trans atlantic cultures
Cultural Histories of the Atlantic World 18th–21st Centuries

ISSN 2739-6614
transatlantic-cultures.org



Literary Agents

Cécile Cottenet

Over the course of the 20th century, literary agents have maintained an important role in the transatlantic circulation of texts. As both economic and cultural negotiators, these men and women are at the heart of the transnational cultural history of printed material.

TRANSLATION	Larry Kuiper
PUBLISHED	March 13, 2022
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE	French
AVAILABLE IN	English, French
TOPICS	Publishing · Literature
SPACES AND PLACES	Europe · South America · North America
PERIODS	Atlantic Revolutions and Colonialism · The Steam Atlantic · The Atlantic Space Within Globalization · The Consolidation of Mass Cultures
KEYWORDS	publishing, book, cultural transfer, network
PERMANENT LINK	https://transatlantic-cultures.org/en/records/agents-litteraires/

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Over the course of the 20th century, literary agents have maintained an important role in the transatlantic circulation of texts. Through their mission and their actions as both economic and cultural negotiators, these men and women are at the heart of the transnational cultural history of printed material. The evolution of the profession is inarguably tied to that of publication markets on all sides of the Atlantic, especially the North Atlantic. While "Atlantic" book brokers were present as early as the 18th century, the professional agent did not clearly appear until the 1870s, in England, and then in the United States at the end of the 19th century. The development of modern publishing in Spain, at a later period, explains why literary agents did not appear there until the last quarter of the 20th century.

In France, however, agents remain rare, perhaps because of the publishing structure, which tends to delegate the exploitation of a work's rights to the publisher. It is, however, useful to distinguish between several uses of the word "agent." While authors' agents are present in the Anglo-American and Iberian zones, in France literary agents are principally *co-agents* or *sub-agents*, serving as intermediaries to foreign agencies or publishers. Both the appearance and evolution of the literary agent are tied to different notions of the protection of intellectual property. The debate on the necessity of such protection has a similar tone, during the Enlightenment in the English-speaking Atlantic zone and in France, and then during the period of South and Central-American independence in the first decades of the 19th century, but the repercussions of this debate are quite different from country to country. The literary agent emerged precisely because the right to vend one's work exists in the doctrine of copyright as well as in the *droit d'auteur* regime. In a transatlantic context, the literary agent's first mission is the management and negotiation of secondary rights, and more precisely foreign and translation rights, rather than primary rights of publication in current editions.

Book agents and American dependencies in the Anglophone Atlantic sphere

In the Atlantic paper trade, attested in exchanges starting at the end of the 18th century, Europe was the long-time provider of books for North America. In the 18th century, the transatlantic book market operated under several constraints that continued in various ways throughout the 19th and 20th centuries: the difficulty of getting up-to-date information on European releases; the duration and hazards of shipping by sail, later, steamship; the obstacles to paying for the merchandise. While some networks contributed to the circulation of printed material by sending parcels to individuals—this is how the writings of the Quaker Anthony Bénézet were widely shared and even reproduced in large numbers by transatlantic abolitionist networks—most of these circulations were ensured by merchants working outside the book sector. This was especially true in Canada, where Scottish networks show a predominance of merchants who were not printers or booksellers. The customs registers confirm the transportation of books from one shore to the other, but they very often do not reveal the exact number, sometimes only featuring the weight of the merchandise, other times only mentioning "stationery items," without distinguishing between books and other merchandise. Books were sent in large or small cargoes, along with other items like paper, ink, or even tobacco.

In the United States, until the passage of the customs tariff act of 1816, it was more expensive to manufacture books on site than to import books printed in London, either already bound or in sheets. In the latter case the printer-publisher needed only to add a title page with their name to turn it into a U.S. edition. The history of the distribution and subsequent reprinting of the works of Walter Scott by Mathew Care—an Irish printer who emigrated to Philadelphia and became one of the pioneering publishers in the

U.S—shows how European commercial agents were employed. Carey long relied on John Miller, who procured and arranged shipment for copies he solicited from Scott's British publishers. To ensure their arrival, he placed copies on multiple ships. The first libraries (the Library Company in Philadelphia, or the Charleston Library Society in the South) also had access to commercial agents, or bookseller agents, both to keep themselves informed about recent releases in English, and to maintain their stock. The services of Peter Collinson, John Ward, and even Benjamin Franklin during his stay in London in the 1760s and 70s, were valuable. If they weren't literary agents *per se*, these men were certainly facilitators of the transatlantic circulation of books. Their prerogatives, however, did not extend to the defense of the royalties of British authors whose distribution and spread in the North America they fostered.



Charleston Library Society building at 164 King Street in 1914

Source: Wikipedia

In the 1820s, the rise of customs tariffs for foreign books encouraged U.S. printers and publishers to reprint and manufacture books in America, ushering in an era of reprinting British authors that has often been characterized as a recurring violation of copyright. In 1837, several British authors submitted a petition to the American Congress for the protection of their rights. The legend of Walter Scott having been brought to ruin by the fraudulent practices of American publishers was trumpeted by Charles Dickens during an American tour in 1842. This reputation of a completely unbridled transatlantic circulation of texts lasted a very long time, despite the existence of the widespread practice across the Atlantic known as courtesy of the trade. According to this custom, the most well-known publishers regularly compensated the authors that they republished: Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and even Victor Hugo (who is said to have received £750 for *Quatre-vingt-treize*) were remunerated by Harper & Brothers; Dickens himself was remunerated for a reprint of *The Pickwick Papers* by a Philadelphia publishing house, Lea & Carey. None of this erases the reality that many

republications were done without authorization, on both sides of the Atlantic. But given the absence of any legislation on international copyright in the United States at the time—that is, until 1891—it would actually be incorrect to refer to these practices as piracy.

Several signs of an early "transatlantization" of bookselling and publishing emerged in the 1830s: the publication of Emile Zola and Victor Hugo in North America, and of James Fenimore Cooper and Harriet Beecher Stowe in France; the opening of branches of some American and British publishing houses across the Atlantic, and travels to London and Paris by publishers like Harper's and George Haven Putnam all attest to it. The bombshell statements by Dickens, along with the creation of the *Cercle de la Librairie* in France (bringing together publishers and booksellers), signal both the professionalization of authors and publishers, and a heightened preoccupation with international publishing rights. While the courtesy rule of American publishers continued to be in place until the end of the 19th century, authors demanded more acknowledgement not only of their writing, but also of their image. Dramatic agents and author tour organizers like James Redpath in the United States answered this call and were the early precursors of literary agents.

Emergence of the profession in the Anglophone transatlantic market

The decrease in the rate of illiteracy and the invention of new rotating presses in the 1840s led to the spread and diversification of outlets for printed production. In England, the periodical press became a symbol of the Victorian age. From one side of the Anglophone Atlantic to the other, magazines, even more than books, were the beneficiaries of technological advancements and the impulse for social (and moral) reforms aimed at improving the lives of citizens. In the United States, the last two decades of the 19th century saw a veritable explosion in the number of magazines, as the number of monthly publications increased by a factor of 3.5 from 1890 to 1905. The importance of magazines and the press as transatlantic transmitters of literature and facilitators of cultural transfers was not limited to the English-speaking world: Alexandre Dumas, for example, owes a great deal of his popularity to the Portuguese-language press. Magazines and newspapers were also an important source of revenue for authors. Finally, the spread of cheap series of popular literature in England, the United States, France, and Portugal starting in the 1840s also increased the circulation of texts.

The professionalization of authors is another factor in the emergence of agents. Several efforts were made to organize authors professionally over the course of the century. Organizations, like the Society of Authors (1884, chaired by Walter Besant) in England, the *Société des Gens de Lettres* (1838) in France, and, later, the Authors League of America (1912) in the United States, made it their mission to protect writers against the many swindles, real or imagined, carried out by publishers. In fact, even after the system of royalties began to develop in the middle of the 19th century, many authors continued to sell their rights to a publisher for a fixed rate, or flat fee, blocking their own possibility for future profit. Alexander Pollock Watt (1838-1914), a former commercial agent for a Scottish publisher, was one of the first to recognize the advantage of retaining copyright—here literally "the right to copy or reproduce"—in order to market it. In the middle of the 1870s, he established himself as "seller of *copyrights*" and opened the first literary agency in London.

The internationalization of publishing, along with the debates in the second half of the 19th century about the necessity of international legislation on copyright, created an environment favorable to the establishment of agents as a new kind of intermediary. Several issues were tied into these discussions: the

subject of intellectual property beyond national borders; the sometimes-contradictory interests of authors, publishers, printers and other professions involved in the manufacture of books and printed materials; and, on a larger scale, the role of printed material in a transatlantic market that was still poorly delineated in both political and economic terms.

At the end of the 19th century, the international protection of texts and authors was regulated by several laws, legal judgments and bilateral agreements. The relations between Great Britain and the United States remained tense, however, for most of the century. In 1838, Great Britain made extension of foreign authors' rights conditional on reciprocity for British authors: a foreign author was protected if their country protected British authors. But in 1854, the Jefferys vs Boosey case added a requirement of residence in Great Britain at the time of publication to guarantee copyright. Accusations of piracy were incessantly brought to public attention.

France, meanwhile, had pushed to create reciprocal protection for authors through no less than twenty bilateral treaties between 1852 and 1862. The country appears to be one of the most liberal in its protections of foreign works, as the March 1852 decree assured protection of works without requiring reciprocity, as long as they were protected in their own country. The Berne convention (1886) standardized practices and established exclusive copyright for translation and adaptation, although it did not eliminate the asymmetry of relations between Europe and the United States, which refused to ratify the treaty until 1988. In 1891, the United States adopted the Chace law for international protection of copyright, to the relief of many on the British side, notwithstanding restrictive clauses requiring that books be made in American territory.

A.P. Watt, soon joined in the 1890s by J.B. Pinker (1896) and Albert Curtis Brown (1899), and some other lesser-known agents, was not, as we have seen, the first intermediary in the book trade between the two sides of the Atlantic. There were precursors and competitors to this young profession, including small-scale boutique translators as well as "scouts" who worked on behalf of foreign publishers by identifying works immediately upon their release, but who were not mandated to carry out financial negotiations. Here again, the press played an important role. The English, enthused with the French idea of the serial (*feuilleton*), maximized its profitability, promoting the simultaneous release of the same piece of fiction in various newspapers and magazines. In the 1870s and 1880s, literary syndicates appeared, such as Tillotson's Newspaper Literature Syndicate in England and the S.S. McClure Newspaper Syndicate in the United States. Their agents specialized in periodic release of novels and novellas, circulating the printing plates. The magazine press was the first outlet targeted by British and then American agents.

At the beginning of their careers, Watt and Pinker negotiated essentially on behalf of publishers or other agents. Agents during this first period generally had a common background of experience in publishing, either as journalists, editors or salespeople. After some years working for a bookstore in Edinburgh, Watt cut his teeth at the publishing house Strahan and Company as a seller of advertising space in magazines. Albert Curtis Brown, American by birth, emigrated to England while working for an American newspaper, then established his own press office, before finally creating his own historic literary agency.

In the 1890s, Pinker and Curtis Brown also aspired to represent authors directly. Their first clients were close friends and other personal relations, as was the case with Pinker for H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett. Sometimes clients later became friends, as with Pinker and Joseph Conrad. Curtis Brown represented Winston Churchill, George Bernard Shaw, D.H. Lawrence, W.H. Auden and Alan A. Milne, author of the children's series *Winnie the Pooh*, an immense worldwide success. These first agents for British authors had two specific functions: first, they gained access to new markets for writers—the periodical press, and

the markets of the colonies and North America; second, they improved the social status of authors, participating in their professionalization and prestige, since the very fact of having an agent at this time was a sign of the importance of the author.

Paul Reynolds founded the first professional agency in the United States in 1895. At first, he tried to "place" authors published by Cassell's in London in magazines whose circulation was on the rise. In addition to representing George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, he also worked with Ernest Vizetelly, the translator for Zola. Unlike the British agents, who bet simultaneously on the magazine and traditional publishing markets, American agents invested only later in the book market, concentrating for a long time on the more lucrative periodical press. Watt, for his part, alternated between assisting publishers and directly helping authors, obtaining publication contracts with publishers and journals in England and the United States at the same time. *The English Illustrated Magazine* in England, and *Harper's Weekly* and *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in New York, published texts by Dickens, W.M. Thackeray, and George Eliot. Contracts at the end of the century already show the distinction between primary rights, derived right, and secondary rights.



Harper's Monthly Magazine, early 20th century copies

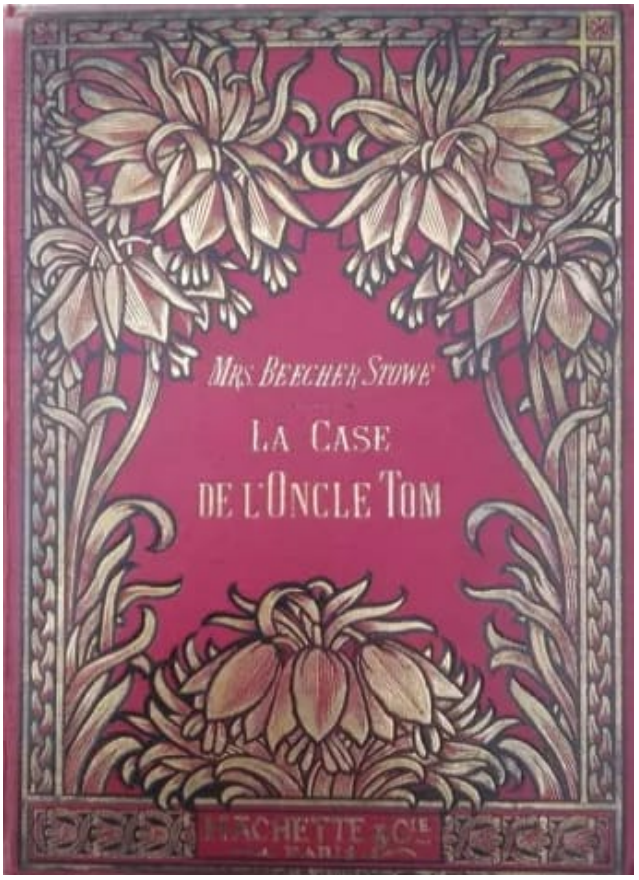
Source: Etsy

This distinction between rights presumably originated with A.P. Watt. He also established the use and conventions of the author's commission – 10% on all negotiated contracts. The regulation of the profession continued to be refined by professional organizations, from the Society of Authors' Representatives founded in 1928 in the United States to the Association of Authors' Agents in the United Kingdom today. The standard code of ethics affirmed it: An agent deserving of the title did not advertise their services, maintained a clean separation between the accounts of the agency and those of clients, and could not propose a commission lower than 10 %. In fact, in the 1940s, the profession was still far from being fully

recognized. Even though the usefulness of agents was quickly recognized by the magazine press, their emergence in the last decades of the 19th century ran into obstacles with the large publishing houses in both England and the United States. According to the testimonials of William Heinemann in Great Britain (1893) and Henry Holt in the United States (1905), the image of the agent as blood-sucking leech, interfering in the personal and even friendly relationship between author and publisher endured into the 1920s. Nonetheless, Anglo-American publishers progressively realized the benefit of the work performed by authors' agents. Do they not, after all, facilitate the publisher's work by "filtering" texts, often correcting them before submitting them for publication? Do they not also allow publishers to speak with their authors about literary, artistic and philosophical considerations, while consigning financial and other, tougher, negotiations to agents? In contrast, the usefulness of foreign agents, or "co-agents", was recognized fairly early by agents, publishers and authors wishing to make a profit from foreign rights.

The rise of *co-agents*: 1920-1960

Outside of the anglophone Atlantic, the importation of English-language literature into France provides a good example for understanding the role of *co-agents* (local contacts for foreign agencies) in transatlantic circulation. Much like today, at the turn of the 20th century, Great Britain and the United States held a dominant position in terms of book exportation. Between 1900 and 1925, among the most sought-after authors for French publishers, alongside Gorki, Chekov and Tolstoy, were the now-classic American authors Edgar Allen Poe, James Fenimore Cooper and Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), as well as British authors Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle and Walter Scott. These authors were soon joined by a constellation of modernist authors, some of whom achieved their initial fame in Paris.



La Case de l'Oncle Tom (French translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), translated into French and published by Hachette, 1907

Source: Wikipedia

In the first half of the 20th century, the internationalization of the literary field continued and the proliferation of literary agents in England, the United States and, on a smaller scale, in France, is a sign that the translation market was doing well, since most foreign texts published were released in translation. We know the role played in France by the great transnational, cosmopolitan and polyglot intermediaries: Valéry Larbaud for English-language and Latin-American literature (who, also, inversely, brought French literature into Argentina), Victor Llona, translator of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Willa Cather and Theodore Dreiser in the 1930s, and, of course, Maurice Edgar Coindreau, the great translator of the U.S. modernists and as of 1936, official scout for Gallimard. The history of agents is intricately connected with that of translation and translators.

By the 1940s, the Curtis Brown literary agency had become the largest in London. It was not only the intermediary for the most prestigious American and British publishers, but had also diversified by opening several European offices, including one in Paris and a subsidiary in New York in 1914. Though British and American agents were undeniably the most numerous between 1920 and 1960, there is mention of "continental" (European) agents in the specialized directories *Who's Who in Literature?* and *Writers and Artists' Year-Book* from the end of the 1930s. It is difficult to establish a cartography of French literary agents, but there were about a dozen Parisian offices in the 1930s, the most influential being the William A. Bradley (1923) and Michel Hoffman (1934) agencies. As a sign of heightened activity, the *Groupement professionel des agents littéraires français* was created in 1948, following the U.S. model of the Society of Authors' Representatives. Hoffman, Bradley and Denyse Clairouin were not authors' agents, but representatives of foreign agencies or publishers, though Bradley did act as direct representative for some

French and U.S. writers. These agents have a similar profile: polyglot, with a perfect mastery of English, they had translation (Denyse Clairouin and Jenny Bradley) or publishing experience and established themselves via international author and agent networks. William A. Bradley, American by birth, started out as a French scout and translator into English for the American Harcourt-Brace company before founding his own agency.

In the first half of the 20th century, the transatlantic circulation of texts was ensured by a large number of intermediaries, but the acquisition of French rights to foreign texts, which most often passed through agents, sometimes caused problems for French publishers, who needed to find the right contact. The direct and exclusive representation of a foreign publisher—as that held by the Bradley agency for New York publisher Harcourt-Brace in the 1920s and 30s and later for Harper & Brothers and Knopf—ensured direct negotiations, the *sub-agent* serving as intermediary only between publishers on both sides of the Atlantic. But the representation of U.S. agencies was often more complex, because several of them had long-established partnerships with a British literary agency or subsidiary through which they still operated. Thus, the negotiations between a U.S. author and a French publisher involved the U.S. author agent, the British representative of that agent, and finally the French *co-agent*. In these cases, the general commission of 15-20% for foreign rights was divided evenly between the three intermediaries. As for the French publishers, they did not engage in exclusive relations with a particular agent, preferring to negotiate with those who did not systematically try to raise the stakes. Gallimard showed an early preference for the Bradley agency, both for the acquisition of the French rights to foreign texts, and for the negotiation of English translation rights for a number of house authors, such as Camus, Sartre and even Proust, which they entrusted to Jenny Bradley after the Second World War.

One of the missions of *co-agents* is to assign a monetary value to texts and thereby to certain authors, based on multiple criteria: success in the originating country, literary prizes awarded, or strong demand from local publishers. The value is set by the advance and the royalty scale negotiated by the concerned parties. These *co-agents* can be commissioned by their foreign partners to place texts on the market and to ensure that the publisher will supply not only adequate financial guarantees, but also the most appropriate setting for the texts: for example, choosing between a foreign literature or children's literature collection, or finding the right catalog for the text and satisfying the author's expectations. They are thus required to develop a knowledge of both foreign and local publishing, which was not as easy in the middle of the 20th century as it is today. *Co-agents* have an important informative mission. When working for French publishers they must keep themselves informed of foreign publications and their success as indicated by sales and any literary prizes, while also establishing who actually holds the foreign rights—autor, agent or original publisher. As we have seen, they must also inform their Anglo-American partners about the French publication scene, sometimes in terms of its politics, but most importantly in terms of its tastes.

The upheavals of the Second World War in the transatlantic publishing world doubtless created conditions conducive to a rise in the number of literary agents. Although in the U.S. and England only a limited number of foreign texts were translated into English, the predominance of these anglophone spaces is confirmed by the flow of texts translated from English into other languages. In fact, whereas few U.S. publishers were really interested in foreign markets before 1939, the use of printed materials and books as sources of propaganda during the war encouraged publishers and agents to pursue these markets in the 1950s. As the cultural diplomacy of the U.S. took shape, books went from being weapons in the struggle for democracy to being cultural ambassadors. It became essential to be able to widely distribute texts in the language of the targeted readers, most importantly where Communism was gaining ground. Ignorance of foreign markets and languages in Western Europe and South America favored the use of local literary

agents. This was particularly true in France, where the Occupation had generally disorganized cultural industries. Immediately after the war, *co-agents* were particularly employed to track down contracts from before the war. U.S. and British agents practiced heightened vigilance in regard to French publishers who did not distinguish between primary publication rights and serial rights in press publishing, and were less rigorous than their overseas counterparts in their communication of royalty statements. *Co-agents* thus became cultural intermediaries, explaining to publishers and agents across the Atlantic or across the Channel the idiosyncrasies of their Parisian counterparts.

Finally, some *co-agents* were tasked by their foreign partners, and even by some authors, with recovering payments that their less-than-scrupulous publishers had not paid in full. More widely, the circulation of texts and the payment of royalties were tributaries to the flow of international commercial and monetary exchanges and were therefore subject to exchange rules and rates. In a period of monetary imbalance, international regulations on commerce affect circulation. In the 18th century the first commercial book agents were already facing many payment difficulties. One of the duties of a professional literary agent, whether a direct or indirect representative, is the fiduciary representation of authors. In this role, the agent or *co-agent* is allowed in some situations to collect authors' payments and withdraw their own commission. This was a particularly useful function after the World War II when some currencies, including the franc until 1958, were non-convertible, and when commercial and monetary exchange controls made it quite difficult to pay foreign authors and agents. *Co-agents* would therefore hold sums for authors to collect when they might travel to the country in question. Presumably, many authors, particularly less-famous ones, did not receive all their royalties.

The increased complexity of transatlantic relations after the war made international agents more useful, and the legal capacities of these agents grew. As for languages, territories were delineated within linguistic zones, including the Atlantic francophone zone. During the war, censorship imposed by the German authorities in France actually led francophone publishers in other countries to take over much of the translation market for anglophone works. The competition of Belgian and Swiss publishers, who benefited by their geographic proximity for the distribution of translations in France, as well as that of Canadian publishers, proved difficult for French publishers, who often relied on agents to determine if a translation had already appeared in another francophone country. Only after the war was the distinction between worldwide rights (in a language) and territorial rights gradually settled. Starting in 1943, in the face of the rise of U.S. publishing and the immensity of its market, the UK became aware of the necessity of maintaining control of English-language publishing in the territories of the Commonwealth. This was the goal of the *British Publishers' Traditional Market Agreement*, passed in 1947 by a large majority of British publishers, who divided the anglophone world into territories for English language rights: the U.S. would control their own territory as well as the Philippines; the UK would have exclusive access to the countries of the Commonwealth. Agents and *co-agents* progressively understood the advantage of dividing rights by territory, rather than consenting to worldwide agreements in one language.

Literary Agents in the Globalized Market Today

Starting in the 1930s and 40s, the literary agent had by and large become a well-accepted figure on the Anglo-American publishing scene. The image of the agent-as-leech faded as publishers realized that these intermediaries streamlined and even occasionally acted as buffers in difficult author-publisher relationships: contract negotiation, advances, and royalties—the potential source of conflicts—became the prerogative of the agent. In the 1960s, Spanish publishers understood the advantages of a Hispanic

publishing market that included European and North and South American readers – a linguistic space that today includes more than 480 million native speakers and about 100 million non-native speakers. About forty literary and artistic agencies representing writers from Portuguese and Spanish-speaking countries play a major role in exposing South American literature to the world. Key factors have normalized these intermediaries and led to their large-scale use by writers in the US, the UK and Spain. These factors include the internationalization and concentration of the publishing sector in the hands of predominant transnational conglomerates like Hachette, Bertelsmann, NewsCorp, Informa, Planeta (Spanish) and Holtzbrinck Publishing (German), the diversification and increased complexity of secondary rights, and the development of the paperback from the 1930s to the 1950s, followed by audio-visual, and today, digital rights. In Madrid and Barcelona, estimates say that 80 to 90 % of fiction writers employ an agent, which is all the more necessary as most publishing houses have no foreign rights departments. Just like British and U.S. authors, then, nearly all these writers maintain translation rights, which they ask their agent to market.

Associating domestic publishing to a larger linguistic territory, the beginning of which is seen right after the Second World War with the *British Publishers' Traditional Market Agreement*, leads to a double system of primary rights: publishers belonging to large transnational conglomerates have a vested interest today in obtaining worldwide publishing rights, or at least, for British publishers, rights for the Commonwealth. On this point, the interests of the author and agent often diverge from those of the publisher. An Argentine or Spanish author might prefer to split rights between Argentine and Spanish publishers, rather than give all their rights to Planeta, a conglomerate which operates and distributes on both continents, and thus can maximize its profits. Similarly, a British author could choose to be distributed in the UK and U.S. by a publisher from the Holtzbrinck group, whose subsidiaries in London, Madrid, Buenos Aires and São Paolo facilitate distribution in the Atlantic region and beyond, through its control of publishing, distribution and sales, or same author might choose to publish with independent publishers on different sides of the Atlantic. These situations are now the part of negotiations to which literary agents are most specifically attentive. In fact, because of the influence of agents, publications in a single language today tend toward the splitting of rights over several territories, despite the resistance of the large media companies.

The specific system for protecting intellectual property—whether copyright in the US and UK, or the dualist conception of the French *droit d'auteur*, with protection for monetary and moral rights—partly explains the very different evolutions of literary agents in these countries. Literary agents are rare in France, where they still suffer from an image deficit among French publishers. However, the choice of copyright or *droit d'auteur* alone is not enough to explain these differences, since in Spain, which adapted the French-style *droit d'auteur* doctrine, agents are well accepted as part of the publishing scene. Another characteristic of French publishing helps to explain this resistance to agents. French custom has authors cede all of their rights—primary, secondary, derived and ancillary—to the publisher, who is notably in charge of marketing foreign translation rights through increasingly efficient foreign rights departments within the publishing house or conglomerate. For French publishers, there is no need in this situation to resort to an agent, who is often viewed as an annoying interloper in the relationship with an author. It is the job of the publishers to facilitate the circulation of texts and to negotiate the different rights for authors in their catalogs. One should note the very clear disparities between the remuneration of authors whose foreign rights are handled by an agent in Spain (70 to 80 % of gross receipts), and by a publisher in France (50-60 % of the same figure).

The integration of the *Alliance des agents littéraires français* (created in 2016) into the *Syndicat français des agents artistiques et littéraires*, leaves hope of new perspectives and an eventual greater acknowledgement of these intermediaries. Success in the negotiation of foreign rights and the increased participation of agents at large book fairs in Frankfurt (300 agents in 2015) and London, show that they play an essential role in the international circulation of texts. As facilitators and intermediaries *par excellence*, literary agents have continuously smoothed this transatlantic traffic. Their story is also fundamentally the story of the circulation and transfer of a professional culture from England to the U.S., and then to Europe and South America.

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