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| Despite early resistance from publishers such as William Heinemann, the expansion of British and American literary markets between 1880 and the First World War rendered the services of a shrewd and knowledgeable literary agent necessary. This was especially the case for authors who hoped to make a living from their literary income. Agents arranged terms, negotiated rights and contracts, assessed markets, and placed material accordingly. |
| Despite early resistance from publishers such as William Heinemann, the expansion of British and American literary markets between 1880 and the First World War rendered the services of a shrewd and knowledgeable literary agent necessary. This was especially the case for authors who hoped to make a living from their literary income. Agents arranged terms, negotiated rights and contracts, assessed markets, and placed material accordingly. They helped navigate an increasingly fragmented print culture field, and by doing so, served an important mediating role between publishers, authors, and the mercurial reading public at the turn of the twentieth century.  *Historical Context*:  From 1880 to 1914, the publishing industries in Great Britain and the United States underwent dramatic expansions and reorganizations. By 1900, annual production of new books in Britain had climbed to nearly 6000, up from just 370 titles a century before; by 1914 this figure had doubled. In the field of periodical production, the total number of annually published titles, not including newspapers, grew from 3,200 to over 10,000 by the start of the First World War. During the same period, the number of *Post Office Directory* listings for literary agents in London rose from just 2-3 in the early 1880s to over 30 by 1913, reflecting the industry’s growing demand for skilled managers to facilitate and direct this expanding volume of print and visual material.  *Agents’ Role*:  Knowing what would sell, in what market, and for how much, literary agents maximized clients’ financial returns and crafted literary reputations, while targeting constellations of readers through a bewildering variety of new publishing options. By 1925, for example, agents often negotiated over twenty-six different rights to a single property. These included first and second serial, book, reprint, syndication, translation, dramatic, cinematic, radio, and gramophone rights. In addition, these rights were frequently negotiated for British, American, Colonial, and Continental markets simultaneously.  *Key Literary Agents*:  Established in 1875, the London firm of Alexander Pollock Watt & Son was the oldest and most respected firm in the business. Watt’s impressive list of celebrity clients included Marie Corelli, Walter Besant, H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, G.K. Chesterton, and Arthur Conan Doyle. The firm’s preeminence was virtually uncontested until the arrival of James Brand Pinker in January 1896. As an agent, Pinker famously championed artistically daring, but commercially less successful authors including Oscar Wilde, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence. By contrast, Watt negotiated many of the early twentieth century’s most lucrative publishing contracts, including those for Winston Churchill, Charles Garvice, and the Baroness Orczy. The American agent Albert Curtis Brown opened offices in London in 1899, and by 1905 was establishing himself as a formidable rival to both Watt and Pinker. These three firms remained among the most influential agencies in Britain and the United States throughout much of the twentieth century. |
| Further reading:  (Finkelstein)  (Gillies)  (Hepburn)  (McDonald) |