were yet again split between The Other Press and Scribner Canada according to the respective market share, and Scribner Canada acquired Canadian rights for both titles.¹²⁴ Since both titles were originally written and published in French, The Other Press also applied for translation grants through *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* (Council of Arts and Letters of Quebec).¹²⁵

For the translation of *In the Belly of the Congo*, The Other Press commissioned Amy B. Reid, an award-winning translator and professor of French and gender studies at New College of Florida.¹²⁶ She received a Literature Translation Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for Patrice Nganang's *When the Plums Are Ripe*. Her other well-known works include Patrice Nganang's *Dog Days*, *Mount Pleasant*, and *A Trail of Crab Tracks* and Mutt-Lon's *The Blunder*.¹²⁷

The Most Secret Memory of Men was translated by Lara Vergnaud, who was commissioned by The Other Press.¹²⁸ Vergnaud is a translator of prose, creative nonfiction, and scholarly works from the French, and lives in Washington, DC. She has received two PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grants and a French Voices Grand

¹¹⁸ This information is provided by Janie Yoon, then Executive Editor; used with permission of Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Percentage division cannot be disclosed; proprietary information of Simon and Schuster Canada

¹²¹ Swedish Arts Council, "Grants for translation of Swedish literature and drama", *Swedish Arts Council*.

¹²² This information is derived from author and translator contract proposal which is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹²³ The Other Press, "Product-The Most Secret Memory of Men", *The Other Press*.

¹²⁴ Percentage division cannot be disclosed; proprietary information of Simon and Schuster Canada

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ The Other Press, "Author-Amy B. Reid", *The Other Press*

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ The Other Press, "Author-Lara Vergnaud", *The Other Press*

Prize.¹²⁹ When *The Most Secret Memory of Men* was longlisted for the National Book Award for Translated Fiction, she was nominated for the National Translation Award.¹³⁰

Comparative Case Study II: The Impact of Marketing and Publicity Strategies on Meeting Projected Sales Goals

Stolen won Sweden's Book of the Year Award in 2021 and became a national bestseller.¹³¹ This is why, consequent to its acquisition, it was pitched with an ambitious initial sales goal.¹³² While the unit sales per title is proprietary information, and thus, cannot be disclosed, the sales goal set was much higher than the typical sales numbers for international literary fiction titles. There were three reasons for this ambitious goal. Firstly, the comparative and competitive titles that were identified for *Stolen*, which included Katherena Vermette's *The Strangers*, Michelle Good's *Five Little Indians*¹³³ and Eden Robinson's *Son of A Trickster*,¹³⁴ were promising and had had a tremendous sales run by the end of 2022.¹³⁵ Secondly, the partnership with Scribner US meant access to US media to ensure coverage of the title.¹³⁶ In fact, Lisa Abend wrote a review in *The New York Times* in January 2023, close to its publishing date, highlighting Laestadius's Sami roots and how the novel is an important narrative within the international Indigenous literature.¹³⁷ Thirdly, in terms of marketing, as seen in Figure ii,¹³⁸ ARCs of the books were mailed to Bookstagrammers and influencers within a special gift box containing cloudberry jam, a mug and coffee from an Indigenous roastery here in Canada, to promote sales of the books during the holiday season.¹³⁹

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ahlander Agency, "Ann-Helén Laestadius wins Book of the Year for *Stolen* [News]", *Ahlander Agency*

¹³² This information is derived from the P&L statement for *Stolen* and is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; the sales goal is proprietary information and thus cannot be disclosed.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ This information is provided by Janie Yoon, then Executive Editor; used with permission of Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada.

¹³⁷ Lisa Abend, "Her Culture Was Suppressed for Centuries. Not It Powers Her Best Seller", *The New York Times*, January 30, 2023.

¹³⁸ This image is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹³⁹ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

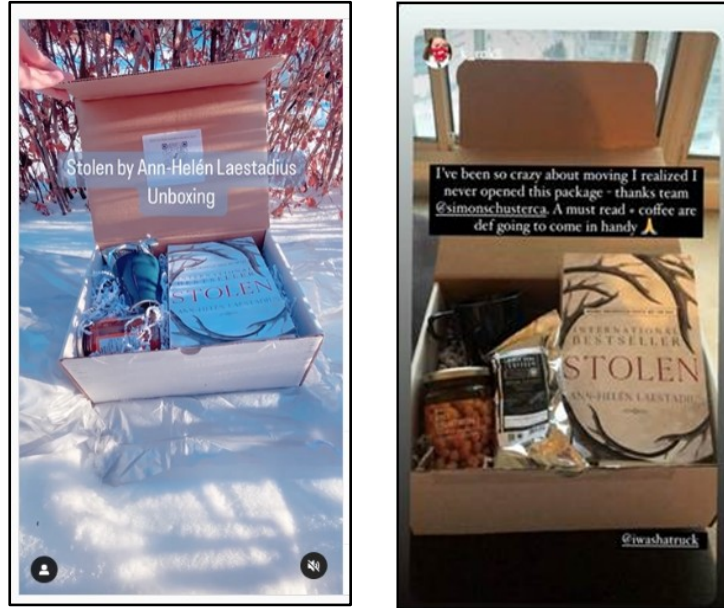


Figure 2. Stills from unboxing videos uploaded by influencers on BookTok

Over three thousand bookmarks with an editor’s letter from Nita Pronovost and Janie Yoon were sent to independent bookstores, one of the primary distribution channels for international and translated literary fiction.¹⁴⁰ Finally, and most importantly, the growing coverage of world Indigenous culture and literature provided a solid foundation for the projected sales,¹⁴¹ especially with blurb endorsements from internationally bestselling authors Frederick Backman, Michelle Good and Tanya Talaga.¹⁴²

Despite the development of a strong publishing strategy that covered all bases, *Stolen* became an interesting case study of doing everything right and still not getting the desired results. While the launch of the novel was a success, garnering sales in the first year of its release, typical to that of a translated literary fiction title in Canada,¹⁴³ and a Netflix film adaptation in progress,¹⁴⁴ it failed to come close to the ambitious sales goals set during the time of publication for a variety of reasons.

¹⁴⁰ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission

¹⁴¹ Maryse Zidler, “Indigenous authors celebrated as readership skyrockets across Canada”, *CBC News*, February 16, 2020

¹⁴² This information was provided by Janie Yoon, then Executive Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission of Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada.

¹⁴³ BookNet Canada Lifetime Unit Sales accessed through Simon and Schuster Canada’s company membership; Sales number cannot be disclosed; proprietary information of Simon and Schuster Canada

¹⁴⁴ K.J. Yossman, “Ann-Helen Laestadius’ Novel ‘Stolen’ Getting Netflix Adaptation – Global Bulletin”, *Variety*, September 1, 2022.

One of the biggest challenges the launch of *Stolen* faced was the turbulence from the biggest sales channel for the title: Indigo Books & Music.¹⁴⁵ Amidst the continuing inflation, which resulted in higher expenses, the retailer was hit with a ransomware attack that started on February 8, 2023, and impacted online sales and internal logistics, lasted more than a month and resulted in a 12% decrease in quarterly sales in comparison to 2022.¹⁴⁶ *Stolen*, which was published on January 31, 2023, suffered heavily as the period that would have seen a peak in its sales saw only a few sales trickling in, thereby failing to gain the initial momentum required to maintain a steady increase.¹⁴⁷ Secondly, while *The New York Times* does have sway in Canada in influencing opinions of readership, coverage from Canadian media would have been even more impactful.¹⁴⁸ However, while there were a few organisations and media channels interested in broadcasting or advertising the title, most were uninterested in moving away from a Canadian-centric coverage of Indigenous culture and did not consider the Canadian demographic the right audience for an Indigenous narrative beyond the national borders.¹⁴⁹ Thirdly, since the author lived abroad and the novel was published in a world still reeling from the pandemic, she was not available to appear in local events like book launches, collaborations with libraries or literary festivals.¹⁵⁰

For *The Most Secret Memory of Men* and *In the Belly of the Congo* the usual, modest sales goal for debut literary fiction titles was estimated.¹⁵¹ According to BookNet Canada, both *In the Belly of the Congo* and *The Most Secret Memory of Men* sold approximately in the same range as their comparative and competitive titles: Abi Daré's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* and Tea Mutonji's *Shut Up You're Pretty*.¹⁵² *The Most Secret Memory of Men* was also longlisted for the National Book Awards in

¹⁴⁵ Ed Nawotka, "Indigo Had C\$49 Million Loss in Fiscal 2023 on Small Sales Decline," *Publishers Weekly*, June 27, 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ This information was provided by Janie Yoon, then Executive Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission of Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada

¹⁴⁸ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ This information is derived from the P&L statements for *The Most Secret Memory of Men* and *In the Belly of the Congo* and is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; the sales goals are proprietary information and thus cannot be disclosed.

¹⁵² BookNet Canada Lifetime Unit Sales accessed through Simon and Schuster Canada's company membership; Sales number cannot be disclosed; proprietary information of Simon and Schuster Canada

Translated Fiction in the US,¹⁵³ adding to the book's prestige and the reputation of Scribner Canada as an imprint of Simon and Schuster Canada. Unfortunately, in the case of *In the Belly of the Congo*, Ndala, who is a French-Canadian author, is not eligible for any Canadian awards as the translator, Amy B. Reid, is American.¹⁵⁴

However, the sales and publishing goals for literary fiction differ from that of commercial fiction novels. All three novels were aimed at attracting steady readerships that seek diverse and international fiction.¹⁵⁵ They fulfilled the aim of diversifying the publishing program of Simon and Schuster Canada and expanding the growing market of international and translated literary fiction. Despite being in the first year of publication, they have garnered moderate sales that continue to grow steadily.¹⁵⁶ All three books achieved the fundamental goal of raking in critical acclaim as reflected in the coverage by both national and international media and added to the discourse on diversity, becoming the representative voices of their own communities.

Therefore, these novels succeeded in establishing a firm foundation for upcoming international and translated literary fiction titles from Scribner Canada, and thus, hint towards a more promising future for Simon and Schuster Canada's position in the international and translated literary fiction market.

¹⁵³ Diana Stevan, "The Most Secret Memory of Men by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr", *The Miramichi Reader*, November 20, 2023

¹⁵⁴ This information is derived from the tipsheets and promotional material for *Stolen*, *In the Belly of the Congo*, and *The Most Secret Memory of Men*; used with permission.

¹⁵⁵ This information was provided by Sarah St. Pierre, Editorial Director at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission

¹⁵⁶ BookNet Canada Lifetime Unit Sales accessed through Simon and Schuster Canada's company membership; Sales number cannot be disclosed; proprietary information of Simon and Schuster Canada

Chapter 4. From Margins to Mainstream

4.1 Publishing Diverse Literature in the Era of the Internet

“A publisher makes a work public, it connects a work and an audience.”

— Patrick Nielsen Hayden

Book culture and publishing have changed tremendously in the past few decades. While the core principles remain the same—to connect authors and their work to a willing readership—the ways to accomplish this goal, and the scale at which work needs to be done to meet demands for the ever-growing global literary market, has been revolutionised by the internet.¹⁵⁷ Digital distribution and marketing, social media advertising, virtual platforms connecting the readers and the authors all allow for creative publicity and marketing solutions.¹⁵⁸

The marketing and publicity teams at Simon and Schuster Canada work on dedicated marketing and publishing plans for each book, based on the genre and positioning and the current market trends driving sales.¹⁵⁹ The key lies in identifying what marketing channels work best for a book; for instance, the promotional activities for *Gull Island* (Fall 2023) by Anna Porter¹⁶⁰ relied on her well-known network of authors and publishers that comes along with her decade-long, award-winning career within the Canadian publishing industry both as an author and a publisher. Apart from that, the vivid imagery on the cover that set the tone for the thriller, as well as the sales positioning with the US sales team, contributed to the novel being picked for the Barnes and Nobles Mystery Thriller Pick in October,¹⁶¹ and encouraged endorsements from media channels like *Toronto Times*¹⁶² and *CBC Reads*.¹⁶³

In the case of debut authors of commercial fiction who are still finding their footing in the North American market like Mai Nguyen, the marketing and publicity

¹⁵⁷ Cory Doctorow, “Publishers and the Internet: A changing world?” *The Guardian*, June 30, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹⁶⁰ Anna Porter, “Anna Porter celebrates *Gull Island* [Events]”, *Anna Porter*

¹⁶¹ B&N Reads, “Our October Picks Are Here”, *Barnes & Nobles Reads*

¹⁶² Laurie Wallace-Lynch, “TOTimes Books: GULL ISLAND By Anna Porter”, *Toronto Times*.

¹⁶³ CBC Books, “Anna Porter’s latest novel is a psychological thriller set in cottage country—read and excerpt now”, *CBC Books*.

plans targeted influencers on relatively new yet relevant publicity channels like BookTok and Bookstagram, along with coverage in social media and traditional print media.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, for a debut literary fiction author like Jamaluddin Aram, the promotional plans were review-centric; the marketing strategy focused more on teacher and librarian outreach programs, soliciting burbs from established literary fiction, and less on promotion through BookTok.¹⁶⁵

4.2 BookTok and Bookstagram as Publicity and Marketing Tools

The Role of BookTok and Bookstagram in Promoting Diverse Literature

What started as hashtags in the niche corners of TikTok and Instagram have become a robust community of book lovers and influencers capable of changing the fate of books by sharing reviews, recommendations and criticisms.¹⁶⁶ Bookstagram on Instagram refers to popular content creators who focus on the aesthetic, cover aspect fiction, often accompanied by snappy reviews of the narrative;¹⁶⁷ BookTok in contrast is based on creating more relatable, emotional content.¹⁶⁸ According to *Tik Tok Newsroom*, BookTok had amassed more than 126 billion views by April 2023, a number which continues to increase at a staggering rate.¹⁶⁹ Books endorsed by BookTok influencers have recorded a dramatic increase in sales numbers; more than a decade after its release in 2011, *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller saw its sales increase from 1,000 copies per week in 2020 to 10,000 copies per week in 2021.¹⁷⁰

However, along with the revitalising publicity and marketing tactics of books in the post-pandemic world of publishing and literature, BookTok and Bookstagram also act as mirrors, highlighting both the advantages and disadvantages of key elements that build the foundation of the publishing industry.¹⁷¹ In this report, I highlight the lack of diverse literature in the mainstream, which is reflected in the BookTok and Bookstagram algorithm, but also how these platforms can be used as

¹⁶⁴ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ “#BookTok: How creators are challenging the publishing industry,” *Every Effort Matters*, July 12, 2022

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth A. Harris, “How Crying on TikTok Sells Books,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 2021

¹⁷¹ C.T. Jones, “How Will BookTok Change Publishing in 2023?,” *Rolling Stone*, December 21, 2022

tools to tap into a large section of the social-media-savvy, young-adult consumer base that is demanding visibility for diverse voices. Readers and influencers are taking it upon themselves to highlight fiction from authors belonging to marginalised groups and communities.¹⁷² For example, Azanata Thakur (@azantareads)¹⁷³ is a Muslim woman of colour with a following of close to 31,000 people on BookTok. She highlights authors of colour and creates recommendation lists featuring lesser-known Muslim authors of colour. She also founded a virtual conference, BookTalk, in March 2021 to connect with people from the publishing industry.¹⁷⁴ The mission of the conference was to “inspire critical approaches to reading and raise the profile of marginalized voices,”¹⁷⁵ and shed light on “the importance of equitable representation in storytelling.”¹⁷⁶

[Incorporating Book Tok and Bookstagram in Marketing and Publicity Strategies](#)

Social media has been integrated in the marketing and publicity strategies of almost every publishing house owing to the commercial success of books reviewed and endorsed by popular influencers on these platforms. At Simon and Schuster Canada, the publicity and marketing teams work in close collaboration to maximise outreach by balancing the current popular promotional channels—BookTok, Bookstagram and social media advertisement, endorsement and reviews from influencers and online content creators, with the tried and tested channels—with traditional channels like literary festivals, media and radio, and reviews from well-established authors.¹⁷⁷ The digital marketing team also maintains regularly updated BookTok and Instagram accounts to track current trends and create similar content to stay connected to their audience.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² “#BookTok: How creators are challenging the publishing industry,” *Every Effort Matters*, July 12, 2022

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ “#BookTok: How creators are challenging the publishing industry,” *Every Effort Matters*, July 12, 2022

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ This information was provided by Cindy Ly, Marketing Assistant at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Comparative Case Study III: The Role of BookTok and Bookstagram in the Marketing and Publicity of Diaspora Fiction Titles

Commercial diaspora fiction like *Sunshine Nails* is an ideal example of diverse literature that can benefit from BookTok and Bookstagram endorsement, for multiple reasons. Firstly, diaspora fiction authors write about their culture in the English language; they offer a mix of the familiar and unfamiliar, which may seem more accessible to the North American readership, as opposed to translated fiction, which has the reputation of being too challenging.¹⁷⁹ Secondly, there are sub-communities within BookTok and Bookstagram that focus on authors from specific communities; for instance, Nguyen was an ideal author to include in recommendation lists focusing on Asian authors and narratives, especially during Asian Heritage Month.¹⁸⁰ Lastly, when the authors are available for local events like book launches, author signings, literary festivals, and panel discussions, it increases popularity amidst the local social media content creators' network.¹⁸¹

For *Sunshine Nails*, which was published as a joint venture between Atria US and Simon and Schuster Canada and pitched as a commercial, upmarket fictional account of the Vietnamese diaspora, both BookTok and Bookstagram proved successful platforms for promotional campaigns.¹⁸² The brightly coloured and inviting cover spoke to Instagram influencers who were looking for aesthetic appeal to attract engagement with the book, and the contemporary account of Vietnamese diaspora in Canada appealed to BookTok creators looking for emotional and relatable ways to connect their followers to both the author and the narrative.¹⁸³ Apart from aiming for coverage from media channels like *RepresentASIAN*,¹⁸⁴ *Toronto Star*¹⁸⁵ and bloggers like *She Does the City*,¹⁸⁶ Simon and Schuster Canada sent free ARCs to BookTok and

¹⁷⁹ John Self, "It's exciting, it's powerful: how translated fiction captured a new generation of readers", *The Guardian*, July 29, 2023.

¹⁸⁰ Simon and Schuster, "Celebrate Asian Voices", *Simon and Schuster*. <https://www.simonandschuster.ca/p/asian-heritage-month>

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Jennifer Nguyen, "Mai Nguyen Explores the Complexity of Intergenerational Families and Identity in 'Sunshine Nails'", *RepresentASIAN*, July 23, 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Shiman Givani, "Sunshine Nails: David and Goliath tale in a bonbon of a novel", *Toronto Star*, July 13, 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Annemarie Cutruzzola, "Toronto's Mai Nguyen Talks Gentrification and Immigrant Stories in Sunshine Nails," *She Does the City*, July 14, 2023.

Instagram influencers to endorse the title on their channels, which had an approximate reach of 10,000 to 20,000 followers.¹⁸⁷ The influencers posted video content featuring short reviews and ARC copies of *Sunshine Nails*; some of these focused on the relatable narrative and targeted second-generation immigrants as audience, others focused on the author and the journey that led her to write the novel.¹⁸⁸

Sunshine Nails was also part of the inaugural “Toronto Asian Girlies TikTok Creators Meetup.”¹⁸⁹ This included influencers with more than 200,000 followers and aimed to bring together Asian content creators from across the Greater Toronto Area.¹⁹⁰ A 15-book giveaway was conducted by the Simon and Schuster Canada team in partnership with the event organisers.¹⁹¹

In comparison, while the promotional plans for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* included sending ARCs to influencers on BookTok and Bookstagram for endorsements, it was not the key marketing strategy for the title because of a variety of reasons. First and foremost, although more and more influencers and readers, like Azanata Thankur, from BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized communities are working towards bringing diverse literature into the limelight, the BookTok algorithm is “inherently racist”¹⁹² as pointed out by Tyler McCall in an article published by *The Cut* titled “BookTok’s Racial Bias.”¹⁹³ The algorithm is designed to create an “echo chamber”¹⁹⁴ that continues to highlight trending topics rather than creating content about something new. Secondly, what differentiates Aram’s *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* from Nguyen’s *Sunshine Nails* is its positioning in the market as literary fiction.

Literary fiction is a genre often used to demarcate the cultural hierarchy between highbrow and lowbrow literature.¹⁹⁵ It is considered more challenging as it is pitched to a readership with a higher education level, and thus not as accessible as

¹⁸⁷ This information is derived from publishing board meetings of Simon and Schuster Canada, attended in the duration of this internship; used with permission.

¹⁸⁸ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹⁸⁹ This information is derived from the marketing plan for *Sunshine Nails* and is the property of Simon and Shuster Canada; used with permission

¹⁹⁰ Laura Nguyen [@torontomillenia], “Toronto Asian Girlies TikTok Creator Meetup”, *TikTok*, July 25, 2023.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Tyler McCall, “BookTok’s Racial Bias”, *The Cut*, November 18, 2022

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ John Dale, “‘Highbrow’ and ‘middlebrow’ are irrelevant when it comes to which writing survives”, *The Conversation*, November 3, 2015.

commercial fiction.¹⁹⁶ Some literary fiction readers seem to separate themselves from popular fiction tropes and trends, which means that books endorsed by popular icons and influencers on popular social media, young-adult driven platforms like BookTok and Bookstagram may not hold much appeal to them.¹⁹⁷ Diaspora literary fiction novels from debut authors, especially authors from marginalised communities, appeal to a more niche segment of the audience. Literary fiction publicity plans generally aim at attracting attention from award juries and critics and getting blurbs from well-known literary fiction authors to endorse the book.¹⁹⁸

What did work for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* was a focus on both printed media—*CBC Books*,¹⁹⁹ inclusion in *Quill & Quire*'s most anticipated books in Spring²⁰⁰, author features in *The Walrus*²⁰¹ and *Miramichi Reader*,²⁰² teacher and librarian focused mailing outreach programs in collaboration Ontario Library Association and author appearances in literary events—Eden Mills, the Wild Writers Literary Festival, and Vancouver Writers Festival. An ARC giveaway was also hosted by the marketing team through Goodreads.²⁰³

4.3 How Cultural and Regional Identities of Authors Impact Marketing and Publicity

The gradual end of the pandemic witnessed the resilience of the publishing industry and its ability to welcome change, albeit slowly and hesitantly. BookTok and other social media platforms were utilised to blur the lines between authors, readers and their stories, and once the restrictions from the pandemic were lifted, what remained was a mix of both old and new channels of publicity and marketing.²⁰⁴ The titles discussed in this report were all published at the tail end of the pandemic, so the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ CBC Books, "Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday by Jamaluddin Aram", *CBC Books*, February 6, 2023.

²⁰⁰ Attila Berki, Cassandra Drudi, Andrew Woodrow-Butcher, "2023 Spring Preview: Poetry and Fiction", *Quill and Quire*, January 11th 2023.

²⁰¹ Whitlock, "Where is the Canadian Fiction about Afghanistan?", *The Walrus*, August 10, 2023.

²⁰² Peter Midgley, "The Jamaluddin Aram Interview", *Miramichi Reader*, July 31, 2023

²⁰³ This information is derived from the marketing plan for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* and is the property of Simon and Shuster Canada; used with permission.

²⁰⁴ Claire Armistead, "After lockdown things exploded-how TikTok triggered a book revolution", *The Guardian*, June 8, 2022

publicity and marketing teams at Simon and Schuster Canada had to come up with different and creative strategies for each title and its author.

For *Sunshine Nails*, as mentioned above, Mai Nguyen's Vietnamese heritage, her family's experiences as immigrants in Canada, her local status, and the Toronto setting of the novel became the focal points for promoting and publicising the book. In the case of *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*, Jamaluddin Aram was a local, Afghan diaspora author writing a literary fiction novel, set in his hometown Wazirabad in Afghanistan, about peace in the times of war. His religious and regional identity became key elements during book promotion.²⁰⁵ Similarly, the Indigenous identity of Ann-Helén Laestadius, the African heritage of Mbougar Sarr Mohamed and the Congolese heritage of Blaise Ndala played a significant role in the marketing and promotion of their novels.²⁰⁶

Comparative Case Study IV: The Impact of Author's Identity on Publicity and Marketing Strategies

As previously mentioned, the cultural and regional identity of the author impacts not only the narrative within the pages of their book but also the narrative built outside the pages of the book, which features glimpses into the life of the author and points of interests that can attract the target audience.

Sunshine Nails is set in the Junction neighbourhood in Toronto, which is known for its strong sense of community. The book launch was thus organised in collaboration with local businesses in the Junction. Owing to the local status of the author, funding was also secured by Toronto International Festival of Authors through the *Toronto Lit Up* program, a series of book launches aimed at promoting new and upcoming authors within the city.²⁰⁷ The publicity team aimed for coverage in Halifax, since Nguyen's family is from Nova Scotia and the family business that inspired the narrative for her book was originally based in that province.²⁰⁸ Nguyen's book release

²⁰⁵ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Toronto Festival of Authors, "Toronto Lit Up: *Sunshine Nails* by Mai Nguyen", *Toronto Festival of Authors.com*

²⁰⁸ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

thus received coverage from *CBC Halifax*²⁰⁹ as well as local newspapers which ran author interviews and reviews. Mai Nguyen is a second-generation Vietnamese immigrant, so the publicity team solicited coverage in print and virtual media channels like *RepresentASIAN* and *Toronto Asian Girlies TikTok Creators Meetup*. *The Globe and Mail* also featured an opinion piece by Nguyen, shedding light on how nail salons became a financial refuge for the Vietnamese diaspora.²¹⁰

For *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*, the publicity team reached out to the Aga Khan Foundation Canada, which promotes Islamic art and culture and supports Asian and African communities across the globe through their socio-economic struggles.²¹¹ Jamaluddin Aram is an Ismaili Muslim from Afghanistan and was thus featured in *This Being Human*²¹² podcast of the Aga Khan Museum and TVO as part of the promotions for his book. While both Aram and Nguyen were promoted during Asian Heritage Month, Aram's book also received coverage from media sources like *The Walrus*²¹³ which, much like his book, highlighted the war in Afghanistan, the aftermath and plight of its victims, and the scarcity of Canadian-Afghani literature.²¹⁴

Ann-Helén Laestadius's Indigenous identity and the exploration of the survival of Sámi heritage in today's world through *Stolen*, enabled the development of promotional plans that highlighted the same.²¹⁵ Mohamed Mbougar Sarr became the first sub-Saharan African author to win Prix Goncourt in 2021.²¹⁶ Therefore, promotional plans were focused on highlighting his African heritage. Since they were international authors and were not available for local literary events, the publicity strategy focused more on print media. The publishing partnership with Scribner US helped facilitate an author profile of Laestadius in *The New York Times*. It was also featured in *Canadian Living* and was one of *She Does the City's Most Anticipated*

²⁰⁹ Josefa Cameron, "Halifax-raised author paints nail-salon experience with honest brush in new book", *CBC News*, June 25, 2023.

²¹⁰ Mai Nguyen, "How nail salons became a financial refuge for the Vietnamese diaspora", *The Globe and Mail*, July 14, 2023

²¹¹ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²¹² *This Being Human*, "Episode 11- Jamaluddin Aram", *Aga Khan Museum*, 2023.

²¹³ Nathan Whitlock, "Where is the Canadian Fiction about Afghanistan?", *The Walrus*, August 3, 2023

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Lisa Abend, "Her Culture Was Suppressed for Centuries. Not It Powers Her Best Seller", *The New York Times*, January 30, 2023.

²¹⁶ Simon and Schuster Canada, "About the Author- Mohamed Mbougar Sarr", *Simon & Schuster Canada*

Books for Early 2023.²¹⁷ *The Most Secret Memory of Men* was also reviewed by *The New York Times*.²¹⁸ For Ottawa-based author Blaise Ndala, who prefers to speak and write in French, the publicity plan included covering print media channels as well as pitching bilingual literary festivals and events like Frye Festival, which is held in New Brunswick and one of the biggest literary events for French Canadian literature in Canada.²¹⁹

4.4 Collaborative Workflow between Editorial, Marketing and Publicity

At Simon and Schuster Canada, the marketing, publicity and editorial teams aim for a collaborative workflow to ensure the utilisation of every unique skill set, idea or connection. Like editors, each publicist also specialises in genres, which helps in building a network for specific promotion channels. Cayley Pimentel, the publicist for *Sunshine Nails*, *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*, *Stolen* and *In the Belly of the Congo*, often leads the publicity for international, translation and diaspora fiction titles.²²⁰ Her familiarity with the books, coupled with Janie Yoon’s editorial expertise worked well together and facilitated effective communication between the authors and the rest of the editorial, publicity, and marketing teams. The editor often proofreads marketing material like posters and advertisements, writes promotional copy and edits Q&As with authors.²²¹ The editor also writes an editor’s note or letter for giveaways or when sending advance copies to endorsers, influencers and reviewers.²²² For all the above-mentioned titles, the opinion pieces published by authors in printed media like *The Globe and Mail*, were also edited and proofread by editorial before publicity coordinated publishing dates with the media sources.²²³

²¹⁷ Ameema Saeed, “23 of Our Most Anticipated Books Releasing in Early 2023”, *She Does The City*, January 3, 2023.

²¹⁸ Ben Libman, “Book Review: ‘The Most Secret Memory of Men’ by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr”, *The New York Times*, September 26, 2023.

²¹⁹ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ This information was provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

Chapter 5. Packaging the Book

“A book cover is a distillation. It is a haiku of the story.”

— Chip Kidd

5.1 Role of Editorial in the Production Process

Once editorial discusses and decides the fate of a manuscript, and the editor is done with the acquisition process, the manuscript is then routed to the production department for copyediting, indexing, and typesetting, and then finally printed.²²⁴ This process involves several rounds of revision and reconsiderations and a collaborative process between the editorial and the production team, with the managing editor tracking the internal workflow and communication between editors and authors, designers, printers, copyeditors and so on.²²⁵ They also coordinate with every department and set deadlines based on the predicted publication timeline for each upcoming book.²²⁶

For the duration of my internship, I got the opportunity to observe not only the acquisition process but also to help and assist the managing editor, Jasmine Elliott, in all her tasks and responsibilities. This involved participating in several rounds of copyediting and proofreading while tracking production deadlines and making changes in production and design strategies based on the needs of the editor and author. The following case studies offer a comparative analysis of the production and design processes of the five titles, and how the collaborative flow of ideas between all departments results in the final package of the book.

²²⁴ This information was provided by Jasmine Elliott, Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

Comparative Case Study V: The Production Process of Joint Ventures Versus Canada-led Titles

As discussed in Chapter 1, joint ventures are advantageous as they reduce the financial burden of the editing and translating process, and often aid access to marketing and publishing channels beyond Canada. The production process of joint ventures is relatively easier since everything does not need to start from scratch, and work needs to be done for only one edition instead of two. For instance, the production process of *Sunshine Nails* was led by Atria Books, which means the production team copyedited, proofread, designed and typeset the files for the Atria edition and only needed to add the unique front and back matter for the Canadian editions.²²⁷

For joint ventures, a mostly simultaneous publishing and production schedule is maintained to streamline the process and avoid confusion between the two teams of publishing professionals.²²⁸ The translated manuscript for the three translated fiction titles were directly picked up from the publishing partners (Scribner US for *Stolen* and The Other Press for *In the Belly of the Congo* and *The Most Secret Memory of Men*). However, despite being the same manuscript, these were copyedited by the Canadian production team with a few minor tweaks like changing the spellings to suit the Canadian readership.²²⁹ For *In the Belly of the Congo*, one of the few challenges faced during the production process was getting the Canadian edition proofread by the author and translator, who proofread the essentially same files with only minute differences that could be overlooked owing to their unfamiliarity with the tweaks made in the Canadian edition.²³⁰ To improve efficiency, Elliott decided to only get the files of the leading edition proofread and incorporate the changes or queries raised in those files into the Canadian edition. This made the production process for future joint venture titles easier.²³¹

On the other hand, a Canada-led title like *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* follows a similar process but without the additional steps of reviewing and comparing files from another imprint before approving them for

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

printing. The delivered manuscript goes through several rounds of thematic editing by the editor, in this case Yoon. The files are then routed to production to begin copyediting, then the manuscript is sent to the interior designer for typesetting.²³² Once typeset, the book goes through several passes of proofing to ensure the incorporation of all corrections like formatting and typographical errors suggested by the team at different stages of the production process. Usually, this is limited to three rounds by production to ensure the completion of the process before each internal deadline in the production timeline. Once the typeset file is approved, it finally moves to the printing stage.²³³

5.2 How Packaging Affects the Positioning of the Book

Contrary to popular belief, most readers and people within the publishing industry know that judging a book by its cover is an integral part of the publishing and book-buying process. Everything about the packaging of the book—the font, image, the colour, any textual matter on the front and back cover as well as the spine—tells the readership about the content and genre of the book.²³⁴ For publishers, the packaging of a book also tells where the book stands in the market in comparison to comparative and competitive titles. In other words, the packaging of a book, which includes both interior and exterior design, is a visual representation of popular market trends.²³⁵

The book jacket is designed with the editorial, publicity, and marketing strategies for the title in mind.²³⁶ Designers and editors need to agree on a design that stands out among its competitors but also simultaneously strike a balance to affirm its position in the same bracket of the genre.²³⁷ Apart from that, today's BookTok- and Bookstagram-centric promotional campaigns are founded on aesthetics, so it becomes even more important to focus on the physical packaging of the book to appeal to its

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ This information is provided by Jessica Boudreau, Art Designer at Simon and Schuster/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²³⁷ Ibid.

readership, as well as influencers and endorsements that significantly contribute to its sales.²³⁸

Comparative Case Study VI: The Designing Process

Four of the five titles discussed in this report—*Stolen*, *In the Belly of the Congo*, *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, and *Sunshine Nails*—are joint ventures with publishing partners; the only exception is *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*, a Canada-only title. This means that each publishing partner would prepare a package design that suits the needs of their primary market.²³⁹ In an ideal scenario, the leading imprint’s cover, description copy and cover blurbs also suit the needs of the Canadian market. However, that is rarely the case.²⁴⁰ The closest example would be *Sunshine Nails*, a joint venture with Atria. The cover for the book designed by Atria perfectly fit the commercial, upmarket fiction market in Canada as well; therefore no changes were made to its design.²⁴¹ The only changes incorporated were the blurbs in the Canadian edition, which featured a few more nationally recognized authors,²⁴² as noted in Figure iii²⁴³ and iv;²⁴⁴ the Canadian edition was also published in a trade paper original format with flaps, as opposed to Atria’s hardcover format, since the Canadian market tends to be price sensitive. This packaging decision has had success in Canada because the flaps give books “a ‘special’ and first edition feeling”²⁴⁵ while simultaneously justifying the price bracket.²⁴⁶

²³⁸ This information is provided by Cayley Pimentel, Publicist at Simon and Schuster/Scribner Canada; used with permission

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²⁴¹ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster/Scribner Canada; used with permission

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ This image is the property of Simon and Schuster; used with permission.

²⁴⁴ This image is the property of Simon and Schuster; used with permission.

²⁴⁵ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Praise for *Sunshine Nails*

"An insightful, moving story with striking depth, taking on gentrification, family expectations, and generational differences.

You will be rooting for the Tran family through every risk and sacrifice they make to save their salon and, ultimately, themselves."

TAYLOR JENKINS REID, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Carrie Soto Is Back*

"The story of the Tran family is full of zany, hilarious fun—but it's also poignant and told with care. *Sunshine Nails* made me laugh, cry, and think deeply about culture, family, and the ties that bind. What a witty and engaging debut."

MARISSA STAPLEY, *New York Times* bestselling author of Reese's Book Club pick *Lucky*

"A phenomenal debut. This page-turning story about the Tran family's desperate attempts to keep their nail salon in business will have you rooting for them as often as you shake your head."

CARLEY FORTUNE, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Every Summer After*

"A whip-smart and hilarious David-versus-Goliath romp. The Tran family will have you biting your nails as they claw at their competition and each other."

CAROLYN HUYNH, author of *Good Morning America* Book Club pick *The Fortunes of Jaded Women*

"Lighthearted and funny while it also shrewdly addresses complex topics like gentrification and anti-Asian racism. I loved the Tran family and their bright, compelling story."

EMILY AUSTIN, author of *Everyone in This Room Will Someday Be Dead*



Figure 3 Back Cover of Sunshine Nails (Atria Edition)

Advance Praise for *Sunshine Nails*

“Filled with heart and humor, *Sunshine Nails* is an insightful, moving story with striking depth, taking on gentrification, family expectations, and generational differences. You will be rooting for the Tran family through every risk and sacrifice they make to save their salon, and ultimately themselves.”

—TAYLOR JENKINS REID, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Carrie Soto Is Back*

“The story of the Tran family is full of zany, hilarious fun—but it’s also poignant and told with care. *Sunshine Nails* made me laugh, cry, and think deeply about culture, family, and the ties that bind. What a witty and engaging debut.”

—MARISSA STAPLEY, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Lucky*

“*Sunshine Nails* manages to be lighthearted and funny while it also shrewdly addresses complex topics, like gentrification and anti-Asian racism. I loved the Tran family and their bright, compelling story.”

—EMILY AUSTIN, author of *Everyone in This Room Will Someday Be Dead*

“A beautiful debut novel rich with specificity, rooted in a love and understanding of Toronto and the intricate nuances of the intergenerational divides within an immigrant community. A deeply pleasurable, moving, and fast-paced read seeped in sensory detail.”

—LEAH FRANQUI, author of *America for Beginners* and *After the Hurricane*

“A compelling exploration of family, identity, and community. Readers everywhere will root for the Tran family as they navigate love and work. . . . Mai Nguyen is a writer to watch!”

—SAUMYA DAVE, author of *What a Happy Family*
and *Well-Behaved Indian Women*

“*Sunshine Nails* is a fresh, fun take on family dynamics and the secrets we keep to protect each other. Well-defined characters and deft navigation of the highs and lows of the immigrant experience make this book a delightful read. Nguyen’s writing sparkles!”

—SIERRA GODFREY, author of *A Very Typical Family*

FICTION 0723

ISBN 978-1-6680-1049-5

\$26.99 U.S.

Figure 4 Back Cover of *Sunshine Nails* (S&S Canada Edition)

Each market represents a specific demographic of people with their own cultural and aesthetic preferences. There is no fixed formula that decides how and why a Canadian book cover design would differ from their US or UK counterparts.²⁴⁷ The editor consults with the editorial, marketing, publicity, and the production team and makes an instinctive decision on whether a new cover design is required for the Canadian edition.²⁴⁸ For *Stolen, In the Belly of the Congo* and *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, the Canadian edition had a different jacket, all designed by Simon and Schuster Canada's designer Jessica Boudreau.²⁴⁹

The cover designing process mainly involves the designer and the editor. A cover brief acts as the first step of the process; it contains general information about the size and format of the book, the title and author name.²⁵⁰ More importantly it contains comparative titles for the subject/theme of the book, as well as comparative titles for the visual imagery of the book cover. These are decided based on the narrative, information about the target audience—age, gender, region—the meaning of the title, visual imagery the editor, author and designer wish to incorporate in the cover, and the genre of the book.²⁵¹

For the sake of brevity, I aimed to record the cover designing process of two titles: *In the Belly of the Congo*, a joint venture title, and *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*, a Canada-led title. While the process for both remains the same, *In the Belly of the Congo* includes a comparative study between the covers of the Canadian edition and The Other Press US edition.

²⁴⁷ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster Canada/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ This information is provided by Jessica Boudreau, Art Designer at Simon and Schuster/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

²⁵⁰ This information is derived from cover briefs from Janie Yoon to Jessica Boudreau; material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

In the Belly of the Congo:

According to the cover brief, this book was published in the standard format of trade paperback: 6 x 9 inches with flaps. Since Ndala's original French publication of the book had won him several awards, it made most sense to include flaps and accommodate praise for the book along with the book description and the author bio.²⁵² *The Vanishing Half* by Britt Bennett and *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi were identified as comparative titles based on themes covered in the narrative, and Nikki May's *Walhalla* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* were identified as visual comps.²⁵³ A contemporary and sophisticated tone was decided for the cover that would cater to readers of literary fiction, international translated fiction, and African diaspora literature. As the novel delves deep into the history of Congo and its colonial legacy and features strong female characters, both Boudreau and Yoon agreed to represent these elements in the visual imagery of the cover.²⁵⁴

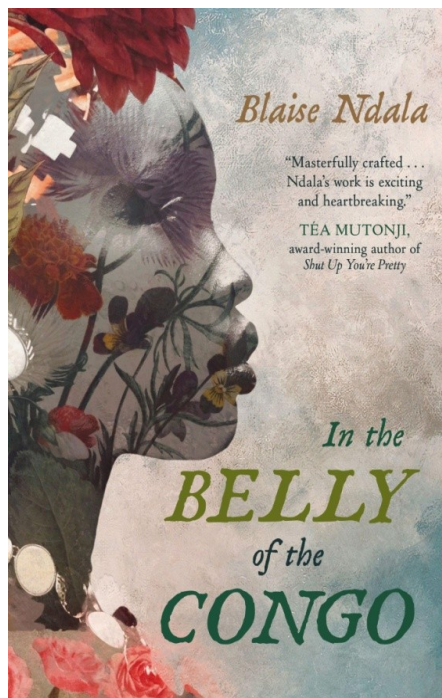


Figure 6 Front Cover of *In the Belly of the Congo* (Scribner Canada Edition)

This image is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

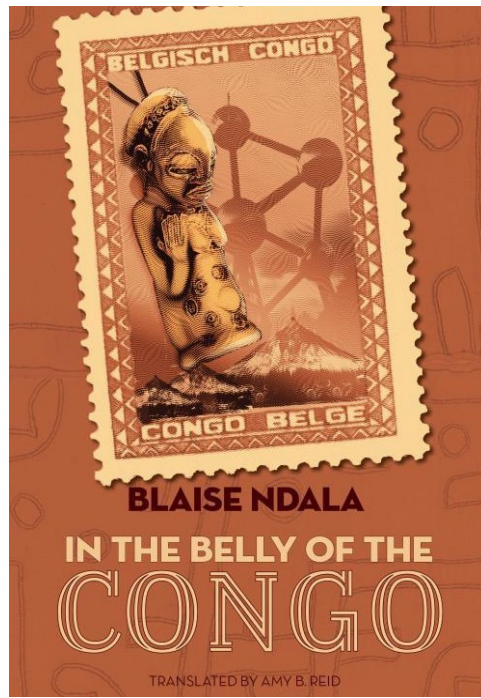


Figure 5 Front Cover of *In the Belly of the Congo* (The Other Press Edition)




This image is the property of The Other Press; used with permission.

²⁵² This information is derived from the cover brief for *In the Belly of the Congo* from Janie Yoon to Jessica Boudreau; material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Notes from Cover Brief by Janie Yoon for *In the Belly of the Congo*:

<p>255</p>  <p><i>Figure 7 Front Cover of Wahala</i></p>	<p>“Is it possible to use a strong image of a Congolese woman’s face or from her mouth to the top of her chest, showing the ivory pendant? But could we make modernise the image with some electric colours, like this edition of <i>Wahala</i> by Nikki May?”²⁵⁶</p>
<p>257</p>  <p><i>Figure 8 Front Cover of Speaking of Summer</i></p>	<p>“Or this cover of <i>Speaking of Summer</i> by Kalisha Buckhanon, showing a woman in the foreground and another in the background, with colourful symbolic imagery?”²⁵⁸</p>
 <p><i>Figure 9 Descriptive Image for Cover Brief</i></p> <p>259</p>	<p>“The other image that stayed with me is a scene in Congo in the 1950s in an underground club with live music... So there has to be some balance of joy, vibrancy, culture that puts a different light on the title... And a strong female character needs to be the central image... I think these images can be used as inspiration for the colour palette and fashion style for this title.”²⁶⁰</p>

²⁵⁵ This image is the property of HarperCollins.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ This image is the property of Counterpoint Press.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ This image is the property of LayeproPhotos.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday:

According to the cover brief, this was published as a paperback with flaps but with a smaller trim size of 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches owing to the lesser page count of 240.²⁶¹ A comparative title for the themes in the narrative was Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. Visual comparatives included Junot Diaz's *This Is How You Lose Her*, Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*, and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*.²⁶² Yet again, a sophisticated and contemporary tone was chosen for the cover to appeal to readers of popular literary fiction and diaspora and postcolonial literature.²⁶³ The challenge for this book was to balance the long title and the specific imagery requested by the author and editor, symbolising characters and instances from the narrative, with the cultural influence of Kabul, Afghanistan in early 1990s.²⁶⁴

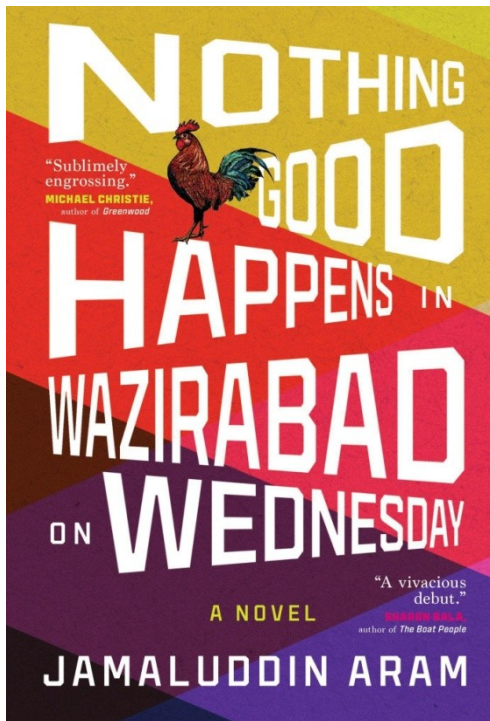


Figure 11 Front Cover of *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*

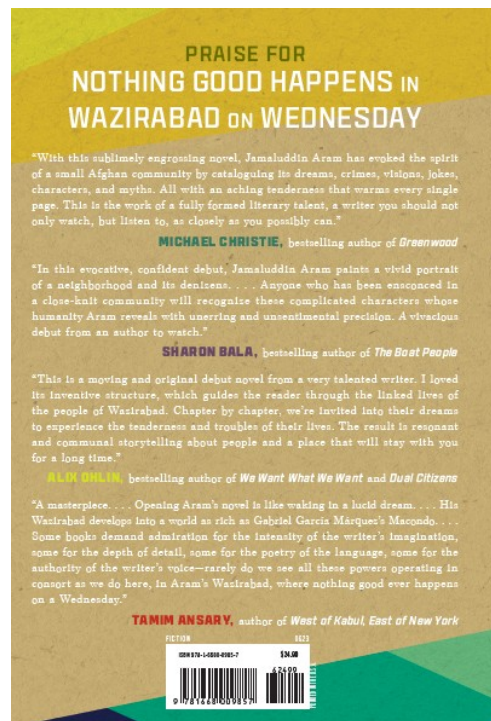


Figure 10 Back Cover of *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*

These images are the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

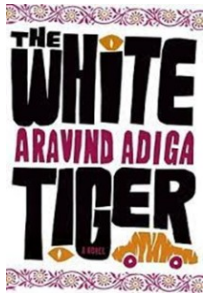
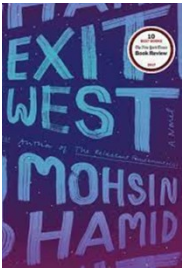
²⁶¹ This information is derived from the cover brief for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* from Janie Yoon to Jessica Boudreau; material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Notes from Cover Brief by Janie Yoon for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*:

<p>Images that can be used:</p> <p>A flaming red rooster</p> <p>The etching of a heart on a wall</p> <p>Almond tree</p> <p>Cats</p> <p>Sunflowers</p> <p>Kite with calligraphy</p> <p>Three young boys</p>	<p>“The challenge in this novel is balancing the long title with the author’s name and some sort of imagery. The novel’s setting is in the neighbourhood of Wazirabad in Kabul, Afghanistan,... My feeling is the cover/imagery might work better if it’s illustrated, but I’m open to photography if you find the right image.”²⁶⁵</p>
<p>266</p>  <p><i>Figure 12 Front Cover of The White Tiger</i></p>	<p>“<i>The White Tiger</i> uses illustration with a pattern that signals the setting/culture of the novel. I could see the rooster walking across a fence or the title text on the cover, in a setting or with some design/pattern that looks like Afghanistan or the Middle East. Or using the image of the rooster and a kite with Arabic calligraphy as it’s described in the novel, or an almond tree.”²⁶⁷</p>
<p>268</p>  <p><i>Figure 13 Front Cover of Exit West</i></p>	<p>“I also love the cover of <i>Exit West</i> by Mohsin Hamid... because of the graffiti-like writing and the sense of movement in the font, along with the strong image...”²⁶⁹</p>

²⁶⁵ This information is derived from the cover brief for *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday* from Janie Yoon to Jessica Boudreau; material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

²⁶⁶ This image is the property of HarperCollins.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ This image is the property of Penguin Random House.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

5.3 Impact of Blurbs in Positioning

Blurbs are quotes or praise from well-known authors that endorse a book and affirm its position in the literary market.²⁷⁰ These blurbs are included in promotional materials like press releases, editor, and bookseller letters and, most importantly, on book covers, and have a big impact on the sales and distribution of a book.²⁷¹ However, according to author and professor Clayton Childress, “You have 5% of authors who are getting 95% of blurb requests, because there’s no middle class in publishing.”²⁷² This highlights the question of whether authors without connections or affluent literary agents and editors in their corner can really make it in the industry.²⁷³ While the process of requesting blurbs is considered tedious and difficult by some, most authors and publishers cannot deny the impact of this “small piece of the puzzle” in the publishing process.²⁷⁴

For all five titles discussed in the report, blurbs played an integral role in the editorial, production, and publishing process. Even for joint venture titles like *Sunshine Nails*, in which the book jacket remained the same, what changed were blurbs on the back cover of the book, as noted above. Some Canadian-centric authors were highlighted or added to the cover to appeal to a Canadian audience more familiar with national authors. For translated and international fiction titles, blurbs from international authors were requested and translated to grant a global appeal to the titles in question and attract a readership interested in international literary fiction.²⁷⁵ Sarr’s *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, which was longlisted for the National Book Award in Translation, successfully received an endorsement from David Diop,²⁷⁶ author of *At Night All Blood is Black* and International Booker Prize-winner, which was translated from French to English and added to the back cover of the book.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁰ Sophie Vershbow, “‘A Plague on the Industry’: Book Publishing’s Broken Blurb System,” *Esquire*, September 7, 2023

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ This information is provided by Jasmine Elliott, Managing Editor at Simon and Schuster/Scribner Canada; used with permission.

²⁷⁶ The Other Press, “The Most Secret Memory of Men A Novel-Praise”, *The Other Press*

²⁷⁷ This information is derived from tipsheet and other promotional material for *The Most Secret Memory of Men* by Mohamed Mbougar Sarr, published in Fall 2023. This material is the property of Simon and Schuster Canada; used with permission.

Conclusion

Goals for Simon and Schuster Canada and Integrating Diverse Voices in the Mainstream

Publishing is the business of people as much as it is the business of books, and the socio-economic as well as the political atmosphere of the globe impacts the literary market. The demand for diversity in literature is reflected in the changing market trends of the Canadian and the North American literary market. The Canadian readership is actively seeking out fiction and non-fiction titles written by and written about diverse communities, as demonstrated in BookNet's 2018 and 2021 studies on the perceptions on diversity in literature. This demand not only represents the reading habits of the people but also highlights the blind spots of the publishing industry, the challenges being faced by publishers, and why and how they need to change to facilitate the publishing of more diverse literature.

Through this report I explored the different classifications that constitute diverse literature with special focus on diaspora, international and translated fiction titles—both literary and commercial—from Simon and Schuster Canada and Scribner Canada. I studied the publishing processes of translated literary fiction titles *Stolen*, *In the Belly of the Congo* and *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, and observed the application of creative solutions to tackle the expensive and complicated process of translation. I also studied and compared the acquisition and publishing process of *Sunshine Nails* and *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*, analysing the differences in marketing plans prepared to promote commercial diaspora versus literary diaspora fiction.

Simon and Schuster Canada's long-term strategy to establish publishing partnerships and utilize the regional and cultural identity of authors to apply for art grants, and to promote a more direct connection with a diverse readership, has proven to be a success as seen by the launch of Scribner Canada and the critical acclaim accumulated by the above-mentioned titles. The collaborative workflow between the editorial team and the rest of the departments, as well as the role of the editorial in the publicity and marketing of a book, and in the production and cover design of the book,

has contributed to this success. However, these strategies remain in their nascent stages and must continue to grow and change to survive the test of time, and to cater to the needs of an increasingly diverse readership.

The acquisition of *Stolen*, *In the Belly of the Congo*, *The Most Secret Memory of Men*, *Nothing Good Happens in Wazirabad on Wednesday*, and *Sunshine Nails* diversified the title lists of Simon and Schuster Canada. The publishing process of each title came with its own set of challenges but also enriched the publishing program at Simon and Schuster Canada in many ways. First and foremost, four out of the five above mentioned titles marked the launch and growth of Scribner Canada, dedicated to publishing humanitarian, literary fiction from diverse authors. Secondly, most of these titles belong to the literary fiction genre—three of them English translations of previously published, award-winning novels, and two pieces of diaspora fiction from local authors—which is a favourite among critics and award juries as well as the artistic, cultural and literary communities. Lastly, the recent nomination of *The Most Secret Memory of Men* for the longlist of the National Book Award in Translated Fiction affirms the promising position of Scribner Canada, and consequently Simon and Schuster Canada, in the literary and diverse fiction market, granting prestige and opening a path for lucrative acquisitions in the future.

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