

Book's Face

Franco-american, Rebecca Byers has worked in publishing since the early 80's. She joined the Editions PLON-PERRIN as a Rights Director in 2005. She also presides the 'Commission Internationale' of the Syndicat National de l'Edition which brings together buyers and sellers of rights in French publishing.



1. Can you please describe your job in 100 words?

To put it simply : Our aim is to prolong the life of a book. Our job is to explore all the ways a title can be transformed above and beyond its first life as a hardback sold into the bookstores or online. This means negotiating its second life as a book-club offering, in paperback format, as an audio book or printed in large characters. It can also be a metamorphosis into a movie or a play. And of course one of the most interesting challenges is to bring the text to a world audience by negotiating translations into as many languages as possible. We have a good deal of fun because we wear lots of different hats: we are sales person, lawyer and literary expert all rolled into one and we usually speak 2 or 3 languages...

2. What did you want to do when you were five years-old?

I still didn't know how to read when I was five but I was very curious to find out what was inside all those books in our house that my parents talked about so much. I think that was the fateful obsession that pushed me into publishing!

3. Can you describe a typical working day?

It's the week of the French "Salon du Livre" – our major book fair and this what my Wednesday is like :

–9:30

A meeting with a French paperback publisher at the Café des Deux Magots – a chance to start the day with a scrumptious

croissant and good coffee while I present our Spring program to a paperback publisher from outside our publishing group. We often meet with competitors should we decide to open up the market for an important title.

–10:45

I'm back at the office – in the meantime a myriad of emails have arrived – foreign editors asking for appointments for the upcoming London Book Fair, a publisher who needs the file of the photo section of the book he will be translating from our list, somebody from the legal department of a US publisher bringing up the counterpoints to my arguments in our contract negotiation, and a sub-agent is giving me the good news that they have an offer from Bulgaria for one of our recent history titles. Unfortunately, I don't have the time to get back to everyone – I need to prepare my luncheon appointment.

–13:00

Thanks to the Salon du Livre there are a lot of foreign publishers in town. I'm having lunch with a German editor and her scout. The scout lives in Paris and is paid by the German publisher to keep track of what's happening in French publishing. I've chosen a typical French restaurant nearby with red and white checkered tablecloths and unimpeachable "plats du jour". The conversation ranges widely from our upcoming titles to the book markets in Germany and France. The editor seemed quite enthusiastic about one of our major new titles – a one-volume history of France. Fingers crossed!

– 15:00

Back in the office. I need to catch up on some correspondence with several authors

to let them know the details about licensing agreements for their books in Italy, Finland and Serbia. I also need to register the contracts in our company data base so that the accounting department can send out invoices to the foreign publishers. This is such a hectic time and I barely have the chance to enjoy my lovely view of the fountain on Place Saint Sulpice. We are still one of the lucky few French publishers still working in the 6th arrondissement (Saint-Germain-des-Prés) – traditional home to French trade publishing.

–16:00

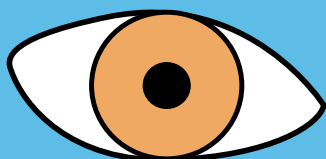
The author of a book on feminine knighthood in the Middle Ages is coming by to see me so that I can learn more about what makes her book unique (and therefore saleable outside of France). I will also explore with her whatever international contacts she might have. She's in a bit of a tiff because the Spanish edition of her last title never came out – crisis "obligé"...I'll need to explain all that to her and boost her spirits by giving her an invitation to the opening of the Salon du Livre on Thursday evening where we receive many of our authors on the stand – c'est la fête!

–18:00

And speaking about parties – for two years now we've organized an informal get-together on the Wednesday evening before the Salon du Livre at the Hotel Lutétia (smack in the middle of Saint-Germain-des-Prés) – trying to imitate our colleagues at the Frankfurt and London Book Fairs – we invite visiting editors, scouts, agents, rights sellers and basically anyone who works in publishing to come together for drinks and celebrate the international world of publishing. Here I go – this

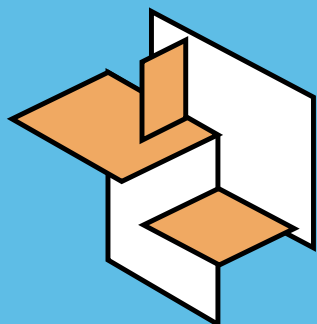
EDITORIAL

- . Reading panel
- . Commissioning or acquisition
- . Copy editing/Full text editing
- . Proofreading
- . Index making
- . Translation
- . Technical revision
- . Infographics
- . Legal reading if necessary
- . Relations with the author



FINANCIAL

- . Authors royalties & copyrights fees
- . Managements accounts
- . Creditors & debtors
- . Legal procurement
- . Sponsors
- . Audits
- . Tax



PRODUCTION

- . Typesetting
- . File conversion
- . Layout & design
- . Paper buying & storage
- . Printing
- . Insurance & shipping

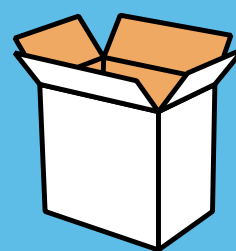


SALES & MARKETING

- . Representation
- . Marketing plans
- . Foreign rights
- . Publicity
- . Contracts with the media & PR approaches of opinion
- . Leaders & institutions
- . Social media
- . Parties

FULFILMENT & DISTRIBUTION

- . Order processing & servicing
- . Fulfilment & delivery
- . IT systems
- . Warehouse management
- . Digital warehouses & distribution
 - . Physical bookstores & other stores selling books
 - . Electronic bookstores
 - . Libraries
- . Consignment processing, returns, used/damaged books sales
- . Management of unsold stock



is just the beginning of a whirlwind week – in this business we're pretty good at mixing business with pleasure!

4. What would happen to the book if you were not there?

Number one, many authors would be pretty unhappy and would likely feel that their life's work was not being given its due. Every writer wishes for his or her book the largest dissemination possible and it is the job of the rights person to make that happen. Even if that beautifully crafted Korean edition is unreadable for the author I am sure it often has a prominent position on the living room bookshelf. Likewise, for a book to be available in English can be a major factor in the career of an academic or the recognition of a literary talent. Of course, there are also financial considerations: In

France the supplementary income generated by rights departments is between 7 to 10% of publishers' overall income. For a publisher to have a rights department is really a guarantee for "full service". I have always felt that for a book to be a success there needs to be a cohesive team working behind the scenes – the editor, the sales people, the production people, the press people and the rights people – everybody working together to make it happen. If we've chosen to publish a book it's because we believe in its overall long term potential and not only in its "first life".

5. What is the most exciting /striking thing that ever happened to you in your job?

Probably the most exciting experience was having a first novel, *LE CONFIDENT*, from a

young and unknown writer, H el ene Gr emil- lon, sell into 25 countries, including English language markets that are always so hard for us. What is fascinating is to see how, from the initial enthusiasm of several European fiction editors, a book can take off worldwide from simple word of mouth at a fair or in a conversation among colleagues. It is our job to capitalize on this "buzz" and maximize the results without spoiling the magic!