Publishers, authors, and texts: The process of cultural consecration in prize evaluation

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\begin{abstract}
As cultural objects are of subjective quality, the determinants of their consecration as being of lasting value is a common focus of research. Most typically, scholars look to three constituent features of cultural objects: 1) the characteristics of their creators, 2) the statuses of their sponsoring organizations, and 3) more limitedly, the textual features of the objects themselves. Rather than treating these features as independently assigned, Bourdieu argues they are different manifestations of the same latent positional and dispositional spaces in the field from which new cultural objects emerge. Using a new dataset on the full population of submissions to the Booker Prize for Fiction over nine years ($N = 1094$), we rely on a suite of characteristics across these three areas of foci to examine the latent positions in the field through which "art" is defined and consecrated. Findings show the consecration process begins with publishers' nominations, which reflect a relational field of competing positions occupied by different groups under the canopy of the former British Empire. Afterward, juries' decisions of shortlisters and then winners reveal how consecration emerges through a distancing from England-centered voices, followed by a growing preference for legitimation by the literary establishment, and male over female voices.
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\section{1. Introduction}

Consecration processes matter as they create "discontinuity out of continuity," or rather, create "winners" and "losers" out of what can often be small differences (Bourdieu, 1984; Merton, 1968). Within this framework the sociological study of cultural consecration broadly focuses on two questions. The first asks who promotes some culture over others as being of value or import. Those who consecrate cultural objects as worthy of attention may orient toward producers (e.g. Hirsch, 1972; Rossman, 2012; Cattani, Ferriani, & Paul, 2014), consumers (e.g. Shrum, 1991; Verboord, 2013), or, be "orchestrated" toward each other and their own legitimacy (e.g. Janssen, 1997; Van Rees, 1987), as "every critic declares not only his judgement of the work, but also his claim to the right to talk about it and judge it" (Bourdieu, 1993: 36). The second major line of research, rather than asking "who" engages in processes of cultural consecration, asks "what" is consecrated as well as by "which" metrics and processes consecration occurs (e.g. Allen & Lincoln, 2004; Braden 2015; DiMaggio, 1982; Ekelund &
2. Cultural consecration and establishing what counts

The consecration of some cultural objects such as art (White & White, 1965), movies (Baumann, 2007), television shows (Bielby & Bielby, 1994), and books (Griswold, 1987a) as valuable over others poses challenges for both evaluators and researchers given that most, if not all, of their value is socially constructed (Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio, 1982). Such cultural consecration processes are of interest to sociologists in part because to consecrate some objects as of lasting value is in some ways to rank the seemingly un-rankable (Karpik, 2010). Given this predicament, within any given field what are the metrics through which cultural objects are consecrated as being of lasting value and import? In any consecration process there are “winners” and “losers” with detectable differences in their character and presentation which may affect the likelihood of their cultural elevation. What is consecrated by those with the power to consecrate is, in effect, the dominate definition of art within the field at any given time. With the dramatic rise of cultural prizes and awards in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Best, 2008; English, 2005), these overtly competitive cultural arenas have increasingly become the object of study in consecration processes, be it for film (Lincoln & Allen, 2004; Rossman, Espanza, & Bonacich, 2010), music (Anand & Watson, 2004; Schmutz & Faupel, 2010), books (Anand & Jones, 2008; Squires, 2004; Street, 2005; Verboord, Kuipers, & Janssen, 2015), or fine art (Péné & Lee, 2014).

As argued by Bourdieu (1984), “cultural consecration... confer[s] on the objects, persons and situations it touches a sort of ontological promotion akin to transubstantiation” (6). For the most part, however, in the study of cultural consecration scholars have treated the characteristics of texts, their creators, and their sponsoring organizations as operating independently; in essence, pitting these different properties against each other in regression models. The benefit of this...
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