

ACROSS BORDERS

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While the dream of a borderless world is ancient, envisaged by builders of empires and monotheistic religions among others, technological revolutions seem to quicken the dreamers' pulses. The rise of international digital media and other forms of globalization have renewed the fantastic apparition of people being everywhere and nowhere, floating above the strictures of place. Recognizing that such dreams inevitably falter or are unevenly realized, we need to figure out what has changed and what has not in the wake of the globalization-digitalization upheavals. This is as true for reading as for everything else.

We can quickly dispose of the idea that digitization has simply given rise to a world without borders, a democratic fellowship of humanity sharing concerns about human rights and the future of the planet. If anything, the opposite seems to be the case as the same media both transcends distance and fosters chauvinism. Nationalisms, benign and malignant, find recruits, stoke emotions, and motivate actions through social media. Immigrants maintain a social presence online in their places of origin as well as in places of destination, while anti-immigrant groups rally the likeminded. And censors put up firewalls to keep out materials deemed threatening; it has proven easier to smuggle biblical passages into North Korea via balloons than via the Internet.

Another imagined digital-age scenario that hasn't panned out is the disappearance of print. On the contrary, e-book sales have plateaued, print books (and, to everyone's surprise, bookstores) have held steady, and there is little danger of the reading class or their progeny giving up reading.¹ This last clause has some implications, of course. The "reading class" is the educated, socially advantaged

¹ The past several years have seen a drumbeat of reports like "In Books, Print Makes a Stand," all expressing surprise that the "newfangled formats" have not displaced print, and that the book industry is doing just fine. Zeke Turner, "In Books, Print Makes a Stand," *Wall Street Journal*, October 16, 2017. The 2017 Frankfurt Book Fair (the industry's largest) reported that e-book sales were down while printed-book revenue was up 4.5 per cent. Interviews of industry professionals at Frankfurt came up with a variety of explanations—screen fatigue, political angst, better-designed print books—but the overall trend appears robust.

group of people who read in their leisure time. Its percentage of the population varies—close to half of adults in Finland, single digits in Malawi—but every country has one. These people both model and pass on social advantages and cultural tastes, intertwined and mutually constructive as Pierre Bourdieu has demonstrated, so such characteristics as parental education and the presence of books in the house correlate with whether children become readers. The advent of digital media doesn't seem to make much difference.

This essay will use Nigeria as a running empirical case for examining the relationship between reading, on the one hand, and globalization and digitalization, on the other. I am using Nigeria because I know something about its readers and writers, and because the Nigerian literary complex—a number of world-class writers, a large reading public at home and abroad, an established publishing industry, online sophistication—is in as good a position as any to cross borders.

To begin with, Nigerian readers exemplify the persistence of print. In 2000, I published a book on Nigerian readers, writers, and fiction that came out just as the Internet was starting to be widely available in Anglophone Africa.² Many observers of the literary scene, including me, believed this might “change everything,” as both the youth and the people involved in the commercial and educational sectors celebrated the advent of globalization. So I began studying educated African (and other) youth's reading practices in the digital era, a study using focus groups, interviews, and short surveys. Initially focused on Africa, I conducted research in Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, and South Africa. The early stages of this research suggested that while young Africans embraced digital technology, the impact on their reading practices was minimal: Going online was glamorous, but reading had social honor, and readers saw the two as occupying different cultural sectors.³ My subsequent research, within and beyond Africa, has further confirmed this, even as educated youth—the seed stock of the reading class—have become digital natives who have grown up with smartphones. One of the questions I ask student focus groups is, “If you had equal access to whatever you like to read in your leisure time, if there were no difference in cost or availability, would you prefer to read it in print or on a screen?” Invariably about three-quarters say print.⁴

² Wendy Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

³ Wendy Griswold, Erin M. McDonnell, and Terence E. McDonnell, “Glamour and Honor: The Relationship between Reading and the Internet in West African Culture,” *Information Technologies and International Development* 3.4 (2006): 37–52.

⁴ Other researchers have found a similar preference for print; see, for example, Naomi S. Baron, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). And this is just as well, for there is a growing body of evidence that print is better than screens for reading comprehension and retention; see, for example, Anne Mangen, Bente R. Walgermo, and Kolbjørn Brønnick, “Reading Linear Texts on Paper versus Computer Screen: Effects on Reading Comprehension,” *International Journal of Educational Research* 58 (2013): 61–8. Even *Wired* suggests that “the smart reading device of the future may be paper” (Brandon Keim, “Why the Smart Reading Device of the Future May Be... Paper,” *Wired*, May 1, 2014 (<https://www.wired.com/2014/05/reading-on-screen-versus-paper/>)).

My focus today will be two borders: access and desire. The first term is the more capacious, the second more operational. Both are produced by technology and directed by social evaluation.

Access and Desire

In the twenty-first century, what keeps people from reading? There can be only two answers: They are unable or they are unwilling.

People might be unable to read for two main reasons: They are illiterate or they don't have reading materials available. Of course there are others, such as having impaired vision, or poor light, or insufficient free time, but literacy and availability are the major impediments. Of these two, the battle for literacy has been largely won, despite a few persistent pockets in places like Afghanistan and South Sudan where war piled on top of a traditionally low rate of literacy has stalled progress.⁵

Availability is a different matter. Distribution of print materials is spotty, especially in rural and/or developing areas, and easily disrupted. Books, when available at all, are expensive. Access to digital media is not yet universal, with various digital divides persisting in denying the Internet to some people, especially poor people in the developing world, the same demographic likely to have lingering illiteracy.

According to this line of thinking, if people were *able* to read—if they had the skills and the reading material, print or digital—they *would* read. Scholars and researchers, those of us who make our livings reading, tend to assume this, but in fact it is not the case. The key consideration is not whether people have access but whether people who do have access—who are literate and able to procure reading materials—have other ways to spend their leisure time. A series of studies in the Netherlands, a country with historically high rates of reading, has shown that a drop began in the 1950s with the advent of television, and this has been reading's principal and successful competitor in most of the West.⁶ In Italy the early competition came more from movies. At the turn of the twentieth century, south-

⁵ As of 2016, 90 per cent of adult men and 83 per cent of women were literate; literacy is all but universal in Europe and North and South America (with a few exceptions in poor nations like Guatemala and Haiti). It approaches universality in China and is getting close in developing countries like Indonesia and Brazil. War-ravaged and/or poor countries in sub-Saharan Africa lag behind; adult literacy is less than 50 per cent in Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, and South Sudan. Afghanistan is another country where literacy, low to begin with, has stalled and where sharp differences between male–female and urban–rural literacy remain. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT_DS&popupcustomise=true&lang=en#); *The World Factbook* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2017) (; and “Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA) Program,” UNESCO Office in Kabul (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/kabul/education/enhancement-of-literacy-in-afghanistan-ela-program>).

⁶ Wim Knulst and Gerber Kraaykamp, “Trends in Leisure Reading: Forty Years of Research on Reading in the Netherlands,” *Poetics* 26 (1998): 21–41.

ern Italy had much lower rates of literacy than northern; by the time the South began to catch up in terms of education, films, radio, and later television offered attractive alternatives, and the South has never caught up to the North.⁷ Today the attractive alternatives are social media and texting. Parents and teachers in the Western world for decades have urged their children, generally to no avail, to get off the television/video games/computers/smartphones and read a book.

So the high wall is not access but desire. The border between readers and those who could read but don't is often self-imposed, and non-readers generally have no wish to cross it. In the twenty-first century, we will see, indeed, are seeing, a return to the historical norm whereby not everyone wants to read unless they have to (for work or studies), even if they are perfectly capable of doing so. A minority has the skills, the access, and—most critically—the desire. The percentage varies from place to place: high in Nordic countries, Western Europe, North America, Japan, urban China; lower in Latin America; lowest in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world. All else being equal, educational level being the primary variable, the reading habit is higher in cities than in rural areas, and higher among women than men. Desire is intense both among longstanding members of the reading class, and also in areas where the thirst for information about the world is newly available, as in the case of Kabul's recent boom in book publishing and bookstores.⁸

Let us imagine that the borders of access have been crossed, as they have for most, and that the border of desire has been acknowledged. While not everyone wants to read, some do and can. These people constitute the reading class, and they are socially powerful almost everywhere, able to do and get what they want. So what do they want? And how does what readers want square with what authors and publishers want? Are there any borders left for global members of the reading class?

Globalization and digitalization have led to rosy predictions along the lines of "African writers are going global." The idea is that once writers have Facebook pages and once readers have Internet access, something like Pascale Casanova's "world republic of letters . . . independent of political boundaries" where everyone is a citizen and where readers and writers are unconstrained by wherever they happen to be will finally be realized.⁹ While this scenario is not altogether wrong, it needs to be qualified.

Many recent scholars and commentators have assumed a linear development thesis along the lines that once digital access is achieved, hitherto marginal literary communities will enter the circulation of global discourse in a way that had not been possible with print media. Formerly, the idea goes, African writers depended on pre-established colonial relationships and metropolitan publishers (in London, Heinemann, Longman, and Macmillan, for Anglophone countries) to have any

⁷ Wendy Griswold, *Regionalism and the Reading Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁸ Nordland and Abed.

⁹ Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

chance of reaching an international readership; now they can just circulate their writing online. Africans involved in the book trade, as well as the writers themselves, have festooned their products and activities with “global” and “international” labels. My research suggests instead four sometimes contradictory conclusions:

1. *Most writers* have embraced new media as a way of reaching larger audiences.
2. *Some writers* can be considered global in terms of their readership.
3. *Women writers* have the advantage in terms of crossing borders and attaining global recognition.
4. *Few readers* desire to read authors from outside their own countries or places with which they are familiar.

In the twentieth century it was unlikely for a Nigerian writer to reach a global market. A few lucky giants of the first generation—for example, Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa—caught the attention of British publishers like Heinemann and Longman and reached readers in the English-speaking world. A few others—for example, Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri—were able to establish careers once they had moved to London. The vast majority either published their books in Nigeria with virtually no distribution inside or abroad, or published with firms like Macmillan’s Pacesetters Series that were distributed only to an African market. They might achieve considerable success locally, more in terms of being known than in making a living from their writing, but they were unknown outside that community. Geographic borders were barriers to cultural transmission for most writers and most readers.

Digital technologies and new media have changed all this. Nowadays it appears that every Nigerian writer maintains and manages an online presence via Facebook, blogs, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube (African poets are particularly adroit at YouTube readings, as the research of Susanna Sacks has demonstrated).¹⁰ Electronic distribution has made the output of African writers accessible all over the world.

However, there are three caveats. First, the definition of a *Nigerian* novel or author is becoming blurred. Second, going digital does not mean going global, not in terms of readership; the “Nigerian authors” that the outside world is likely to read tend to be atypical cosmopolitans who write about issues that the outside world is interested in. And, third, they are likely to be women.

Almost two decades ago I wrote a book with the subtitle *Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria*. Implicitly acknowledging that the readers could be in Brooklyn, the writers in London, the novels sold in bookshops in Berlin, the subtitle confidently assumed that such things as Nigerian readers, authors, and novels actually existed

¹⁰ Susanna L. Sacks, “Slam Poetry in Malawi: Digital Media Aesthetics and Translingual Poetic Forms,” in *Digital Technology and Languages in African Communities and Classrooms: Innovations and Opportunities*, ed. Leketi Makelela and Goodith White (Bristol: Multilingual Matters Press, forthcoming).

and could be identified. Needless to say, the digital, technological, and demographic tides of the twenty-first century have washed away any such categorical stability (which probably wasn't there in the first place). The fluidity of the present collides with the specificity of social diagnosis that the novel has traditionally offered. What readers remain—and, again, people have alternatives if all they seek is entertainment—are those seeking such specificity, about Nigeria or anything else.

The global elite is moving away the local, crossing the old borders, and this is especially true in the case of female authors. For the book just mentioned, I looked at every twentieth-century Nigerian novel I could identify (476 in total), running from the 1950s through the late 1990s. Fifteen per cent of the authors were women. A few years later I compiled a list of novels that had been published after my book. Although this list was less comprehensive, I identified 132 titles from the late 1990s to 2005. Eighteen per cent were by women; while mildly encouraging, this didn't suggest much of a trend.

Compare this to the truly global list of novels published and distributed by Cassava Republic, which has the explicit mission “to build a new body of African writing that links writers across different times and spaces” and has received a great deal of attention in the UK and US.¹¹ Thirty novels are available through Amazon.com or directly from the publisher (who has a London office and is opening one in the US). Of these, twenty-three (77%) are by women. And while Cassava Republic has an explicit mission of promoting African writers, it has no explicit gender agenda. Nor is it just African-oriented presses that are tilting female. Overall, it is remarkable how a new generation of writers born in Nigeria features so many prominent women authors—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (b. 1977; *Half a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah*), Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani (b. 1976; *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*), and Helen Oyeyemi (b. 1984; *Boy*, *Snow*, *Bird*)—authors who publish with mainstream Western presses and whom critics have lavished with attention and praise.

Why have women suddenly moved to the foreground? Why have they been able to capitalize on digital and physical border-crossing more than men? There could be a number of factors in play. The literacy gap in Nigeria and elsewhere is closing, meaning more female readers; women everywhere read fiction more than their male peers, giving an advantage to writers who deal with issues of interest to women;

¹¹ Based in Abuja, Cassava Republic Press has been in operation since 2006. Cassava Republic (<https://www.cassavarepublic.biz/pages/about-us>). For the 2016 London launch, see “Nigerian Publishing House Cassava Republic Comes to the UK this April,” *What's On Africa*, April 13, 2016 (<http://whatsonafrica.org/nigerian-publishing-press-cassava-republic-launches-london-april/>). For its 2017 entry into the American market, see Ed Nawotka, “Cassava Republic Brings Africa to America,” *Publishers Weekly*, June 30, 2017 (<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/international/international-book-news/article/73739-cassava-republic-brings-africa-to-america.html>). See also Mark Williams, “Social Media and Instagrams Are Making Books Sexy Again—in Nigeria,” *New Publishing Standard*, November 24, 2017 (<http://www.thenewpublishingstandard.com/social-media-and-instagram-are-making-books-sexy-again-in-nigeria/>).

publishers and critics concerned with promoting diversity may see a double benefit in favoring women of color; cosmopolitanism benefits intellectually ambitious women more than it does men because it releases the former from patriarchal expectations (in Nigeria, highly educated women who are too serious about their work have been stigmatized as “acadas,” either sexually undesirable or having used their “bottom power” to achieve success). I suspect another factor is that while both men and women can promote their literary careers online, this might be especially beneficial for women who are more geographically limited by family responsibilities.

To sum up the picture so far: authors from the periphery are attempting to go global via social media. A fortunate and talented few—especially women—have captured attention in the West and beyond; Adichie’s works have been translated into some thirty languages, mostly European but also Japanese, Malayalam, Hebrew, Sinhala, Vietnamese, and Arabic. So what about back home? Have readers and the book trade gone global as well?

Among the research sites I am exploring are book fairs where publishers and booksellers display their wares, depict their trajectories, and make connections. I attended the Nigerian International Book Fair 2017 in Lagos, where I spoke with a number of publishers as well as booksellers at leading Lagos bookstores, and, to get another perspective and see if Nigeria is atypical, I also attended the Nairobi International Book Fair the following September. Based on my observations and conversations, the shift toward globalization of markets, readers, and literary circulation has been greatly exaggerated. While both events adopted the label of “international,” in fact virtually all of the booths set up by publishers and other members of the book trade were locally oriented. And beyond textbooks, booksellers tell me that their customers want the same things they wanted twenty years ago: formulaic fiction by Western authors (Frederick Forsyth and John Grisham are very popular) and motivational or Christian books. There is little demand for quality literature by foreign authors. As for quality work by Nigerian or Kenyan authors, the booksellers shrug and say that expats are the ones who buy these books. Despite a revolution in access, the tastes and desires of the local reading class have not changed.

Chinelo Okparanta, one of the most successful Nigerian border-crossers, exemplifies the fluidity and limits of the current situation, the complexities of readership, and how women are involved. Born in Port Harcourt, she moved to the United States at the age of 10 and was educated there. She is variously referred to as Nigerian, American, Nigerian-American, and “Nigeria’s US-based author.” Her fiction, set both in Nigeria and the US, focuses on women’s lives, gender oppression, and female same-sex love. Ever since her short stories began appearing in places like *The New Yorker*, she has enjoyed extraordinary attention and acclaim in the West: London-based *Granta* named her one of their “New Voices for 2012”; she began to garner prizes such as the O. Henry Prize for the year’s best short stories; and when *Granta* published her collection *Happiness, Like Water*, it received glowing praise from the likes of the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* and

National Public Radio. And also from the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transexual and Queer (LGBTQ) cultural tastemakers, which awarded it the Lambda Literary Award for best Lesbian General Fiction in 2014. Her debut novel *Under the Udala Trees* similarly drew praise from mainstream, Black (e.g., *Essence*), and LGBTQ critics and writers; again receiving the Lambda award for 2016, it has won prizes and been on the “best book” lists of everything from the *Wall Street Journal* to *Cosmopolitan*.¹²

The response in Nigeria has been more measured. Both YNaija and Pulse, news sites aimed at young, urban Nigerians, included the novel on their ten-best lists for the year (though it was number ten for Pulse), but the press has paid no attention to it.¹³ It was shortlisted for the Etisalat Prize for Literature in 2014, but lost out to a South African novel, Songeziwe Mahlangu’s *Penumbra*, a work that has been largely ignored in the West.¹⁴ At the Ake Book Festival in 2016, Okparanta received a mixed response: “Boos as well as cheers greeted one audience member who told Okparanta that ‘the natural order of life is against LGBT because the Bible said he [God] made male and female.’”¹⁵ The ambivalence in Nigeria is not surprising. On the one hand, the Nigerian literary world still takes its cues from London and New York to a considerable extent, so someone who has conquered that world would usually be celebrated. On the other hand, Nigerians are extremely conservative when it comes to same-sex relations. A draconian law from 2014 prohibits not only same-sex marriage but also any “public show of same-sex amorous relations”; the law seems to have encouraged vigilante violence, and few Nigerians outside of the activist community have objected. Ninety-five per cent of Nigerians are against gay marriage, ninety per cent against cohabitation or LGBTQ organizations.¹⁶ So a writer dealing sympathetically with lesbian issues has difficulty getting traction with the local reading class.¹⁷

¹² Cited on Chinelo Okparanta’s website (<https://www.chineloookparanta.com/book-reviews>).

¹³ Zaynab Quadri, “10 Outstanding Nigerian Books for this Year,” *Pulse*, December 16, 2015 (<http://www.pulse.ng/books/pulselist-2015-10-outstanding-nigerian-books-for-this-year-id4464207.html>); and Wilfred Okiche, “The 10 Most Notable Books of 2015,” *YNaija*, December 13, 2015 (<https://ynaija.com/the-fishermen-blackass-under-the-udala-tree/>).

¹⁴ Another indication that it is not the case that novels that have won acclaim in Africa have crossed borders into the West. Both *Happiness, Like Water* and *Penumbra* were published in 2013, and both are available from Amazon.com; as of February 2018, *Penumbra* has received two customer reviews, *Happiness, Like Water*, fifty-nine (*Under the Udala Trees*, published three years later, has ninety-five).

¹⁵ Sarah Ládípò Manyika, “The Nigerian-American Writer Who Takes on Taboos,” *OZY*, December 19, 2017 (<http://www.ozy.com/rising-stars/the-nigerian-american-writer-who-takes-on-taboos/82567>).

¹⁶ “Tell Me Where I Can Be Safe”: The Impact of Nigeria’s Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 20, 2016 (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/10/20/tell-me-where-i-can-be-safe/impact-nigerias-same-sex-marriage-prohibition-act>). Figures are from p. 18.

¹⁷ Okparanta is perfectly aware of this. At the Ake Book Festival during a panel on “Legs Open, Eyes Closed: The New Sensuality in African Writing,” she argued that “when we talk about sex, we are talking about power. Shame is the power that we give others to wield over us, so when I write I take back my power.” “Galaxy of Africa’s Literary Stars,” *This Day*, December 15, 2016 (<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/12/15/galaxy-of-africas-literary-stars-2/>).

Meanwhile back in the West, critics are not the only ones who love Okparanta's fiction. Goodreads, with sixty-five million registered members, offers a sense of her popularity.¹⁸ While we do not know the gender breakdown, evidence from book-club membership and reading patterns in general suggests that it would skew female. We know that women read more than men do, especially more fiction, and that they favor new books, reading them twice as often as men do.¹⁹ So it comes as no surprise that Goodreads names *Under the Udala Trees* as one of the thirteen most popular Nigerian books—or that over half of these books are by women.²⁰

Position and Location

When we think about people and borders, it is useful to distinguish between position and location. Position is where a person is; location is how a person makes meanings from where she is. In the twenty-first century, position seems to have become less important. Digital media allows readers to access writers from anywhere and writers to reach out globally (most readers, most writers, I hasten to add; there are still issues of access and digital divides, though much less so than in the recent past). Moreover, the very position of people, both authors and readers, is less stable than it was in the past. Lesley Nneka Arimah was born in the UK, grew up in various places including Nigeria, and lives in Minnesota. Wikipedia calls her a Nigerian writer; the *New York Times* calls her a “British-Nigerian-American writer,” and the University of Chicago Library houses her book in the “William Vaughn Moody Collection in American Literature.” She herself is coy, saying she is “Nigerian-ish,” and that she was “was born in the UK and grew up wherever her father was stationed for work, which was sometimes Nigeria, sometimes not” (Burney 2017). Position is fluid, with authors transcending borders, moving from place to place, in and out of the world republic of letters as they see fit.

Readers' positions are less fluid. (The mobility of the reading class should not be confused with the mobility of people fleeing war and poverty; we need to remember that we are talking about an advantaged group here.) While a few cosmopolitans like those expats in Africa want to read African writers, by and large people choose to read locally, about their own country, region, city; when they relocate, they read about their new country, region, city. To be cosmopolitan usually just means to be

¹⁸ “Number of Registered Members on Goodreads from May 2011 to September 2017 (In Millions),” Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/252986/number-of-registered-members-on-goodreadscom/>).

¹⁹ On women vs. men reading, see Andrew Perrin, “Book Reading 2016,” *Pew Research Center: Internet & Technology*, September 1, 2016 (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/01/book-reading-2016/>). On women favoring contemporary books, see “Elizabeth,” “Sex and Reading: A Look at Who's Reading Whom,” Goodreads Blog, November 19, 2014 (<https://www.goodreads.com/blog/show/475-sex-and-reading-a-look-at-who-s-reading-whom>).

²⁰ “Nigeria,” Goodreads (<https://www.goodreads.com/genres/nigeria>).

local, culturally savvy, in more than one place. Readers read about some places but not all places.

Why might this be? Readers have bodies, material rather than virtual, and those bodies spend time in particular places. Thus readers do their location, their meaning-making, from a specific place, not from some planetary everywhere. Location, it appears, entails borders. Social constructions though they may be, borders help orient people. By drawing lines, they demarcate a place worthy of attention, separating what is inside them, an area of interest and concern, from what is outside them and therefore less compelling.

The reasons for this come both from the brain and from society. Human beings are neurologically wired and socially conditioned to pay attention to some things, to things that might matter, and to ignore the rest. So just as readers tend to select reading materials related to their gender, their ethnicity, their religion, their occupation, and so on, they also prefer to read about the place or places with which they are most familiar.²¹ An American reader who has lived in Italy but not France will be more inclined toward fiction set in Italy than in France. Again we see that the borders are not impenetrable, but the readers themselves tend to honor them.

Reading across borders in the twenty-first century? It is easier than ever before to read works from other places and cultures. Writers and publishers and (some) educators use every digital and social media device they can to encourage it. Those barriers of access that remain will evaporate. Most readers, however, will not have the desire to read beyond their own positions. They are local, perhaps multilocal, but not translocal in their interests and satisfactions, and their reading choices will reflect this. Although the borders will be wide open, few people will make the journey to cross them.

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²¹ Wendy Griswold and Hannah Wohl, "Evangelists of Culture: One Book Programs and the Agents Who Define Literature, Shape Tastes, and Reproduce Regionalism," *Poetics* 50 (2016): 96–109.

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