



Publishing & The Pandemic

with

- **Hugo Setzer, President, International Publishers Association**
 - **Piero Attanasio, Italian Publishers Association**
 - **Olivia Snaije, journalist**
 - **Javier Celaya, dosdoce.com**

For podcast release

Monday, March 30, 2020

KENNEALLY: The applause rises from apartment buildings across Paris, every evening at 8 p.m. The acclaim is for the doctors, nurses and other first responders who provide care to those sickened by the coronavirus. The grateful ones are millions of Parisians quarantined in their homes under a national lockdown.

Welcome to *Publishing & The Pandemic*, a special edition of Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book.

Parisians, of course, are hardly alone in this global pandemic brought on by COVID-19. Around the world, cities and even whole nations are shuttered and silent. Apart from the essential businesses of grocery markets and pharmacies, entire industries have lurched suddenly to a halt. Meanwhile, of course, hospitals swell with patients.

COVID-19 has given rise to a new, terrifying vocabulary from epidemiology and public health: Social distancing. Flattening the curve. Super-spreader. We have become suddenly well acquainted with medical equipment: ventilators; PPEs; N-95 respirators. We are learning quite a lot these days about subjects few but the professionals ever gave much thought.

For those under quarantine, many with children out of school, the Internet is a lifeline, providing information, instruction and welcome distraction. We are recognizing, in new ways, how much of daily life that authors and publishers make possible and how much they make life under lockdown bearable.

In this special report for CCC's Beyond the Book, I visit virtually with journalists, publishers and industry analysts in France, Italy, Spain and Mexico.



Piero Attanasio of the Italian Publishers Association describes an industry in severe contraction with impact across the supply chain. To date, Italy is the European country hit hardest by COVID-19, with the deaths recently climbing over 10,000.

ATTANASIO: The expectation is a reduction of 25% of the number of titles. That means in Italy, since we publish around 80,000 books per year, it's 20,000 books less and 40 million copies, more or less, which means that this has an effect that will be in the printing industries, in the paper industry, but also, of course, with the authors' revenues and translators, which is another particular warning we have is translators. We estimate that we probably translate 2,500 books less than last year, so there is a problem of revenues for all the employees around – all the professionals along the value chain from the beginning to the end, including, of course, the bookshops.

KENNEALLY: From France, which began a national lockdown on March 17 that was recently extended to April 15, journalist Olivia Snaije relates the cultural dilemma of closing bookstores.

SNAIJE: There was a big discussion last week on whether or not bookshops were considered essential industries. And most agreed that they were. However, the Union of Booksellers said – they put out a statement that the health measures weren't secure enough to reopen their bookshops, even if the economic upset for them was great. There are 3,300 independent bookshops, which is so much more than in most countries. But this isn't to say that they aren't struggling as well and most of the big publishers have agreed to reschedule payments for bookshops and reimburse them immediately for returns.

KENNEALLY: In Madrid, analyst Javier Celaya advises publishers to heed the real lesson to be found in the dramatic shift to the virtual.

CELAYA: I think this is a time to reflect. We, in the sector, for the last decade, have not really understood the power of digital. And I think now is the time to really reflect that the importance is not the format. The importance is the content. And if we want to have people continue reading, we have to really invest in this digital transformation in order to guarantee that the publishing sector has a future.

KENNEALLY: And in Mexico City, International Publishers Association president Hugo Setzer hopes the crisis may strengthen the industry.

SETZER: We are seeing the importance of the publishing industry, how the publishing industry has been important to society since a long time, how publishers are responding with solidarity, with innovation, to the public.

++++++



KENNEALLY: Hugo Setzer is president of the International Publishers Association and CEO of Manual Moderno, one of the leading publishers in medicine and psychology in the Spanish language. Welcome to the program, Hugo.

SETZER: Thank you, Chris. Thank you for inviting me to your program.

KENNEALLY: So in Mexico City, you're just bracing for the possible impact of the COVID-19 virus, but elsewhere around the world, the impact has already been felt. And as president of IPA, what are you seeing? What is the response that global publishers have been undertaking to this crisis?

SETZER: I'm impressed by the response I've been seeing by the publishing industry in general globally. I've seen publishers all around the world in all sectors – STM, academic, trade – making books and other materials available for the general audience now in this period of crisis.

I know because of our own personal experience in our publishing house, we were able to put up in just a matter of days over 100 chapters of different books we have published online on our web page for free access. Those are medical materials, materials in psychology – and psychology is also a very important thing, because we are of course worrying about our physical health, but we should be also worrying about our mental health.

KENNEALLY: Publishing is often taken to be a low-tech industry, but this kind of online, digital-driven response sort of challenges that, clearly.

SETZER: Yeah, absolutely. I think while not all publishers, perhaps, have the same capabilities, but I think the publishing industry in general, you can see the response, and it's really amazing how we are using technology to bring all those contents to the audience, to people interested in having those contents.

KENNEALLY: And are there lessons to be drawn here regarding the role of copyright and intellectual property protections? It's a moment of choosing to make access to materials available, but that is still a decision that the various copyright holders are making. Explain the important point there.

SETZER: Thank you for asking that question, Chris. It's a very important question, because I would say that the reason we are able as publishers right now to share all these contents with our readers and with the users is precisely because we have this copyright framework. Without this copyright framework, we wouldn't have been able to have those contents in the first place, because authors and publishers wouldn't have had the incentive to produce all those contents.



A Copyright Clearance Center Podcast

KENNEALLY: Is there also a lesson here about the importance of the publishing industry in times not only of crisis, but also when things are hopefully a bit calmer? How essential are books and publishing, do you think?

SETZER: We are seeing the importance of the publishing industry, how the publishing industry has been important to society since a long time, how publishers are responding with solidarity, with innovation to the public.

There are certain countries even discussing if books should be considered an essential necessity, like going to the supermarket, going to the bookstore to leave bookstores open during these times of crisis. It's good to have this discussion. And I would definitely support the idea that books play such a role and the importance of not just the publishing industry, but all the publishing chain from the authors, of course the publishers, the booksellers.

KENNEALLY: As we all think about our own reading lists for this time of crisis, do you have a book you would recommend for a lockdown reading list?

SETZER: Yeah, it's a good question. I'm currently reading a very interesting book by a Swiss philosopher, Alain de Botton. It's called *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*. It's really interesting, because it talks about how we learn a lot of technological stuff in college and in all of our formal education, but we don't really learn how to manage our emotions, which is also something particularly important at times like this.

KENNEALLY: Well, we appreciate your observations and your recommendation. Hugo Setzer, president of the International Publishers Association and CEO of Manual Moderno, thank you for joining me on the program.

SETZER: Thank you, Chris.

++++++

KENNEALLY: Piero Attanasio is head of international affairs and R&D programs and coordinates the activities of the academic publishing group for AIE, the Italian Publishers Association. Attanasio is author of two monographs examining the impact of digital technologies on the book trade and rights management. He also lectures in publishing at the University of Milan. Piero Attanasio joins me from Bologna, Italy. Welcome to the program, Piero.

ATTANASIO: Thank you for the invitation.

KENNEALLY: We appreciate your taking the time to do so to give us a picture of the publishing scene in Italy. There's some recent news from a weekly survey that AIE conducts. Tell us about the mood as it is reflected in the survey.



ATTANASIO: Yeah, the situation in Italy for the epidemic of coronavirus – you know that it's very hard. And it's hard in particular in Milan, where most publishers are located and most of the logistics of the book sector is located. So we are experiencing a very big crisis.

We did a survey interviewing around 150 publishers in the country, and we know that the first reaction was reducing the editorial plans and the number of titles that are planned to be published within this year. It's a signal that publishers are worried that the crisis is not just a few weeks, but it will last for the entire year.

At the same time, we saw that we had whole bookshops closed. Online operators are continuing, but half operation, let's say, something like that, because of problems with logistics. And this means that we see that at the end of the year, probably we will have the worst crisis in the history of our sector since the Second World War.

KENNEALLY: One of the questions you asked in the survey, Piero Attanasio, was the perception of this crisis among the publishers. It was nearly unanimous – sadly unanimous – in that respondents defined the crisis, the current emergency, as either significant or dramatic for their own company, and an even higher number referring to the whole sector.

ATTANASIO: Yes, absolutely. At this moment, we hope that if the crisis, the closing of the bookshops and of the entire country, actually, will not last too long, also the forecast for this year can change. We are also as a publishers' association – as you can imagine, we are lobbying hard with the government to receive particular attention in the measures they are preparing for supporting the economy of the country in general. But there is, you understand, very big competition, because every sector feels themselves as very important for the country, and possibly it's very hard for the government to find money for everything.

KENNEALLY: You asked about the expectation there would be prolonged effects, at least for the whole of 2020, and on a scale of one to 10, the average score there was higher than eight.

And sadly, there was also a similar number, a score of eight, for a question regarding liquidity. Publishers assess that they would be having problems with payment of employees and suppliers. That's quite dramatic.

ATTANASIO: There are agreements by the general confederation or the trade association in Italy and the association of Italian banks trying to approach this problem. It's a short-term problem, but you know that these kind of problems can kill companies. So we are very much committed in trying to find the instruments to cope with this difficult situation.



KENNEALLY: Your survey has anticipated a reduction in the number of published titles throughout the year, not just in the current quarter, but throughout 2020. There are, again, negative expectations there. This is going to have quite an impact on the supply chain.

ATTANASIO: Yes, of course. The expectation is a reduction of 25% of the number of titles. That means in Italy, since we publish around 80,000 books per year, it's 20,000 books less and 40 million copies, more or less, which means that this has an effect that will be in the printing industries, in the paper industry, but also, of course, with the authors' revenues and translators, which is another particular warning we have is translators. We estimate that we probably translate 2,500 books less than last year, so there is a problem of revenues for all the employees around – all the professionals along the value chain from the beginning to the end, including, of course, the bookshops. The bookshops that are now closed, it will be very, very hard to restart. We expect also that some will not be able to restart.

KENNEALLY: Now, with those closed bookstores, are Italian readers turning to ebooks or even to audiobooks in any great number?

ATTANASIO: We have not precise figures. You know that it's very hard usually to have precise figures for the ebooks. It's much better for the printed books in the tradition of our sector. So we don't know exactly what is happening. We have signals that there is an increase of the ebook sales. The compensation between the two is very minimal, because today in Italy, before the crisis, ebooks in trade publishing was just around 4% or 5%. And even if those will double, when there is a reduction of 90% in this moment in the sales of printed books, you can understand that it's a very minimal blip in this situation.

KENNEALLY: One other important point in the survey is that 96% of companies have adopted what we call working from home – I think you may refer to it as smart working – for their staff. So you were able to move – using technology, able to move from the physical offices to the home offices under this stringent lockdown that is in place in Italy.

ATTANASIO: Yes, for publishers, it was surprisingly easy. I have to say also for us in the publishers' association, we have a staff of 45 people, and we moved working from home from one day to the other without any preparation before, and it was without problems. I have to say we are probably used to working when moving, but that all the staff moved so easily in this new situation was also surprising for us. And when we asked the publishers, the percentage of publishers that moved the entire operation – and again, it's in less than one week, the entire operation was moving in this different way of working – was 60%. Another 30% around moved in part to this methodology. This is really a signal for us that publishers are very smart in using technologies.



A Copyright Clearance Center Podcast

KENNEALLY: Tell us what the scene is in Bologna – in the town of Bologna where you are today. Look out your window. What do you see?

ATTANASIO: It's a desert. It's quite impressive. We just leave home to go shopping some food. The only shops that are still open are pharmacies and supermarkets for food. And it's really impressive to go on the streets of Bologna – it's a very live city. And walking around the city without meeting almost anybody is really something impressive, I have to say that. You know Italians are famous to be very social, and they like to walk around, to go to the streets, to the squares. It's very strange.

KENNEALLY: Piero Attanasio, we appreciate your joining us today, and I wonder if you could just offer a suggestion for an Italian author that you think would be particularly appropriate for all of us to be reading right now. It could be someone – a contemporary author. It could be a classical author. But is there a name that springs to mind who just seems right for you at this moment?

ATTANASIO: So it's not easy to answer, because there are many authors that I like from Italian literature. I'll try to mention one author that I'm very – that I appreciate a lot is from my original region. I was born and grew up in Calabria in the very south of Italy. This author is Carmine Abate. He wrote several wonderful books. What I prefer is a book that is entitled *Tra due mari* – it's *Between Two Seas*. It was translated in many languages. I don't know if it's translated also in English. But I would recommend it to any publisher if it is not translated to translate, because it's a very, very good novel.

KENNEALLY: What's the story about, in brief?

ATTANASIO: It's a story of an old man and his grandchild. In south Italy, there is a community of people speaking Arbëresh. Arbëresh is the ancient language in Albania. It's the community of Albanians that moved in Italy in the 15th century and still speaks this language. There is a story between the very old traditions of those communities, this (inaudible) problem of the south Italy, and the relation with the rest of Europe through the migration. So there is stories of the son moved to Germany, came back, and then there are some German characters also that came visiting these people in Calabria. And it's a mix of culture. That is something that I like very much, because I feel myself very much linked to my original region, and then at the same time, I feel myself very European. This novel possibly put together the two spirits I have.

KENNEALLY: Piero Attanasio with AIE, the Italian Publishers Association, thank you for the reading recommendation, and thank you for joining us on the program.

ATTANASIO: Thank you for the invitation.



++++++

KENNEALLY: Olivia Snaije is a journalist and editor who writes about translation, literature, graphic novels, the Middle East and multiculturalism. She is the author of three books and has contributed to newspapers and magazines, including *The Guardian*, *The Global Post*, *The New York Times*, and *Publishing Perspectives*. She joins me from Paris. Welcome to the program, Olivia.

SNAIJE: Thank you, Chris. Thanks for having me.

KENNEALLY: And Javier Celaya is the CEO and founder of Dosdoce.com, analyzing the use of new technologies in the cultural sector. He publishes annual studies on trends in the creative industries in Spain. He is also Vice President of the Spanish Digital Magazines Association and a member of the executive board of the Digital Economy Association of Spain. Welcome to the program, Javier.

CELAYA: Thanks, Chris. Great to be here with all of you.

KENNEALLY: We want to start with Olivia Snaije first, there in Paris, and get a sense from you of the immediate impact, the business impact, on book publishing as a result of this crisis and the national lockdown that France is now under.

SNAIJE: Well, of course it's wreaked havoc on France's book industry, like everywhere else, with bookshops and libraries closing and book fairs and festivals being cancelled. There are festivals – numerous literary festivals – all over France. And book launches are being postponed to late spring or summer. But now, it looks more like summer and fall. So you can see the cultural ecosystem breaking down on many levels. For example, an art book publisher, which publishes books that are linked to an exhibit or a photography festival – with all these events having to be rescheduled or cancelled, then the books have to be as well.

And depending on the size of bookshops and publishers, whether they're independent or not, the smaller ones have often put their employees on unemployment directly, so that the government will take over with the salaries. And they're paid about 70% of their salaries.

And then the bigger companies, like Editis, which is owned by Vivendi and have a lot more capital – the employees have been paid for March, but we have yet to see what will happen in April.

KENNEALLY: Are publishers responding with opening up access to books and educational materials? You mentioned Editis. I believe they have a program to



provide for online courses, and Gallimard also reacted to the situation. Tell us about that.

SNAIJE: Most publishers have given open access to e-books and educational material. One of the first was Gallimard, with a series called *Tractes*, which are short texts of fiction and nonfiction by authors in their backlist. And they put them online at 10:00 a.m., 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. And then Editis and other publishers are giving free access to academic books for kids online because, of course, the education – kids' education – is of primary concern.

KENNEALLY: And what is the status of online book purchasing? You mentioned that the bookshops are closed. Online book buying was not as common in France as in other countries, particularly here in the United States. But has there been an uptick there?

SNAIJE: Well, the Fnac – the big chain – is still delivering. And Amazon says it's not buying new stock, but it's really case by case. I mean the post office is still working, but they're not picking up packages anymore, so I know other places which distributed books have had to stop, because you have to go and deposit your books now at the post office, but smaller bookshops, I've read in the newspapers, in towns and villages are delivering books by hand, so it's really a case-by-case situation.

KENNEALLY: It's interesting to mention the dedication of those bookstore owners and employees, because the role of bookstores in the cultural life of France is an important one. What do you think we are learning about books and reading as an essential industry? Was there a discussion – a debate, if you will – about whether reading and books was essential in France?

SNAIJE: Yes, absolutely. There was a big discussion last week on whether or not bookshops were considered essential industries. And most agreed that they were. However, the Union of Booksellers said – they put out a statement that the health measures weren't secure enough to reopen their bookshops, even if the economic upset for them was great. There are 3,300 independent bookshops, which is so much more than in most countries. But this isn't to say that they aren't struggling as well and most of the big publishers have agreed to reschedule payments for bookshops and reimburse them immediately for returns.

The Minister of Culture, Franck Riester, who himself has coronavirus – on March 18th, he announced that there was an emergency aid package of €22 million for the



A Copyright Clearance Center Podcast

cultural sector, €5 million of which are for the book industry. But many people don't think that this is enough.

KENNEALLY: Are libraries in France able to lend e-books or audiobooks?

SNAIJE: E-book borrowing has increased tremendously. And I've heard that several publishers are working on increasing the number of people who can borrow one book at a time. So for now, I think it's something like six to eight people can borrow one book, and they're trying to up this to 25 people.

And my neighbor, on my floor, who of course is working from home – she's the technical product manager for a platform that provides e-books to libraries or bookshops. And she says she's never been so busy in her life.

KENNEALLY: Olivia Snaije in Paris, we'll return to you in just a moment.

But I want to turn right now to Javier Celaya in Madrid. And I suspect, Javier, that you're going to tell us that the situation that Olivia is describing in Paris and throughout France is one you're familiar with there in Madrid. But give us some numbers to explain the story.

CELAYA: Yes, it's very similar. We are actually in the second week of the four-week quarantine that the Spanish government announced two weeks ago, although everyone expects that is going to be at least six weeks, if not more. But let's hope it's between four and six and no more.

All bookstores are closed. And this has a huge impact on the sales to the publishing sector. The national publishers' associations have estimated at least 150 million euros per quarter loss during this quarantine. And, as Olivia has described, all new releases have been postponed until the fall. The publishers have understood that, whenever we come back to the market – hopefully, May – they will not put more books into the market, trying to manage the current situation.

And, surprisingly, because here in Spain a lot of publishers were reluctant to really foster digital consumption, they have realized that the readers are taking reading and listening on the screens and tablets and phones more easily than they expected. E-book sales have increased by 50% just in one week. Subscription services for e-books and audiobooks have increased 100% in one week. And e-lending has increased by 10 times.



We all know that these digital sales will not replace the losses in print. But at least they will maintain reading as the center of entertainment during this crisis. And I think this is the most important thing. We have to do something to maintain reading as the center of entertainment during this crisis.

KENNEALLY: Publishers are only beginning to reckon that all this news and all the concerns are going to take people away from their books, from literature.

CELAYA: The first week, a lot of publishers with the lack of experience, because it's the first time we have this major crisis in many of our countries, they started giving away a lot of e-books and audiobooks for free. And it might be it was a huge mistake. I understand the social good that a lot of them wanted to send to the citizens.

But I think what we all have to understand – that we have to make readers understand that they have to pay for that content. And you can do promotions, as many publishers have done – discounts on their e-books and audiobooks up to 50% or up to 70%. I've seen this week, the second week, some publishers pushing the digital market, offering discounts up to 70% on their e-books and audiobooks.

And I think that's the right way to do it – having more digital content on the market, so reading becomes accessible and available to as many Spanish citizens as possible. And then, when everything goes back to normal, we will try to rescue the booksellers, which are the ones that are suffering most from this crisis.

KENNEALLY: How does it compare – how would you expect this to play out, as a comparison with 2008?

CELAYA: Well, at the end, it's a consumption crisis, meaning that people are not, in this case, able to go out on the streets and buy their books. Back in 2008, it was a financial crisis. There was no money in the market. And again, they could not buy their books. Back in 2008, we actually, in Spain, lost €1 billion in sales during that financial crisis. And the worst-case scenario for this new crisis again estimates another €1 billion sales, because it's not only going to be this quarter.

This quarter, unfortunately, is the best quarter for the booksellers in the whole year, as well as Christmas. Usually, in the springtime, most of the big publishing houses release the biggest new releases for the year. Also, it's where most of the book fairs take place – Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Valencia – all the big cities have, in the springtime, their book fairs. And all of them have been cancelled, so the damage is not only going to be Q1 and the beginning of Q2, but it's going to



expand into Q2 and basically until the end of the summer. And I think, again unfortunately, it's going to imply that at least €500 or €700 million lost this year in revenues for the publishing sector in Spain.

KENNEALLY: I wonder if you can reflect on how this particular moment is bringing into highlight the importance of books and publishing in Spain and, perhaps, its role as another type of essential industry.

CELAYA: Well, I think this has been the major shock to the publishing sector. When the government decided the quarantine, the bookstores and the publishing industry was not an essential industry. Kiosks, newspapers are open in Spain, so people can buy newspapers and magazines. But bookstores were not allowed to open. There was a debate, as Olivia has mentioned, also here in Spain, if bookselling was essential or not. And a lot of people believe it due to health reasons, but as well as the decision that it was not an essential industry, because you could get, today, that same content – that same information – via online.

And I think this is a time to reflect. We, in the sector, for the last decade, have not really understood the power of digital. And I think now is the time to really reflect that the importance is not the format. The importance is the content. And if we want to have people continue reading, we have to really invest in this digital transformation in order to guarantee that the publishing sector has a future.

KENNEALLY: Olivia Snaije, in Paris, I wonder if you can comment on that point. The French do love their books, their volumes in their hands on the Metro or in the cafes. Do you think they will stay loyal to that format or do you think the increasing adoption of digital, at this moment, is going to be something that will last beyond the crisis?

SNAIJE: I think there's room for both. I mean, as we've seen before, physical books were not – I mean did not – lose out to e-books. So the fact that very few people read e-books here – perhaps they will read more, but I don't think that the physical book will lose out, anyway.

One publisher commented to me yesterday that the pessimistic version is that, once this crisis is over, people will want to hang onto their money and they'll consider that books are not a necessity. But then there's the optimistic side that, you know, people will have a tendency to buy books and give books as gifts because they're not futile. And they may have realized that they don't need much else besides a good book when they're confined.



CELAYA: In Spain, in the last week, because of this quarantine, we have become the second country in Europe consuming more mobile data, after Germany. And streaming services have increased their data consumption by 50% in just one week.

People are going to get tired of Netflix, HBO and similar services. And if we want to, in this four to six weeks, to keep reading books, in the mindsets of the citizens of Spain, it has to be digital. This is something we have to understand. Physical books are not going to be available for the next four to six weeks. If we want reading and the publishing sector to become a central point, it has to be through digital. And there's nothing wrong with that. The more we do to foster digital, the more we do for people to engage and communicate and enjoy reading, whatever the format – e-book, audiobook – the better for all of us, when we come out of this crisis.

KENNEALLY: And do you have any data available to tell us what are some of the bestselling titles in Spain right now?

CELAYA: The data in Nielsen clearly indicates that the 20 most-read books in Spain during the last two weeks have been, on one side, very interesting – all local authors. People are reading very local stories. Out of the 20, there's not a single international author.

But at the same time, due to the concentration of publishing imprints in the last two years here in Spain – Penguin Random House and Planeta have been taking over many midsize and independent houses – out of those 20 most selling titles, 18 are from Planeta and Penguin Random House – and only one from an independent house and one from a midsize house, which is, to me, a very sad outlook of the future, because I think, also, this financial consumption crisis – at the end, a lot of midsize and independent houses will have to close or will be purchased at a very cheap price by one of these two mega publishing houses, and we'll have more concentration in the future, which is unfortunate for authors and readers.

KENNEALLY: And Olivia Snaije, in Paris, France, how about that question? What are some of the bestselling titles? What are some of the more popular reads at this particular moment?

SNAIJE: Well, I don't have access to Nielsen, like Javier. But I've compared a few sites. And it looks like the bestselling book right now is Leila Slimani's first volume of her trilogy about Morocco, called *Le Pays des Autres*, which I'm sure will be soon translated into English, because she's very popular in English as well.



A Copyright Clearance Center Podcast

And then, like in Spain, unfortunately, most of the books seem to be from big publishers – from the big groups. For example, you have the sort of normal bestsellers, like Guillaume Musso, Michelle Bussey, who are French. But one nice feature is that Albert Camus’ 1972 *La Peste*, or *The Plague*, is among the top sellers.

KENNEALLY: We appreciate speaking with you, Olivia Snaije, in Paris, thank you for joining me on the program.

SNAIJE: Thank you very much for inviting me.

KENNEALLY: And Javier Celaya, in Madrid, thank you, as well, for joining us today.

CELAYA: Thank you for inviting me. It was a pleasure.

++++++

KENNEALLY: In the novel *The Plague* by Nobel laureate Albert Camus, the gates of the Algerian city of Oran are shut during an epidemic, entrapping the citizens. Characters plot to escape or struggle to cope and assist others. Published in 1947, Camus’s fiction has strong resemblance to ancient plagues and, of course, for our own pandemic. Physicians treat the sick without fear. And officials dither and dissemble.

In his [acceptance speech](#) for the Nobel in 1957, Camus declared his dedication to writing as essential to his own existence: *“It is a means of stirring the greatest number of people by offering them a privileged picture of common joys and sufferings. It obliges the artist not to keep himself apart; it subjects him to the most humble and the most universal truth. And often he who has chosen the fate of the artist because he felt himself to be different soon realizes that he can maintain neither his art nor his difference unless he admits that he is like the others.”*

Over the weeks and months ahead, the response by authors and publishers to COVID-19 will capture our time and our humanity in all their complexity. The news accounts and scientific breakthroughs will call for the greater share of our attention. We should be grateful, too, when there is something else to read. In Paris, says Olivia Snaije, unexpected volumes may arrive outside your door at any time.

SNAIJE: I know, in certain apartment buildings here in Paris, neighbors are leaving books in a box downstairs, near the letterboxes, so that people can take books, so they’re sort of building their own mini-libraries. And there’s a lot of talk about, you know, what are you reading and how to get books – and for children too – so this is absolutely – I think people will appreciate more and more books.



KENNEALLY: We close this special Beyond the Book program, “Publishing & The Pandemic,” with sound from Madrid recorded this weekend by Javier Celaya – public appreciation for the city’s caregivers fighting the coronavirus. Jeremy Brieske is our co-producer and recording engineer. For Copyright Clearance Center, I’m Christopher Kenneally.

END OF FILE