1 Introduction

Cultural organisations have played key roles in the history of publishing and the book in Latin America. Whether we understand organisations from a broad and inclusive perspective – with athenaeums, literary societies, poetry houses, academies, and other small and medium cultural circles – or more narrowly – with book chambers, professional associations, unions, and even specialised transnational organisations, like the UNESCO, the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), or the Regional Centre for the Promotion of Books in Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLALC) – we can easily trace the various impacts that organisations have made on the production, circulation, and reception of books and printed materials. Given their condition as intellectual groupings with a penchant for building transnational and translocal networks, all of these organisations, regardless of their size, stimulated urban culture by publishing books, collections, newspapers, and magazines, by creating libraries and spaces of sociability, or by implementing politics and programs to promote reading (as is the case with the most specialised of these organisations).

Nonetheless, with a few relevant exceptions, book historians have rarely taken up the task of studying these organisations’ itineraries and their impacts on the book ecosystems of the past.¹ Just as their importance has been overlooked in academic reconstructions of Ibero-American literary systems and fields (Roig-Sanz and Subirana 2020, 9), the histories, goals, productions, successes, and failures of literary and cultural organisations have been understudied when it comes to the history of the book, having garnered more attention in intellectual

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¹ Regarding the second half of the twentieth century, we may highlight the research by Christina Lembrecht (2013) and Amanda Laugesen (2017) on the UNESCO and the Franklin Book Program, respectively, as well as the more recent research by Mitiyo Morinaka (2021) on the publication programs at the American Library Association and the Rockefeller Foundation for Brazil during the cultural Cold War. On book corporations, the studies on Spain by Martínez Martín, Martínez Rus, and Sánchez García (2004), as well as the eye-opening work of Alejandra Giuliani (2018) on the Argentine Book Chamber, stand out.
history and in the history of international cultural relations (Iriye 2002; Chaubet 2004; Devés-Valdés 2007; Dumont 2008; Pita 2009; Roig-Sanz and Subirana 2020).

Aiming to highlight cultural organisations as a relevant object of study in terms of the region’s book history, this chapter analyses an ephemeral and little-known type of cultural organisation, which nonetheless made outstanding contributions in Latin American capitals like Lima, Caracas, Bogotá, and Havana. Surging in Peru in the mid-1950s, these organisations mainly aimed to boost the book and national literature among ordinary readers. As one of their promoters stated, the goal was none other than to cheapen the book so that it could multiply (Caballero Calderón 1959). Determined to organise street events where literary collections were sold at popular prices, and able to consolidate efficient and transnational professional networks involving writers, editors, and booksellers, these organisations sought to fill in the gaps in state policies around literature and books in various countries, revealing certain specificities that might be questioned from the perspective of the transnational history of the book.

As initiatives that shook up cultural and urban life, allowed for international mobility, determined the publication of numerous collections, and favoured the articulation of a broad range of gens du livre (people of the book) across the region, festival organisations are notable examples of groupings that have proven able to transform the world of literature and books. For all of these reasons, such organisations are worthy of being viewed as an object of study in which several analytical perspectives can converge and intercept each other, either highlighting their conditions as events that impacted the establishment of regional communities (Iriye 2002), as disparate or reciprocal spaces of exchange (Ory 2010), or as agencies of institutionalisation, if viewed from the sociology of literature (Bourdieu 1993).

Though many of these experiences were quite unstructured and were often led single-handedly by certain individuals, we demonstrate that these organisations succeeded in outlining a transnational cultural space at a key moment in Latin American history, the 1950s: a period that, on the one hand, saw the momentary overcoming of dictatorships in various countries, and, on the other, the resounding triumph of the Cuban Revolution, with everything that this implied for the region’s political, intellectual, and media-related life. Using the definition set forth in the introduction to this book, we hope to show that

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2 This perspective is revealing of the transnational turn and reaffirms the fact that the history of the book inhabits multiple geographies, allowing us to study book organisations in dialogue with other subdisciplines by privileging fields like translation, transfers, international organisations, and publishing multinationals (Lyons and Mollier 2012, 10–17).
festival organisations promoted cultural transfers as well as the mobility of people, goods, and ideas, while they gave cohesion to national literary fields and helped project them beyond their borders. Further, they were led by agents who sought to encourage or build transnational intellectual networks. We thus hope to show that the people behind these organisations operated as cultural mediators. Following Roig-Sanz and Meylaerts (2018, 3), we will show how these cultural mediators acted as “smugglers” by creating their own circuits of interaction and taking a disruptive stance before the popularisation of the book and national literature, for instance, while they also acted as “customs officers,” as, from a legitimised position, they used festivals and related collections to showcase specific political perspectives. As we will later see, the Colombian case may be read in this light.

With these reflections in the backdrop, the following pages seek to reconstruct the history of festival organisations and analyse their impacts in the Latin American book and literary sphere. Divided in three parts, the chapter starts by exploring the reasons and relationships that gave root to these organisations in Peru and introduces the itineraries of the writer-editors Manuel Scorza and Enrique Congrains Martin, who spearheaded the projects and whose itineraries marked the unfolding of these organisations, but also their ends. Secondly, we describe the festivals and the collections that circulated therein. Regarding the publishing activities that gave these organisations meaning, we examine the conditions that favoured their development in Peru and their eventual transfer to other countries as successful models for publishing production, literary dynamisation, and intellectual articulation. Finally, we briefly reflect upon the impact of festivals. Highlighting some of the effects of organisations on popular publishing, we analyse the pertinence of understanding festival organisations, their events, and their collections as phenomena with the institutional force needed to affect the national literary space – while they also served as spaces in which the people behind the organisations could accumulate symbolic capital.

2 Organising Around the Book

Festival organisations surged in a period that may be described as one of relative cultural reactivation in Latin America, which was tied to the new political moment in turn. Fundamentally, the second half of the 1950s can be read as a parenthesis between the cycles of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes that marked the mid-twentieth century and the following decades. In the words of Carlos Rincón (2015, 417), this period stood as a “brief summer of bliss” in which the repression of cultural modernisation had finally seemed to come to a stop. Though
Rincón was referring to Colombia, his singular reading of the moment can be extrapolated to many countries in the region, especially to those which, like Colombia, seemed to be overcoming their authoritarian governments. For instance, general Gustavo Rojas Pinilla’s dictatorship in Colombia, which began in 1953, after the overthrowing of the also authoritarian regime of Laureano Gómez and Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez, came to an end in 1957. The year 1957 also marked the end of Carlos Castillo Armas’s government in Guatemala, which had begun in 1954. In Venezuela, the government of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, a member of the junta that had overthrown Rómulo Gallegos in 1948 and the head of the regime since 1952, came to its end in 1958. A year later, the Cuban Revolution would also topple Fulgencio Batista’s dictatorship, which had begun in 1952. In Peru, where festival organisations were born, Manuel Odría’s government, which started with a military coup in 1948, would end in 1956, anticipating the changes that followed in other countries in the area.

This landscape of change across many of the countries that later became involved in book festivals marked a moment of expectation regarding the return of democratic practices, a harbinger of the return of elections, the end of censorship, the recovery of public opinion, and the revitalising of cultural and artistic life as many exiles returned to their countries. Thanks to the latter, this period also stands out for spanning one of the longest and most intense intellectual movements at the continental level. The Cuban Alejo Carpentier was in Caracas; the Peruvian Ciro Alegría, in Cuba; and the Guatemalan Miguel Ángel Asturias, in Buenos Aires, to name but a few people who would later become involved in book festivals. While we will come back to this later, the forced mobility of many writers across the continent, along with the movement facilitated by diplomatic missions, ultimately boosted the expansion of festivals, as organisers took advantage of the ties they had built across an itinerant community with Latin-Americanist ambitions in terms of cultural action. As we will show, mobility played a key role in the development of festival organisations, as agents were able to acquire solid knowledge of various sociocultural contexts and articulate concerns around the book as a modernising object.

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3 Rincón’s reading on the period can be questioned, however, as Rojas Pinilla’s regime hadn’t completely put a stop to cultural life and intellectual activity. For instance, just one year after he entered power, the Association of Colombian Writers and Artists was founded. This group sought to influence the cultural policy of the regime, which it also valued for having appeased the violence that had marred the country ever since the assassination of the liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and the incendiary, conservative government of Laureano Gómez.

4 On the role of intellectual mobility in knowledge building and as a constituting dimension of modernity, see Aurea Mota (2017). Regarding the history of the book, studies interested in
In Peru, the country where festival organisations first took root, the apparent end of cultural repression materialised with the conclusion of Odría’s regime and the beginning of Manuel Prado’s second government, between 1957 and 1962, which revoked the interior security law and put an end to the ban on the Communist Party of Peru and the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) party, leading to the return of many exiles. The “Prado Moment,” known as the period of Convivencia, or coexistence, swept in a time of political reopening as intellectual activity started being re galvanised. Among intellectuals, debates on the book’s place in society became more visible than ever before. Coinciding with the UNESCO’s movements and with new, global policies on libraries and reading, many Peruvian writers and critics started to discuss the state of national literature, its subpar international projection, and the always worrisome absence of readers. To intellectuals like Sebastián Salazar Bondy, the problem with the book in Peru was multicausal. It not only stemmed from the way politics had overlooked the literary and cultural world, but also from the faltering publishing industry, which benefited from very little State financing, with absent or unambitious strategic actors, including distributors. The industry barely survived thanks to the struggles of a few individuals (Hirschhorn 2005).

Furthermore, readers were hard to come by, thanks to high rates of illiteracy, but also to potential readers’ preferences for radio, film, television, and comics, according to Salazar Bondy. In one of his columns, he stated that these media were the enemies of the book and needed to be attacked with intense reading-promotion campaigns if there was still any hope of not becoming a “people without light, a dead people” (1958, 12). It is worth noting that such paternalistic views of the people, readers or not, were constant, stretching well beyond the Peruvian scene.

Except for Argentina, Mexico, and even Chile, which continued to see the effects of the golden era of book commercialisation and production, as well as of a more organised publishing industry, complaints about the weakness of national publishing houses, the few and “bad” readers, and the absence of stimulus policies for books cut across the entire region. In a similar tone to Salazar Bondy’s, at around the same time, the Colombian writer Elisa Mújica stated – regarding the National Literature Prize – that in her country there was no “publishing industry, and barely any readers of national books, and no notion that intellectual work should be guaranteed the same material conditions as any other kind of work” (1954, 2). To the writer, however, the very idea of issuing a prize was already

the geographic dimension have posited the need to not only study the specific mobility of books and their intermediary agents, but also of the ideas and know-how that contextualised this mobility, which also end up in transit (Withers and Ogborn 2010).
In Peru a similar prize was created in 1952, and though it was also appreciated, there were doubts around the extent of its impact on the publishing world (Hirschhorn 2005, 10). In other words, while there was a certain belief that prizes were important, there were doubts around their effectiveness as they did not directly stimulate the publishing field.

Nonetheless, it was against the backdrop of moderate progress and general nonconformity that the mother institution of all future festival organisers was born: Patronato del Libro, or the Book Board. Created in September of 1956, this novel space, which was led by several representatives from the literary world, with the backing of private companies, took on the goal of “giving the people low-cost books of proven cultural quality.” The goal was to take on the problem of the book in Peru through specific actions, but also to incentivise the creation of policies that might accelerate production and circulation, laying the groundwork for “the great Peruvian publishing industry” (“Patronato del Libro Peruano”, 1956, 7). Within this circle of literary leaders, we could highlight writers like José Durand, Luis J. Cisneros, Mario Florián, and Salazar Bondy himself, as well as philosophers like Francisco Miró Quesada, culturally aware entrepreneurs like Manuel Mujica Gallo, and other lesser-known men who were nonetheless key to the project’s execution, such as Manuel Scorza (Lima, 1928 – Madrid, 1983), a young poet and former APRA militant who had recently returned to Peru after being exiled in Mexico, where he published the poetry book Las Imprecaciones (1955), which would earn him the National Poetry Prize the year of his return.

All in all, this innovative, intellectual group would not have met its goals without the drive of the Peruvian private sector – which was committed to publishing the first collections, as well as to said collections’ publicity campaigns and the financing of programmed activities, which were ultimately precursors to future Peruvian book festivals (Gras 1998, 84–85). To be clear, even though the Board essentially responded to the interests of Lima’s literary circles, which fretted over the country’s high illiteracy rates as well as over the precarious circulation of their own writing, the publishing project relied on the private sector – namely, Banco de Crédito del Perú, Compañía Agrícola del Perú, Compañía Nacional de Cerveza Callao, the International Petroleum Company, and Cerro de Pasco mining company. This alliance, which was then enriched with new members, carried out two mass events in Lima’s Plaza San Martín: the first was

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5 Regarding Colombian writers’ complaints regarding the lack of literary incentives and the shortcomings of the publishing industry, Felipe van der Huck (2020) shows that these can be traced back to the Liberal Republic (1930–1946), a cycle of governments that constitute the most relevant moment of articulation among intellectual professionals and the country’s politics and culture.
in December of 1956, and the second was held in July of 1957 – both coordinated by Manuel Scorza, who became the main beneficiary of the events’ success, as well as the face of subsequent festival projects.

3 Itinerant Festivals and the Battle of the Book

Before addressing Scorza’s itineraries, we should describe the first few festivals. From the intellectual group’s standpoint, such events needed to offer the people an amalgamation of books that were fundamental to Peruvian literature, introducing ordinary readers to national classics, while also showcasing the best contemporary writers. Comprised of an elite that believed itself responsible for guiding Peruvian society, the Board decided to publish, in each of its events, a selection of ten titles, with the most reputable members of the board writing their prologues and commentaries. The books would be printed as pocket editions, on newsprint, to ensure easy commercialisation. These editorial decisions would allow buyers to acquire their first collections of Peruvian literature: the idea was to commercialise a full collection at the price of just one book, that is, to sell ten books for the price of one (Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1:** Book covers belonging to the first two literary series published in Peruvian festivals, 1956–1957 (Source: Biblioteca Nacional del Perú).
As Dunia Gras (1998), the first great researcher of this publishing phenomenon, has highlighted, the Primera serie de autores peruanos (First Series of Peruvian Authors) stood out for its fundamental selections, but also because the intellectual heads of the Board left their marks on each book. Such marks can be read, following Bourdieu (2002), as typical transfers of symbolic capital, which were particularly useful when it came to increasing the prestige and recognition of those who wrote the paratexts. To illustrate, Narraciones y leyendas incas, the first title in the series, was prefaced by Luis E. Valcárcel; Historia de la Florida by Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, had an introduction by Aurelio Miró Quesada; and Tradiciones peruanas by Ricardo Palma, was presented by Raúl Porras Barrenechea, who also selected and prefaced Paisajes peruanos by José de la Riva-Agüero. The other books in the series were printed as “Best of . . .” selections. For instance, we might highlight poetry books by the highly respected writers Santos Chocano and César Vallejo, edited at the behest of Francisco Bendezú and Gustavo Valcárcel, respectively. Two volumes dedicated to Peru’s best short stories were mediated by Manuel Suárez Miraval and Estuardo Núñez; the publishing of Manuel González Prada’s select essays was managed by Salazar Bondy; while the publication of José Carlos Mariátegui’s select essays was coordinated by Manuel Scorza. The second series also included classical titles, such as an additional volume of Ricardo Palma’s work, and other select, commented works, such as Poesía amorosa moderna del Perú, edited by Suárez Miraval. In contrast to the first experience, this new series would include works by living authors, such as Ciro Alegría and Enrique López Albújar, with the former published Perros hambrientos and the latter, a selection of his best short stories.

Another key feature of these first book festivals lied in the spaces they occupied. In the understanding that the target public did not tend to frequent bookstores, and that intermediaries would raise the collections’ price tags, the organisers decided to hold their events in Lima’s main public plazas, using kiosks and stands. In other words, they sought a direct-sale scheme, eschewing booksellers, and other intermediaries to guarantee easy access to all kinds of passers-by. It is worth highlighting that this strategy would be replicated in all the other festivals that soon took place in Peru and other countries in Latin America. The strategy was replicated because of its resounding success: in the first event, all 10,000 available collections were sold (100,000 titles) in just ten days, while the second event sold 15,000 collections. Given the numbers, young writers like Manuel Scorza understood that these “Battles of the Book,” as they’d
come to be known, could prove great businesses as well as significant platforms for visibility. As the goal of revamping publishing had been met, the Board was dissolved after the Second Festival in mid-1957, but Scorza continued to kindle the fires of future festivals.

In association with the book-printer Pablo Villanueva and the editor and bookseller Juan Mejía Baca, who had joined the Board in 1957, Scorza planned a Third Festival of the Peruvian Book in December of that same year. One of the innovative aspects of this festival was its Latin American turn: Scorza put forward the idea of creating a collection with works by Rómulo Gallegos, Horacio Quiroga, Mariano Azuela, and Jorge Icaza, as well as other anthologies, such as *Los mejores cuentos americanos*, edited by Aníbal Quijano. These were accompanied by books authored by valued Peruvian writers, like López Albújar and Ciro Alegría, who even returned from his exile to promote the festival and sign books for festival goers (Gras 1998, 93–94). The selection of writers clearly reflected the ideas that had marked Scorza’s itinerary across Mexico. As Gras documents, at that moment, his political positions had crystallised around “anti-imperialism and the revindication of Pan-American, left-wing nationalism, as well as around the denouncing of indigenous exploitation” (1998, 44). Works like *Huasipungo* by Icaza, *Los de abajo* by Azuela, *Doña Bárbara* by Gallegos, and *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* by Alegría (this last one being published in two volumes), speak to Scorza’s intellectual horizons, as well as to the alliances he sought to cultivate as the festival model began to internationalize.

Thanks to these backings, the new festival also saw resounding success. With a total of 500,000 copies sold at the humble price of 4 Peruvian soles, festivals had proven their ability to shake up Lima’s cultural scene in terms of the book’s massification but had also proven sound business models. Since the events were transitory, the organisers saved themselves the expense of leasing out storefronts while also eschewing ever-feared intermediaries. Instead, they only hired a bare minimum of temporary vendors. Furthermore, the resources spent on producing the collections matched the economic scheme that marked the first few events. They chose small formatting (17 cm), printed in offset, and used cheap newsprint. Meanwhile, participating writers also made good money, earning between 20,000 and 40,000 soles in royalties. In Scorza’s opinion, this was just the start of Peruvian writers’ full emancipation, as the country’s writers had never been able to live off their craft before (Strote 1970, 66).7

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7 According to an article published in Lima’s *El Comercio*, at the festival, López Albújar made more money than he’d received in his last 50 years as a writer (Strote 1970, 66).
This new festival’s cultural and commercial triumph, however, left deep wounds in Scorza’s relationship with his associates. According to Juan Mejía Baca’s documents in the National Library of Peru, Scorza didn’t pay royalties to many of the authors involved, with controversy especially marrying his relationship with the Mexican author Mariano Anzuela’s heirs, as they had not authorised the reprinting of Los de abajo in the festival collection (Anzuela 1959). These accusations tarnished Scorza’s reputation, as he wasn’t a literary heavyweight in Peru at that point. Nonetheless, the young cultural entrepreneur pressed on. Alongside Mujica Gallo, the only member of the Board who stood by his side, Scorza decided to take the festivals to other countries, especially to those where cultural life seemed to be rekindling. The creation of the Continental Organisation of Book Fairs (OCFL) in Lima was a first step in this direction. With an interest in building professional networks with writers from other countries who wanted to put on festivals and print their own respective collections, the transnational dynamics that unfolded through this organisation heavily marked Peru’s transfer of both its festival model and its goal of quickly making books massively available.

However, before delving into the moment when book festivals were exported, we should introduce one more literary and popular-publishing entrepreneur in Peru: Enrique Congrains Martin (Lima, 1932–Cochabamba, 2009). Born to a middle-class family of French origin, Congrains was a youthful character in Lima’s cultural milieu, but he was also quite proactive in terms of writing and publishing. Years before the Book Board was founded, Congrains had already launched a well-known project: the Circle of Peruvian Novelists, a one-man organisation that emerged around the ephemeral magazine La novela peruana (1953), under which Congrains printed his first notable book: Lima, hora cero (1954). Backed by Sebastián Salazar Bondy, who signed the magazine’s first issue and contributed with a project manifesto, the Circle of Peruvian Novelists sought to break away from costumbrist literary traditions in favour of a new perspective that reflected mid-century urban and economic changes (industrialisation, migration from the countryside to the cities, the middle class, shanty towns, and poverty) – a

8 Though there was reciprocity between Peru and Mexico regarding copyright at the Havana (1929) and Washington D.C. (1946) conventions, copyright violations were relatively commonplace in Latin America.

9 Congrains and Scorza shared certain similarities in their schooling. Congrains had attended Catholic Marist schools in Lima, while Scorza had gone to a Salesian institute in Huancayo. As his family lived in Lima, Scorza then attended the Leoncio Prado Military School, which Mario Vargas Llosa would later attend. Then he studied at the National University of San Marcos (Gras 1998, 35). There is no record of Congrains attending university, but he did begin his work as a journalist at a very young age. In 1948, when he was just sixteen years old, he started working for La Crónica newspaper’s cultural section (Rubio Bautista 2011).
new social reality that literature had tended to overlook, as compared to journalism (Rubio Bautista 2011).

Soon after Lima, hora cero, Congrains launched a modest collection of titles under the Circle’s seal that underscored the need for a shift in literature, including works like Los gallinazos sin plumas by the celebrated Julio Ramón Ribeyro, Chicha, mar y bonito by José Diez Canseco, and Náufragos y sobrevivientes by Salazar Bondy. The series also included Congrains’s Kikuyo, as well as a selection of Peruvian short stories, published in two volumes. The Circle subsequently printed Entre algarrobos by Francisco Vegas Seminario and Mala entraña. Cuentos del Ande by Tulio Carrasco. According to Luchting, Congrains would sell the entire collection, going door-to-door and factory to factory, placing the titles among workers, cooks, butlers, and housekeepers (1971, 76).

After this first editorial effort, Congrains had a pioneering experience abroad. Having moved to Santiago de Chile in 1957, he founded a new one-man organisation, the Cultural Embassy of Peru, where he’d publish an anthology of short stories. He then moved to Buenos Aires, where he published three more books under this new organisation’s seal, including his only novel No una, sino muchas muertes. At this point, he had had no contact with book festivals, but his trajectory was already suggestive of the same concerns around literature and the book that had led to the Book Board’s creation.

The concerns that pushed Scorza to conceive and materialise the internationalisation of festivals were the same as Congrains’s. Scorza’s new organisation required a change of airs, given the conflict around the controversial Third Festival in Lima. While Scorza and Mujica Gallo’s organisation had successfully put on two more festivals in Lima in 1958 – including a recently internationalised one, with works by Alejo Carpentier, José Eustasio Rivera, and Pablo Neruda, while the other was a reedition of the Board’s first festival – the organisation also had to face overt competition from a former ally, Juan Mejía Baca, who proposed a new kind of festival, capable of striking the Scorza and Gallo’s project. Thus, Mejía Baca launched a similar direct-sale initiative in public spaces, with support from Salazar Bondy and Luis Jaime Cisneros. This new project published two literary collections, five titles each, with the goal of competing with Scorza’s organisation.

Under the name Ediciones Populares, the series included work by José María Arguedas, Jorge Basadre, Abraham Valdelomar, Héctor Velarde, and Aurelio Miró Quesada, among other writers chosen by Salazar Bondy, who stood at the helm of

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10 The novel would see a new edition by Editorial Alfa in Montevideo in 1967. This edition was included in the Populibros Peruanos collection (Popular Peruvian Books), led by Scorza between 1963 and 1966, and was also published by Editorial Planeta, with a prologue by Vargas Llosa, in 1975; its very itinerary is telling of its success.
the selection process. Launched at the same time as those in the Continental Organisation, this series led to a battle of publishers and publishing projects, which, as an article in the press put it, characterised a time of “cheap books,” placing Peru “at the forefront of South American countries when it comes popular editions” (“Hoy. Gran Batalla Editorial” 1958). The same article, which doesn’t allude to any previous conflict, highlights the competing parties’ strategies to win over writers and readers. Mejía Baca opened a contest for stories and novels with a prize of 20,000 soles plus 10 percent royalties, while Scorza was organising a contest that would award 50,000 soles. Competition aside, the article concluded by highlighting both initiatives’ contributions to the country, as both had broken taboos in terms of publications and sparked an unprecedented thirst for the reading and purchasing of books.

While we have no definitive proof, it’s likely that this climate of tension and competition accelerated the internationalisation of Scorza’s organisation, which presented itself as the continuation of the Book Board and as the official heir to the book-festival model. As of 1958, Scorza sought to sow festivals wherever he could. His internationalisation strategy mostly involved the writer network that he’d started to build with his first festival experiences, whose impact in the media had crossed borders – not only projecting how fruitful and innovative these book events were, but also putting Scorza in the limelight as an editor who was committed to the book and its massification. The quick transfer of this model to other countries stemmed from the festivals’ remarkable cultural and commercial transcendence, but also from the intellectual connections of its by-then renowned organiser.

Now, it is worth noting that, before landing in other countries, festivals had shown their ability to adapt to various contexts, since the model had already begun to decentralise within Peru itself. We might trace the following developments to 1958 and 1959: the Book Festival in Arequipa promoted by Mejía Baca; a Festival of the Cuzco Book as well as a South-Peruvian Festival, both of which had roots in Cuzco; and additional “Libro Piurano” and “Libro Puneño” festivals, all of which left various regional, literary collections in their wake, and whose unfolding attested to the existence of specific literary demands from readers and writers outside the capital.11

With such precedents, the international transfer of festivals would basically depend on Scorza’s abilities to mobilise a transnational network of agents with

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11 According to data collected by Hirschhorn (2005), Pedagogical, Revolutionary Literature, Romantic Literature, and Peruvian Women Writers festivals were also held, as well as one in honour of César Vallejo and another dedicated to José Carlos Mariátegui.
common interests regarding the massification of the book as a path toward cultural modernisation, but also on his ability to coordinate and carry out festivals in various countries, creating popular, national literary collections that would constitute the bases of the events themselves. As suggested before, this network was mainly composed of writers with whom Scorza had already shared close or distant experiences throughout the first few festivals, but the network was enriched, in every country, by the editors, booksellers, and writers who, like Scorza, understood the need to make cheaper, national books, thus expanding their territory of consumption and stimulating literary production.

Scorza chose Venezuela as his first test-case for expansion, given his previous contacts there. After establishing contact with Alejo Carpentier, who lived in Caracas at the time and who had published *El reino de este mundo* in the Fourth Book Festival, Scorza started planning the First Venezuelan Book Festival. According to Gras (1998, 99–100), Carpentier put Scorza in touch with the poet Juan Liscano, who, as a national literary reference, had taken up the tasks of selecting the titles that would comprise the collection and of coordinating the event.

The fact that the first festival outside of Peru succeeded was proof of the effectiveness of Scorza’s collaborative work strategy, which was replicated in subsequent events. On the one hand, he delegated editorial decisions to prestigious writers, and, on the other, he assumed certain operational tasks, compiling manuscripts, managing printing and distribution from Lima, and boosting the publicity campaign. Deploying this strategy, the organisation put on four festivals in Caracas between 1958 and 1959, selling about 1 million copies. This attested to the organisation’s remarkable ability to promote the popular book.

This tangible success allowed Scorza to organise parallel festivals in Ecuador, Colombia, Cuba, and several Central American countries.

It is worth highlighting that these countries were selected due to their similarities with Peru. These countries had just left their authoritarian regimes behind and were also places where the publishing industry had yet to mature. Organising festivals in Argentina or Chile, whose publishing houses had sat much of the South American market as of the 1930s, made less sense than opening

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12 With no exceptions, all of the Book Festival collections were printed in Peru, as newsprint was apparently cheaper there than in neighbouring countries.

13 The third of these Venezuelan festivals was entirely dedicated to celebrating Rómulo Gallegos’s 75th birthday. According to an article that Scorza published in Bogotá, this event earned the Venezuelan writer 20,000 US dollars in royalties, an apparently unprecedented figure. Many newspapers printed this figure, ultimately creating further publicity for the Continental Organisation (Scorza 1959, 1).
festivals in places where books remained out of reach for certain social classes, or in places that lacked stimulus policies.¹⁴

Focusing on spaces with clear needs in terms of book massification, Scorza’s strategy could permutate with ease. By delegating the festival organising to one or several reputable, well-known writers from each country, each event benefited from specialised guidance. In Ecuador, Jorge Icaza, who had been invited to Peru’s third festival, would coordinate Quito’s festival. In Cuba, Scorza relied on Alejo Carpentier, with Eduardo Caballero Calderón and Alberto Zalamea organising the festival in Colombia, and Miguel Ángel Asturias taking up the task in Central America. Most organisers were highly committed writers and intellectuals who greatly valued network-building.¹⁵ The Central American experience was the most translational, as, rather than creating specific events for each country in the continent, the OCFL decided to organise a single Central American Book Festival that would circulate through several capital cities and offer a multinational collection for sale. This collection included titles by Rafael Arévalo Martínez (Guatemala), Juan Ramón Molina (Honduras), Salarrué (El Salvador), Carlos Luis Fallas (Costa Rica), and Ramón H. Jurado (Panama), as well as select short stories and poems by Rubén Darío. Furthermore, it included anthologies like Antología de la poesía centroamericana and Panorama del cuento centroamericano.¹⁶

The Colombian experience also travelled well, though within the country itself, as the First Book Festival was simultaneously organised in Bogotá and Medellín, while the Second Book Festival opened up to Cali and other inner cities. Both events were developed in 1959, and the two were the closest ones to the Peruvian experience, as they took advantage of city plazas and main streets, installing kiosks to seduce passers-by of all kinds. This same case can help examine how Scorza’s connections tended to not only privilege established authors, but also actors in the publishing and media realms.

¹⁴ Though we have no sources on whether organisers considered exporting the festivals to Chile or Argentina, it’s clear that such event campaigns would have made less of an impact in these countries. As Giuliani (2018) has shown, publishing houses in Argentina had greatly benefited from the economic policies of Peronism. Despite the waning of their literary golden ages, these two countries would have been less competitive for festival projects.

¹⁵ In countries where festivals were put on simultaneously, the coordinating team saw growth. In Colombia, the poet Carlos Castro Saavedra and the bookseller Alberto Aguirre supported the event’s organisation in Medellín, while the poet Óscar Hernández collaborated in the Cali festival. In Havana, Carpentier benefited from Reinaldo Gómez Banilla’s support, while the festival in Santiago de Cuba was led by José A. Portuondo.

¹⁶ There were anthologies in all of the OCFL’s collections, ever since the first few festival series were launched in Lima. Such publications could simultaneously disseminate a myriad of texts and writers, while also drawing an artificial map of culture (Weinberg 76).
For instance, Eduardo Caballero Calderón had recently founded Ediciones Guadarrama in Madrid, a publishing company through which Caballero aimed to internationalise his literary work (Murillo Sandoval 2021). Meanwhile, Alberto Zalamea was at the helm of the magazine _Semana_, the most influential political publication of the moment, and he was also the son of the writer and former secretary of the World Peace Council, Jorge Zalamea, who participated in the first Colombian series with _El gran Burundún Burunda ha muerto_. Other writers with ties to the festivals, like Hernando Téllez, Eduardo Zalamea Borda (Jorge Zalamea’s cousin), and Gabriel García Márquez, who had a second edition of his first novel, _La Hojarasca_, published in the First Colombian Festival, were also quite present and influential in the country’s main media outlets, like _El Espectador_, _El Tiempo_, and _La Calle_, and in the magazines _Cromos_ and _Estampa_.

The group’s prestige and intellectual visibility would lead each of the Colombian festivals to receive ample coverage in the printed media, which published interviews with Scorza, footage of the events, and numerous commentaries by journalists and columnists. These commentaries highlighted the initiatives’ innovation as well as sales records, adding new perspectives to the debate on the place of the book in the country. Slogans that had already been popularised in Peru, such as “Battle of the book” and a few others taken from interviews with Scorza, like, “Let’s take the tailcoat off the book, and dress it in a T-shirt,” were printed in numerous headlines as well as alongside visual and televised registers. In one article published by Scorza himself, he explained that the need to “go out to America” not only involved convincing publishers and mayors, but asking journalists to make space in newspapers, “because if they gave us half of the columns they give to a football championship, we’d score goals, too!” (Scorza 1959, 1).

As we can see, the exportation and execution of festivals was favoured by the ample support of a transnational network of solidarity, but also by literary recognition and media action on behalf of festival collaborators. These factors proved decisive for the events’ publicity, generating expectations and an everyday following of festival developments. It is worth noting that both the coordinators of each festival, as well as many of the writers involved in the collections, shared the same perspectives as Scorza and Salazar Bondy regarding the popularisation of the book. As such, they saw themselves as ideal mediators for the culturalisation of the masses, deciding which works and authors should be brought together and disseminated in cheap collections.

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17 Local televised media covered the First Colombian Book Festival, with the presence of Bogotá’s mayor, the minister of labour, and many of the published authors. Footage of the event has been recovered by Señal Memoria and can be viewed here, in two parts: https://youtu.be/tQ3qDYw4YE and https://youtu.be/QT9tQJhcPWM.
The shape that the national series published for each festival ended up taking, ultimately comprising the Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Latinoamericana (Basic Library of Latin American Culture), is telling of the latter, as they all not only boasted the same format and editorial design but also tended to combine canonised titles with more recent work written by festival directors or emergent but promising writers (Fig. 2). Once again, the Colombian case is a perfect example: its festival collection included celebrated titles, like *La vorágine* by José Eustasio Rivera, but also opened up to specific genres, like novels of “La Violencia,” with works by Jorge Zalamea and Caballero Calderón. The Colombian editors’ decisions can also be read in a political tenor, as their choices seemed to line up with the National Front, the political regime that replaced Rojas Pinilla’s dictatorship. The National Front based itself on the imposition of a system that would alternate political power between the Liberal and Conservative parties. The Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Colombiana (Basic Library of Colombian Culture) aimed to emulate this political-intellectual balance, bringing in writers who supported these two traditional parties, thus supporting the idea that the two parties could coexist in peace, just as the new regime would have it.

The Cuban experience, as mediated by Carpentier, was similar in a way, with certain works in the collections gaining new meanings in the revolutionary climate, as was the case with José Martí’s writing. However, in Cuba, neither Carpentier nor Scorza managed to monopolise festivals for the dissemination of popular books, as their plans clashed with those of Congrains, who had chosen Cuba as a laboratory for his new organisation: the Latin American Crusade for Cultural Dissemination. Like Scorza, Congrains was fascinated by the Revolution, leading him to focus on this country. As declared in a pamphlet published in 1960, Congrains saw the Cuban Revolution as the liberation of a people. As such, to him, any aggression on behalf of the United States would require that

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18 Besides the aforementioned authors, the continuation of festivals allowed the Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Latinoamericana to bring together Venezuelan writers like Teresa de la Parra, Arturo Uslar Pietri, Mariano Picón Salas, Arístides Rojas, and Miguel Otero Silva; Ecuadorian writers including Juan Montalvo, Leopoldo Benítez, and Enrique Terán; as well as Cuban writers like José Martí, Salvador Bueno, Cintio Vitier, Nicolás Guillén, and Cirilo Villaverde.

19 During the Second Colombian Book Festival, Miguel Scorza (Manuel Scorza’s brother) who was the OCFL’s subdirector at the time, published an article in *El Espectador* magazine on 29 November 1959 titled “Frente Nacional en las Bibliotecas” (“National Front of Libraries”). It is worth noting that politics were more or less common in Colombia’s literary collections, given the historical overlaps between politics and literature. Politics also marked collections like the Biblioteca Popular de Cultura Colombiana (Popular Library of Colombian Culture) (1942–1952), which grouped together many generations of literary politicians.
Organización Continental de los Festivales del Libro

MANUEL MUJICA GALLO
Presidente

MANUEL SCORZA
Director General

ALEJO CARPENTIER
Sub-Director General

DIRECTORES

PERU: Miguel Scorza
ECUADOR: Jorge Icaza
MEXICO: Carlos Pellicer

COLOMBIA: Alberto Zalamea
VENEZUELA: Juan Liscano
CUBA: Alejo Carpentier

BIBLIOTECA BASICA DE CULTURA LATINOAMERICANA

La Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Latinoamericana que, a través de multitudinarios Festivales del Libro, se está formando en centenares de miles de hogares latinoamericanos, responde a una imperiosa necesidad: difundir los libros fundamentales de la cultura latinoamericana.

Tal objetivo sólo podía lograrse sacando el libro de los anaqueles y las bibliotecas y, ofreciéndolo en plena calle, en la plaza pública, reduciendo al mismo tiempo su precio hasta ponerlo, verdaderamente, al alcance de todos.

Esto es lo que han logrado los Festivales del Libro, que vienen publicando, semestralmente, las series que forman la Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Latinoamericana. En ella figuran las obras más importantes de la literatura, del ensayo y de la historia de América, incorporadas a través de la más rigurosa selección, especialmente cuidada en el caso de aquellos libros que, debido a prejuicios, a desconocimiento o falta de circulación, no habían alcanzado la difusión que merecen.

La Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Latinoamericana es el medio más adecuado para alcanzar un conocimiento integral de la rica y variada cultura latinoamericana, tan falsada por frívolos sumarios.

Fig. 2: Presentation page of the “Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Latinoamericana”. This paratext was inserted in the final pages of each book published within the framework of the book festivals organized by Manuel Scorza (Source: Biblioteca José Manuel Rivas Sacconi/Instituto Caro y Cuervo).
intellectuals abandon “exquisite literature and turn each word, each verb, each thought, into a trench [in the battleground]” (“Enrique Congrains Martín y su Carta de advertencia”, 1960, 9).

Founded one year after this declaration, the new organisation led by Congrains appeared to situate itself at the fringes of revolution, especially in terms of culture. According to the paratexts in the inside and back covers of the collection Comprensión de Cuba (Understanding Cuba), the main publishing project under the Latin American Crusade, this collection was proposed as an idea and a movement. The collection was understood as an idea because it deemed that economic, political, and social transformation wasn’t enough, as the people’s relationship to culture would also be crucial. Meanwhile, it was also proposed as a movement, as it aimed to develop the conditions so that the people could read the best literature on the reality of the Americas, without economic sacrifice. To paraphrase Claudia Gilman (2003, 71), this organisation was politicised and saw practical interventions in society not as a possibility, but as an obligation.20

In association with editor José Bonilla Amado, who had worked with Mejía Baca on other occasions, Congrains travelled to Havana in mid-1959 to launch Comprensión de Cuba with great fanfare. The collection was printed in Mexico, where the Crusade had been published already. With six books by Cuban authors, among which La sangre hambrienta by Labrador Ruíz and El sol a plomo by Humberto Arenal stood out, with the latter regarded as Cuba’s first novel of the Revolution, Comprensión de Cuba breached the market around the same time as Scorza’s OCFL collections (Fig. 3). According to documents in Juan Mejía Baca’s archive, Congrains faced attacks from Scorza, his also-Peruvian rival, who dismissed his new enterprise by saying that the festival model belonged to him.

In solidarity with Congrains and Bonilla Amado, a broad group of Peruvian writers and publishers signed a letter of support in July of 1959, which argued that book festivals couldn’t possibly belong to a specific institution or person (AAVV, “Los firmantes” 1959).21 Regarding the clash between these organisations and their leaders, the Cuban writer Enrique Labrador Ruiz (1959), who had received numerous invitations to publish with the OCFL as well as with the

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20 In her research on the Latin American revolutionary writer, Gilman highlights 1960 as the year when the “romance between Latin American writers and the continent’s reading public” began (2003, 88). However, as we have shown, this relationship actually started a few years prior, thanks to the festivals.

21 The letter was signed by former members of the Book Board and writers who participated in the first few collections, including José Durand, Héctor Velarde, José Díez Canseco, López Albújar, and Mejía Baca himself.
Latin American Crusade, wrote to Congrains saying that one day he’d have to pen an article about the “feuds between Peruvian festivalists.”

4 A Phenomenon with Institutional Force

Beyond these conflicts, the Cuban experience demonstrates that Scorza’s and Congrains’s respective organisations were able to quickly read the revolutionary context and capitalise upon the rekindling of culture at the continental scale. Indeed, both aimed to mediate the Cuban Revolution’s cultural facet, brandishing themselves as politically committed projects and efficient publishers who aimed to popularise the book and help showcase national literatures. Likewise, they both demonstrated their abilities to enmesh their projects with other political, cultural, and book-related concerns that were palpable in the region. These shared qualities can lead us to our first conclusion regarding the impact of festival organisations, their events, and their collections in the Latin American book market.

With millions of copies sold, festivals and their organisers demonstrated that ordinary readers could emerge as reliable consumers, as long as books were cheap enough to remain within reach. The first to glean this reality were probably the editors themselves. After taking in the sheer sales as well as their ventures’ impact in the media, they began to assume greater risks, diligently producing cheap collections of national authors. The long series Populibros Peruanos (or Popular
Peruvian Books), launched by Scorza himself in 1963, as well as the rival publishing projects led by Juan Mejía Baca, stand as emblematic cases in Peru, but not as the only ones (Aguirre 2016). In Colombia, publishing houses like Bedout, in Medellín, which were overshadowed by the festivals of 1959, started publishing popular collections using the same model that had shown its success in Peru. The series Bolsilibros Bedout (or the Bedout Pocket Series) is perhaps the most salient example.

These cases would allow us to highlight the ways the impact of these organisations surpassed their goals. By seeking connections on a more or less horizontal plane of publishing peripheries, so to speak, while allowing for both the creation of networks and the transnational mobility of agents interested in book commercialisation – traits that, according to Lyons and Mollier, are markers of transnational publishing phenomena (2012, 14) – festival organisations also managed to shake up the ecosystems around reading and the book across diverse contexts, almost in the same way as other specialised non-governmental organisations.

Shifting from the history of the book to the sociology of literature would lead us to our next tentative conclusion, in terms of Peter McDonald (2015) invitation to consider “acts of institution” in a verbal sense. The history of festival organisations – as short-lived in temporal terms as they were impactful in the field of printed culture – yielded massive events and literary collections that could be read as literary and publishing phenomena with institutional force. The Cuban case would allow us to observe the role of organisations in the construction of the first clusters of literature that emerged with the Revolution, for instance. Both the Festivals of the Cuban Book that Scorza led, with Carpentier’s coordination, as well as the launching of the Comprensión de Cuba collection, published by Congrains and Bonilla Amado can also be read as early signs of cultural articulation between Havana and certain Latin American intellectual circles, at a time when Casa de las Américas, the future bastion of Cuban soft power, was still developing. In the Peruvian case, festivals also helped position a new literary guard, comprised of those Book Board or OCFL members who had selected the works to be included in each series. We might make similar observations regarding the Colombian case, in which festivals and veteran promoters not only pushed the visibility of emergent writers like García Márquez, but also elevated the status and literary recognition of local genres, like novels of “La Violencia,” while issuing festival collections that were representative of the newly balanced political regime that had claimed power in Colombia at that time.22

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22 García Márquez would always recall this experience with affection, as it was the first time that he publicly signed his books and received royalties. As he recalled, “Eduardo Caballero
As Helgesson (2015, 28) would remind us, literature isn’t simply given, but is performatively and materially *instituted* by various agents in the literary and publishing field. The organisations analysed here massively and systematically produced collections that, despite their material conditions, were milestones in the effort to construct specific national, regional, or continental canons. We need only recall that the literary series published by the OCFL in Lima would lead to the Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Latinoamericana, an almost encyclopaedic product that not only boosted the internationalisation of a body of books and national writers, but also of the mediators who left their mark therein, in a typical transfer of symbolic capital, as per Bourdieu (2002). Thus, just as with anthologies, which were perhaps the most notable example of how selections can help forge world literature, popular collections also emerge as key building blocks that endow the texts that have been brought together with new meanings – including meanings that may not have been in the texts when they first appeared (Mollier 2014). As is the case with the anthologies and manifestos that McDonald studies, the people behind popular collections also exert their authority to confer their status to such compilations, presenting them before readers in specific ways “to give meaning to the term ‘literature,’ or a phrase like ‘world literature,’ at a certain historical juncture” (2015, 50).

All in all, festival organisations can be understood as lead actors in an institutionalisation process that reverberated across a myriad of national cultural spaces, bringing them together to create a transitory transnational space that was shaped by a climate of cultural reactivation, at a time when a number of dictatorships came to an end just as the book was being revalued as a modernising instrument. Developed in countries where the publishing industry had yet to fully establish itself, these organisations built and agitated literary and publishing networks. In the Cuban case, for instance, such organisations emerged as early manifestations of soft power and tended to stimulate the Revolution’s cultural dimension. Though none of the studied organisations survived past 1960, meaning that their institutional force was somewhat ephemeral, we should nonetheless highlight their condition as instances for the accumulation of symbolic, Calderón, who directed the Basic Library of Colombian Culture, included a pocket edition of *La hojarasca* in a collection of works that would be sold in street stands in Bogotá and other cities. He paid for the royalties we’d agreed upon, which were scarce but timely and which always carried the sentimental value of being the first I’d ever made off a book” (García Márquez 2002, 499). The paratexts around Biblioteca Básica de Cultura Colombiana show that, in fact, García Márquez considered including *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* for the second planned festival, in 1959. Indeed, many works were initially proposed for these literary spaces, only to be replaced by others – and we don’t always know of the reasoning behind such changes.
social capital for its young promoters, Scorza and Congrains, who, after leading the organisations, acquired even higher status within the Latin American literary and editorial map – a map that would soon explode with the Latin American Boom.

Reference List


