

News

Manguel, Pinker, Sudan memoir hot at Frankfurt

BY DEREK WEILER

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Among the hot Canadian properties at this year's Frankfurt Book Fair is *Six Months in Sudan*, a memoir by doctor James Maskalyk about his sojourn in the troubled African country. On Friday and Saturday, Jennifer Shepherd, vice-president and director of rights and contracts for Random House of Canada, completed two auctions for the book: Australian rights went to Random House Australia, while Scottish publisher Canongate got U.K. rights. Shepherd would not discuss financials for the deals, but said, "We've [been] well paid for [our trip to] the fair, and that's a major understatement."

Six Months in Sudan recounts Maskalyk's experiences while working with Médecins sans Frontières; the book is based on a blog that appeared on the MSF website. Doubleday Canada bought world English rights from Westwood Creative Artists and will publish the Canadian edition in spring 2009; prior to Frankfurt, Shepherd had sold American rights to Speigel & Grau, a Random House U.S. imprint.

Frankfurt's other big Canadian title was Susan Pinker's *The Sexual Paradox: Men, Women and the Real Gender Gap*. Early in the fair, agent Denise Bukowski sold the book to four different countries; Bukowski later added a Japanese sale, to Hayakawa Publishing (through Japanese subagent Miko Yamanouchi at Japan UNI Agency), and on her last day at the fair, she was still expecting a Swedish offer. A Swedish sale would bring the total number of countries the book has sold in to nine.

For House of Anansi Press, Alberto Manguel's *The City of Words* (this year's Massey Lectures title) was the book of the fair. Anansi president Sarah MacLachlan says she received no fewer than five offers for Australian rights to the book, and will hold a formal auction after the fair; the book also drew offers from publishers in other markets.

Agent Samantha Haywood of the Transatlantic Literary Agency represents the Montreal graphica publisher Drawn & Quarterly, and found that the greatest interest at Frankfurt was in *Shortcomings*, a graphic novel by American Adrian Tomine. Haywood sold German rights for *Shortcomings* to Reprodukt and also took in multiple offers from Italian and Spanish publishers, expecting to close deals in those markets shortly after the fair.

Close to a dozen Canadian agents and more than 30 English-language Canadian-owned firms were at Frankfurt this year, most of the latter grouped in a Canada stand overseen by Association of Canadian Publishers executive director Carolyn Wood. All Canucks who spoke to Q&Q *Omni* were pleased with the fair, which closed on Sunday after five days. Few of them walked away with handfuls of completed deals, but many were weighing multiple offers, and all were looking forward to weeks of follow-up after back-to-back meetings. "The days when I was defensive about being a small Canadian publisher are long gone," said Douglas & McIntyre president Scott McIntyre. (McIntyre's new co-president and D&M's new owner, Mark Scott,

was also at the fair this year. It was Scott's second Frankfurt – he attended last year's fair as an observer when he was considering buying D&M.)

Other titles that sold at the fair include Leilah Nadir's *The Orange Trees of Baghdad*, which Denise Bukowski sold to Scribe Publications in Australia. And Second Story Press publisher Margie Wolfe recorded yet another sale for the phenomenon *Hana's Suitcase* – this time to Croatian publisher Dominovik in a walk-by deal. Second Story has now sold that book in 47 countries.

Some publishers, meanwhile, were doing more shopping than pitching. Random House of Canada executive vice-president Louise Dennys bought several books, among them James Harkin's *Cyberbia*, a non-fiction title about Internet culture; a novel about Tiananmen Square from Chinese author Ma Jian; *All the Living*, a debut novel from American C.E. Morgan; and *Convoy 30*, a non-fiction book by Caroline Moorehead about a group of women in the Paris resistance who were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps. (Moorehead's books will appear on the Random House Canada imprint, and the other three on Knopf Canada.) "I usually do not buy at the fairs," said Dennys. But she noted that thanks to Blackberry ubiquity, "the speed of the book fair now is changing.... I'm sending manuscripts back and forth to the office, and getting overnight reactions."

Penguin Canada president and publisher David Davidar and executive editor Nicole Winstanley were buying as well as selling in Frankfurt, too; they walked away with Canadian rights to Italian author Claudio Magris's next novel, as well as a mystery trilogy by Swedish author Stieg Larsson, who died in 2004.

Among the new exhibitors in the Canada stand was cookbook publisher Robert Rose, looking to pitch publishers on a new line of health titles. "It was a last-minute thing," said international sales and rights manager Arden Boehm. "I managed to get quite a lot of appointments, and [met] a lot of new publishers." Boehm also found herself selling several cookbooks in the Indian market, and she wasn't the only one: Arsenal Pulp Press sold *The Modern Aruweyic Cookbook* to Siddhartha Books in India (as well as *Desilicious*, an anthology of erotic South Asian literature). And Madison Press Books sold *1001 Foods* to Eumschau in Germany, and was weighing several offers for other books.

This year there were multiple groupings of Quebec publishers: eight were found in a Quebec stand in the English-speaking Hall 8, next to the Canada stand, while nine remained in a Quebec stand in the international Hall 6. Another 15 or so could be found in the main Canada stand, among the English-language publishers.

Several Canadians said aisle traffic felt more sparse this year, and some felt the American presence was lighter. According to official fair stats, total attendance was up slightly on Wednesday and Thursday (to 45,000 and 57,000, respectively) and down slightly on Friday and Saturday (to 52,000 and 72,000). The variance from 2006 was never more than a couple thousand on any given day.

In the rights arena, Frankfurt is facing ever greater competition from the spring London Book Fair. "London now is just as busy as Frankfurt," said Natasha Daneman, foreign rights director at Westwood Creative Artists. Said Scott McIntyre: "I think it's better timing in terms of publishers building lists." And Arsenal Pulp Press publisher Brian Lam is planning to hit the London fair in 2008, for the first time in several years.

That said, for now, publishers and agents seem to view the events as complementary and still see Frankfurt as a must-attend. And following Thursday's announcement of Doris Lessing as the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, there was one notable instance of Frankfurt serendipity. The main celebrations took place at the booth of HarperCollins, Lessing's current

publisher, but Canadian firm House of Anansi had rights to *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, Lessing's 1985 installment in the Massey Lectures series. Before the fair was out, Anansi's Sarah MacLachlan had received an offer for Mexican rights to the title.