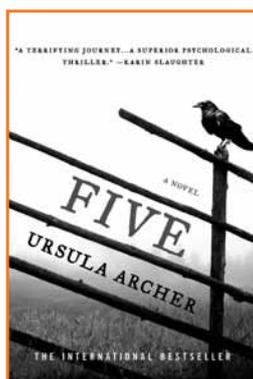
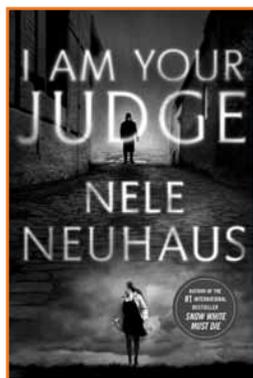
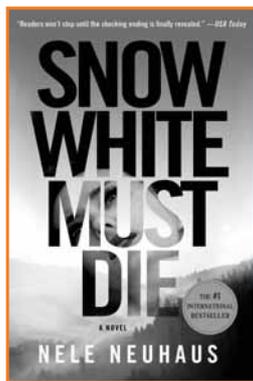


# An Editor's Perspective on German Crime Fiction

By Hannah Johnson

International crime fiction has sold steadily in the US market in recent years, proving wrong the oft-cited adage that translations don't sell well in America.

'In the end, a good book is a good book, no matter the setting,' says Daniela Rapp, Editor at St. Martin's Press in New York City. A native of Germany, Rapp reads multiple languages and has brought numerous translations to US readers. Here, she talks about her experiences working on crime fiction in translation.



## What do you love most about working on crime fiction?

My sensibilities as a reader have changed over the years. I used only to want to read very literary fiction. Now, my tastes tend more towards the commercial, plot-driven read, and crime novels certainly fit that profile. I love twists and turns, and guessing alongside the protagonists.

## You've brought some successful German crime writers to English-speaking readers. Can you give us some recent examples?

Our biggest success would probably be Nele Neuhaus's mystery series, beginning with *Snow White Must Die*. We will publish the fourth book, *I am Your Judge*, early next year, and Nele has certainly found a devoted audience here in the US. While her numbers here can't compare to the millions she sells in Germany, we are rather pleased with how the books are doing. We have also been successful with Ursula P. Archer's *Five*.

Both of these authors know how to ratchet up the tension, and their stories are original and unusual, while still following the basic concept of a crime novel.

## Some authors sell really well in their own countries, but don't connect with readers abroad. Are there certain traits in a book, particularly crime fiction, which might keep it from being successful in English translation?

I have heard the argument that if the authors' names or the names of their protagonists are unfamiliar (read: unpronounceable) to readers, it will make it difficult for them to succeed here. I disagree. Jo Nesbø does pretty well here, as do Arnuldr Indridasson and many others, both in crime fiction and in general fiction.

In general, though, there are very specific styles of writing in different cultures and countries, and some of those are more experimental, non-linear, or perplexing than what we would consider a mainstream crime novel here. That would make it a challenge to grow them in the US market. Length can be an issue,

as well as the book being too derivative of an author already established here in the US.

## Why do you think that international crime fiction appeals to English-speaking readers?

I am not convinced there is an audience who reads and seeks out specifically and only international crime fiction. Mystery readers want a strong plot, compelling characters, and good pacing. The international setting doesn't really change any of that. The exotic locales might add appeal for some readers, but in the end, a good book is a good book, no matter the setting.

## As a native German speaker, do you work closely with translators on German titles you've acquired?

Absolutely. I do edit the translation closely, and the process is really a back and forth between the translator, the author, and me. These contemporary novels use slang and colloquial expressions, in some cases even a regional dialect, and I make sure my translators feel they can come back to me for input and help if they are struggling with a phrase or a cultural concept.

## How big a role does the author's fan base or marketability play in your decision to make an offer on a book?

If the author's fan base is mostly abroad, it is irrelevant to my decision. More important to me is how well they speak English, and how 'pitchable' their book concept is. Fiction is more review-driven than non-fiction, so in the end it is mostly in the read.

## If you find a book that you want to publish in English, what internal decision-making process do you need to go through before you can make an offer?

As with all my acquisitions, I have to raise the project with the editorial board. In some cases, I will circulate sample translations, info sheets, and other relevant materials to the publisher and other departments ahead of time. Very rarely do I have a full translation to share, so our



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discussion is mostly based on my assessment of the book, as well as where exactly it would fit on our list. Based on my enthusiasm and their impressions, we figure out if the project is a viable one for us.

## What information from foreign publisher submissions is most helpful for you when deciding which books to consider for translation?

Info sheets, sales figures, prizes, blurbs from other writers, a good, detailed synopsis, and a sample translation – the longer the better, and not in bits and pieces.

Daniela Rapp joined the editorial department at St. Martin's Press in 2003, after stints in the performing arts and at a literary agency, and considers herself an omnivore when it comes to reading and books. This is reflected in her eclectic list of projects, which ranges from dark mysteries, animal and humour books, serious narrative non-fiction projects in history and pop science, to more whimsical titles in the memoir and travel genre. She reads Italian, French, and German, and as a former Frankfurt Fellow, tries to keep her finger on the pulse of the international publishing scene. As a result, she publishes German multi-million-copy bestselling author Nele Neuhaus and charming French storyteller Nicolas Barreau, among other translations.

Hannah Johnson is the publisher of Publishing Perspectives, an online trade journal for the international publishing industry. With a network of correspondents and publishing experts who live and work around the world, PP offers coverage of global markets and companies, along with deeper insight into the business of publishing and writing.

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