



Beyond the Book

A podcast series on the business of writing and publishing

Interview with Fabrice Piault
Vice Editor-in-Chief, *Livres Hebdo*
recorded in Paris

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KENNEALLY: Salut, mes amis! It's Christopher Kenneally coming to you from Paris today presenting a special program of Copyright Clearance Center's *Beyond the Book* podcast, and joining me in an office overlooking Boulevard St.-Germain-des-Prés is Fabrice Piault, who is *rédacteur en chef adjoint* of *Livres Hebdo*. Fabrice, bonjour.

PIAULT: Bonjour.

KENNEALLY: It's wonderful to have you join us and I appreciate your taking the time. We are coming up to the opening of the Salon du Livre and we want to take a little bit of a temperature of the book industry here in France to help educate our listeners around the world, but especially in America, because there are some important similarities, but I think as well some important differences.

However, first, for people who aren't familiar, tell us about the role that *Livres Hebdo* plays in the book industry.

PIAULT: *Livres Hebdo* is the French book trade magazine. It can be compared to *Publishers Weekly*, for example, in the United States. So we address to publishers, to booksellers, to librarians and to all people working with books, literary critics and so on, and we report on the industry activity, book industry activity.

KENNEALLY: As we approach the opening of the Salon du Livres, is it a moment, as you might say in French, du *calme ou du l'unquiet* for the whole industry?

PIAULT: I think it's not so – it's not either quiet, either worry. It's something else, I think. Now, all people in the industry realize that there will be important changes. I say it will be because it's not so advanced than it is now in the United States. And they are working to adapt to this change.

So, sure, there is some worry, that's right. But I think now they are in the – they entered in a period when they are working hard to adapt. It's a new phase. Maybe you would have asked me the same question one or two years ago, I would have said that well, there were many worrying about what could be the future. Sure, they are still worrying, but they are also beginning to work to – especially in

publishing industry, publishers are doing new products, they are doing apps for the iPhones and iPads. Of course they've been digitalizing all their catalogues and so on.

KENNEALLY: You have a chance – it's a global industry, and as an editor for this particular publication, you view not only the French publishing business, but the world's publishing business, and I believe you've been part of some exchange programs to the United States to learn more and then to sort of share information. Is the situation in the United States having an influence on how people behave in the business here in France?

PIAULT: Yes, it has. Actually, I think there is really – in France, people are very surprised of how the industry is changing in the United States and also how fast it is changing. Nobody would have expected that in just a couple of years the e-books would have taken 8 percent of the sales of publishers like it is now in the United States. Actually, I know that even American publishers wouldn't have expected so fast change.

But I think people here are very much impressed with this very fast change and I think it has an influence. It accelerates the efforts of all the industry to adapt to the new condition of the market, or the new condition they expect for the market within one or two years.

But the market is not exactly the same here. I think the paper market for print books is maybe stronger here. First, it's stronger because the bookstores are much more – there are more bookstores, traditional bookstores, and this is related to the fact that we have a fixed price for books. I think this fixed price for books has given more means for the bookstores to resist to the competition from big chains and from e-book retailers. So the changes here are slower than they are in the United States.

KENNEALLY: Is there pressure on that system of fixed pricing to change? And we should sort of explain to people, because it's something that probably comes as a shock to many listeners. But the price of a book is set by law, we could say, for each individual title, and even if it were available in an *édition numérique*, a digital edition, it would still be the same price.

PIAULT: No, that's not true. The fixed price applies to print books. If you want to – for the moment, it's only for print books. For e-books, you can do what you want. But there is a law being discussed in the parliament now which will introduce also fixed price for digital books, but it hasn't been passed yet. And anyway, I'm not sure this new law could be applied to e-books sold from outside France. So, I think in France, there will be a combination between fixed price. For e-books, there will be



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a combination with a fixed price coming from the law and also a type of agency model like in the United States, which gives the publisher the ability to fix the price for its books.

KENNEALLY: What's the differential now then between an edition in print and an edition digital for a book today?

PIAULT: What do you mean?

KENNEALLY: I mean, so for example, in the United States, a Kindle edition would be available for \$9.99 whereas the print book might be list price at \$24.99.

PIAULT: The difference is about 20 percent, no more than 20 percent. The e-books are sold about 20 percent less than the print books.

KENNEALLY: So, much closer.

PIAULT: Yes, much closer. And that's also a reason why the market doesn't develop so fast than in the United States. The price is not so different for something which is not exactly the same. With a print edition, you really have a product in your hands. That's not exactly the same with an e-book and so as the price is not so different, it doesn't help for a quick development of this market.

KENNEALLY: We're talking with Fabrice Piauult who is with Livres Hebdo about the changes in the book industry in France at the opening of the Salon du Livres. And I was thinking as you were talking about the influence that the American industry is having, and yet here in France, people can certainly choose to do things their own way. What are some things that perhaps the French industry might be thinking about doing that would surprise anyone in America? Are there different approaches, different cultural norms?

PIAULT: If we speak about digital, I think the main difference between the United States and France is that in United States, digital books have been developing first with text, with books with text. It's the text. It's related to the Kindle and so on.

In France, the most advanced publishers on digital matters are publishers who are involved in illustrated books, comics and graphic novel publishers, how-to-do books, even art books, books for young people, young readers and so on.

I think it's related to the devices that sure, we have here also some type of devices like the Kindle, but they have been launched recently. In the United States, the market could develop because you had the main bookseller online selling both the device and the contents. We didn't have this at the beginning here. We had some

devices and we had some publishers and we only have since three or four months, some devices sold by the main booksellers, actually the Fnac, which is the main book chain in France and also Cachette (sp?), which is another one.

So the main experiences which was developed by French publishers here on digital were either on just on computers, on PC or on the iPad when it was launched, and it was mainly for illustrated products.

KENNEALLY: Well, that's an interesting difference and one important, I think, to think about because the iPad and to some extent the Nook are much more pictorial anyway in their presentation, and the whole digital culture thinks in pictures as well as in words.

PIAULT: Yes. I don't know what you –

KENNEALLY: I mean, as a book publisher observer, we think about books – I think about books as words, but yet they contain so much more.

PIAULT: Sure. Yes, you're right, but I can't say anything else.

KENNEALLY: It's stating the obvious I suppose, yes.

PIAULT: That's right. I think here the traditional publishers editing texts were very cautious with digital, especially the literary publishing, which is the most important here. They couldn't see the e-books and digital products as something important for their development and they were not the first to go there because their idea is that people wouldn't read a novel on a digital device or something.

I think there is also a difference between the United States and France on this matter. Maybe in America, people are more – well, they really want to have – they're much involved in new technological devices and so on. They are very much interested in this. It's very important for them and they're ready to go always for new devices and so on.

Here, I don't think there is the same – well, people are always interested with this, but not to read, probably. To read, they still like the traditional way on paper and so on.

KENNEALLY: So the enthusiasm is different here in France, you would say, when it comes to things like digital books, e-books and Kindles and the rest?

PIAULT: Yes. I think there is an enthusiasm, especially among young readers and so on, but it's – well, it's different and I think it's more related to illustrated products.

There is a real interest and a real enthusiasm on illustrated digital products, on books. I don't know what you can call them. But for the text, it is not understood as something very urgent to read text, especially novels, on an electronic device.

KENNEALLY: You mentioned too some of the resistance that publishing has had in this country to digitization, and some of that has come out in some copyright infringement lawsuits and other court actions against particularly Google. Some of those have been resolved recently. Perhaps you can update the audience on where the industry stands with the Google book settlement as it's proposed and some of the (inaudible) sort of entente (inaudible) that has been negotiated for publishers like Cachette and others.

PIAULT: Yes, publishers here are really afraid to lose their rights on books and the Google settlement – well, I don't know. The Google settlement for the moment is nowhere in the United States as I heard. But here, publishers are really against this settlement. For them, it's really a – it's a defeat. They understand it as a defeat and it's right that they are very cautious with digital because they are afraid to lose their power on the rights.

KENNEALLY: How difficult is it to educate the public about copyright in this country? Certainly in the United States, a lot of publishers and others in the media feel like they face a very difficult time, particularly with the young generation, to get them to understand the importance of copyright. Is it similar here?

PIAULT: Yes, I think, I think. Maybe a little less, but it is also a problem to explain it.

KENNEALLY: As you said at the beginning and as a way to conclude – we've been speaking with Fabrice Piault, who is *rédacteur en chef* for Livres Hebdo and preparing to go to the Salon du Livre. You're just about to leave and thank you so much for taking the time to do this. But back to that moment of calm or worry. It sounds like, as you said, it's not an either/or. It's one of those times when one needs to just move forward.

PIAULT: Yes. I think all publishers here are sure that the industry will change, a large part of their activity will be digital, online and so on, and for some of them, it's already a real share of their activity. But I think the real beginning of the market and the growing of the market won't be this year. It may be next year. It's a little slower than in the United States.

KENNEALLY: Well, *plus ça change* and *plus c'est la même chose*, I suppose, right, for the book industry in France. Again, merci to Fabrice Piault, *rédacteur en chef adjoint* de Livres Hebdo for joining us today on *Beyond the Book*.



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PIAULT: You're welcome. Thank you.

KENNEALLY: And for everyone at Copyright Clearance Center, this is Chris Kenneally thanking you for listening.

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