



them. Yet as the translator-publisher relationship has never been without conflicts, closer cooperation and recognizing each other's value should be the key in creating more qualified, "right" translators and, thus, improving the American literary market as a whole.

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This article is an abridged version of "Translators and Publishers" presented by the author at the 13th International Workshop for Translation and Publication of Korean Literature.

The Specter of the Digital Agent

While the early literary agent was just as likely to represent publishers as authors, it has come to be the agent's primary role to advance the interests of the author by working to expand the author's livelihood and readership by making the author's work available in as many languages, territories, and formats as possible. The agent has the first-mover advantage to establish, extend, and protect the value of the author's work in the global publishing market, and in doing so allocates intellectual and symbolic capital to players in the publishing industry.

While self-publishing has always been an option for authors, until now the path to commercial success was many magnitudes more difficult and expensive – and there are many options. It has never been easier to hire the freelance legal, editorial, design, marketing, and publicity resources to produce a book, and to then publish it instantly both digitally and

physically, making it available to anyone anywhere in the world. However much the big five houses of international publishing continue to monopolize the bestselling authors, theirs is now one platform among many. If the cumulative effect of the selection, manufacturing, and marketing processes that go into publishing a book is to "make an author's work public," in many cases that act may now be accomplished by the author.

Just as the author has never had greater optionality in publishing, never has the author had greater connectivity with the reader, and the combined effect of these two desirable states is to empower the author in an unprecedented way.

Since the author brand resides with the author and not the publisher, when an author accumulates singular prestige and recognition independent of the publisher, the direct connection to the reader is even more significant. Harnessing the distributive power of the Internet, the amplification of social and other online media, and turnkey e-commerce, the author platform may evolve from being a set of relationships the publisher may use to its advantage to a direct bookselling platform for the author.

One of the first observations a person makes about the business of literary agents is that it is one of relationships, and it is entirely accurate. The agent must negotiate a global web of relationships with figures ranging from authors, complex estates, scouts, and fellow agents, to publishers, producers, app developers, publicists, booksellers, and distributors to birth the commercial life of their authors' work.

Of these many relationships, the one with the author is paramount, and being conducted at the nexus of creativity and commerce, it is an intimate one. The personal connection—the depth



The 13th International Workshop for Translation and Publication of Korean Literature



of conviction that this agent appreciates your talent, understands what you want to accomplish, has the experience and vision to help you realize such things, and has your best interests at heart—is the deciding factor when an author has to choose from a field of equally capable agents.

Agents have long provided services that exceed the management of copyright, and are closer to career management. With trade editors acquiring and editing more fully-formed ideas than nurturing nascent ones, agents provide developmental editing services to authors, either in-house or through freelancers. While publishers generally dedicate marketing and promotion resources on a per title basis for a set time period, over the long term agents draw on their own press contacts and engage publicists to build awareness and community around the author's work. As the author brand individuates from the publisher brand, the agent may extend the brand by proactively licensing rights across as many media platforms as possible, leveraging the symbolic capital of the author to guarantee distribution and publicity (and to gain margin share yet again). Beyond advising on self-publishing and crowdfunding models agents have begun to exceed management altogether and add production, distribution, and fulfillment of frontlist, backlist, or out-of-print client titles to the mix, contracting with publishing platforms to provide "full-service" e-book and print-on-demand publishing services on a fee or commission basis.

As publishers adapt their core business to the digital environment, there is opportunity once again for agents to assert control over aspects of publishing that more properly belong in the long-term control of the author. Being at the beginning of the chain, the agent is in the best position to capture important, permanent information about

the author and the author's work, yet for the large part that capture happens among discrete systems of record keeping and the data set is inaccessible and unusable to network partners, not to mention to the author. Created and edited on a computer, printed from files or displayed on-screen, the life of the modern book is digital. While most of the current crop of agents came to the business through the love of books printed on paper, agenting is and always has been a data business—data in the form of the actual texts by authors, titles, author and rights information—and the native platform for a data business is now digital. Just as the publisher must pivot from a business model based on the printed book, so too must the agent, and use technology to advance the interests of the author in the digital age by providing data services and empowering toolsets for author websites, social media, and digital asset management.

As we contemplate the specter of the digital agent, we must not be seduced by feats of software engineering or opportunities for rent-seeking by posing as gatekeepers, but rather measure any act of evolution against the very relationship of trust we have with the author, in which we hold their economic and moral interests before our own. Just as our income derives from theirs, so does our honor and reputation, and we must first consider how any change to our role benefits them. The analog agency must be reimagined as a digital one that leverages data to achieve maximum optionality and connectivity for the client, and revise the agent's role once again.

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