

Five Bogotá Book Fair Fellows' Viewpoints on Selling Rights Today

In Feature Articles by Andrés Delgado Darnalt April 24, 2018

Can publishing advances sustain literary agencies in Latin America? And could stories of violence be what publishers this season are looking for? These and other issues are discussed by rights specialists among the Bogotá Book Fair fellows.



At the Bogotá International Book Fair, Image: FILBO, Corferias

By Andrés Delgado Darnalt

'The Market Is Opening Up More'



Running through May 2, the 31st iteration of the [Bogotá International Book Fair](#) has hosted a fellowship program, this year, [as reported by Publishing Perspectives](#) with eight fellows from Germany, Spain, the United States, Canada, Italy, and Turkey.

The fellows participated in business meetings with Colombian publishers and were given guided tours of the fair, acquainting themselves with trends and publishing catalogues from the Colombian literary and publishing scene.

Publishing Perspectives has talked with five of these professionals in the fellowship program, to get their viewpoints on issues around rights sales of Latin American literature, challenges in rights sales, and their expectations from their experiences at the fair.



Nicole Witt

Nicole Witt, Mertin Literary Agency

Rights agent [Nicole Witt](#) studied romance and Germanic philology and started working with Spanish language rights at the Frankfurt-based [Mertin Literary Agency](#) in 1999.

“Editors receive so many proposals that they go unnoticed,” Witt tells *Publishing Perspectives*. “I think the art of the literary agent is to make editors pay attention and give credibility to their projects.”

She says that Latin American authors have a big challenge in the market. “It’s hard to find publishers willing to translate directly from Spanish. In all markets, translation is generally done mainly from English. Those who don’t take that path have to persuade publishers to translate directly from Spanish.”



As an example of successful translated fiction, Witt points to the case of Buenos Aires-based Cuban writer [Marcial Gala](#), whose novel *La Catedral de los Negros* (*Cathedral of the Blacks*) was published in Argentina by Ediciones Corregidor. German rights were bought by Nagel & Kimche, and US rights by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

“I think it caught the attention of US publishers,” Witt says, “because of the political and economic interest the author’s country holds for the United States.”

Witt says she hopes to see the Colombian government giving more support to finance translations.

“Other countries have set up translation support programs, and they help to stimulate foreign editors to decide in favor of translated fiction when deciding to buy the rights or not.

“Colombian literature is very rich and diverse but it needs more financial incentives.”



Nazli Gürkaş

Nazli Gürkaş, Kalem Agency

[Nazli Gürkaş](#) studied English-language teaching in Turkey and earned a master's degree in journalism and communication in Barcelona. She's a literary agent with the Kalem Agency in Istanbul.

The agency often works as sub-agent of publishers and international agencies, representing their catalogues for the Turkish market. It also directly represents more than 100 Turkish authors.



'Istanbul Istanbul,' which just won the 2018 EBRD Literature Prize, is by Burhan Sönmez, who is represented by the Kalem Agency in Turkey

"We've sold the foreign rights of our Turkish authors into more than 35 languages," Gürkaş says. "Managing the rights of Turkish authors isn't easy because there are very few translators between Turkish and other languages."

Gürkaş says that short novels and novellas are doing well in the Turkish market.

"Turkish publishers don't want to pay much for translations," she says.

"Alejandro Zambra's [Bonsai](#), for example, has been a big success in Turkey, as has his other novella, [Los modos de volver a casa](#) (*Ways of Getting Home*)."

She says she sees another trend in graphic novels from Latin America. "We sold Turkish rights for a graphic novel about Chilean president Salvador Allende called [Los años de Allende](#). Books about political issues catch attention in Turkey because we share common social and political issues with Latin America.

"Being at the Bogotá fair is good because we get to see all the new book releases from our own points of view.

"Being in direct contact with publishers gives you a good perspective of the Latin American market that helps you to compare it with your own market."



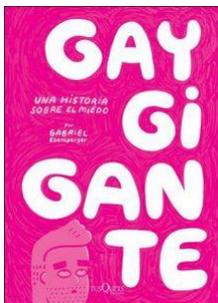
Andrea Montejo

Andrea Montejo, Indent Literary Agency

[Andrea Montejo](#) founded [Indent Literary Agency](#) in New York in 2007 after working with HarperCollins' Rayo imprint for Latino and Spanish-language titles.

Her colleague at the agency, Paula Canal, worked until June 2016 in foreign rights with Spanish publisher [Anagrama](#), the catalogue of which Indent represents for global deals.

"I always thought that Spain dictated taste in Latin America and what is publishable or non-publishable there," Montejo tells *Publishing Perspectives*.



Montejo's Indent Agency in February began representing the work of Chilean author Gabriel Ebersperger

"I think this has to do with the fact that from the beginning, both publishers and literary agents were based there. I believe the balance is changing now as the Latin American market for books grows. Mexico and Colombia today are important markets for any author, and that's why there are projects being sold only into Mexico or Colombia."

Montejo says she believes that the reason behind the low numbers of literary agencies in Latin America is simple math—the going rates paid to authors can't sustain agencies.

"Advances from publishers in Latin America," she says, "are very low, and even if you receive advances, it's not enough to sustain a business. That's the main reason. It has nothing to do with the lack of talent in Latin America or ideological reasons.

"I hope to see more Latin American-based literary agents in the future," she says. "The more, the merrier."



Sandra Pareja

Sandra Pareja, Casanovas & Lynch

[Sandra Pareja](#)—who’s rights sales have been featured in two of *Publishing Perspectives’* [rights roundups](#)—is in charge of foreign rights at Barcelona-based [Casanovas & Lynch Literary Agency](#).

“In the agency,” Pareja says, “we all agree that the most important market to sell into is the United States. If we can sell a title to the US, it guarantees access to almost 15 countries.”

One of Casanovas & Lynch’s latest successes was Mariana Enriquez’s book of short stories [Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego](#) (Anagrama, 2016).



“It was our first time with a book of short stories in a foreign right sales auction,” Pareja says. Following the Spanish publication of the book, it was released in an English translation from Penguin Random House/Hogarth as [Things We Lost in the Fire](#) (2017).

“We find that publishers currently are looking for content on violence,” says Pareja, “when confronted with Latin American and Spanish literature—and not the typical historical violence that deals with dictatorships and social traumas. Instead, they’re looking for books on violence against women, domestic violence, psychological violence.”

“Sometimes it’s easier to sell a literary book than a commercial one to US publishers, too, because they feel they ‘already have a book like this’ in their country.”

“They want something that no one in their own country can write, but that at the same time isn’t ‘too foreign’ for them.”



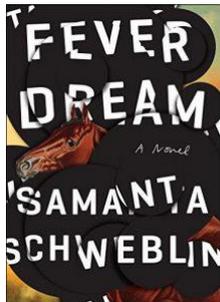
Megan McDowell

Megan McDowell, translator

[Megan McDowell](#)—who translated that Hogarth English edition of Mariana Enriquez’s book—lived in Chile between 2003 and 2007 and learned Spanish there. She returned to the United States and earned a master’s degree in translation.

McDowell has translated contemporary authors from Latin America and Spain, including Alejandro Zambra, Samanta Schweblin, Mariana Enriquez, Gonzalo Torné, Lina Meruane, Diego Zuñiga, and Carlos Fonseca.

Her English translations have been published by [Penguin Random House](#), [Coffee House Press](#), [Deep Vellum Press](#), [Granta Books](#) and [Fitzcarraldo Editions](#).



One of Megan McDowell’s titles is the Penguin Books/Riverhead translation of Samanta Schweblin’s ‘Fever Dream’ (2017)

McDowell says she sees herself as a guide at times to publishers interested in translated fiction. “My role as a translator,” she says, “is somewhat similar to that of an agent.

“Editors ask me what I want to translate or what I think is good. They see me as an expert because I read Spanish, and a lot of editors in the US don’t read in Spanish.

“At the Bogotá fair, I hope to learn who the new writers are and also the ones everyone is talking about. I expect to go home with a stack of books. I’ll translate no more than two or three of them. The rest will give me indications of what the market is offering now.”

McDowell says she sees things looking up for translation.

“The market is opening up more to translations from Spanish,” she says. “Simon & Schuster and Coffee House Press, for example, are really focused now on literature in translation, especially from Latin America.”