

Anne Meadows, commissioning editor at Granta/Portobello, talks to NBG

The Publisher

Publishing is a notoriously tricky industry to get into. Before joining Granta, I read for a literary agent for a few months, one day a week, while finishing my master's degree. I wasn't paid, but because I was studying in London and because I had a grant covering my degree costs, I was lucky enough to be able to afford it. The agent I worked for heard about the editorial assistant job at Granta through the publishing grapevine and recommended me. Without him, I wouldn't be working here now. I try and help our interns in the same way, through advice and recommendation, but it is indisputable that the publishing model favours those with the time and resources to work in London for free.

The Role

Publishing is incredibly demanding, and as a commissioning editor you rarely switch off. It's all consuming, in the best possible way, but it is not a career for people who like to have free time. As a commissioning editor you have to use all of your intelligence, determination and some charm: to find the books you want to publish, to convince the authors you're the right editor for them, to convince the book

stores to stock the books, the blurbers to blurb them, and then readers to read them. As I work at a small publisher, I am the centre of a very complicated, tactical operation designed to make sure that the book is the best it can possibly be in its English guise.

The List

Some of our best, and bestselling, works in translation are by German writers. We've just had huge success with Walter Kempowski's novel *All for Nothing*, the story of an affluent German family torn apart at the end of the Second World War. We also publish Peter Stamm, who writes in Swiss-German, and is translated by Michael Hoffmann; Jenny Erpenbeck, who is translated by Susan Bernofsky; and Herta Müller, the Romanian-German Nobel Prize laureate, who is translated by Geoffrey Mulligan and Philip Boehm. It's an illustrious list and one we are enormously proud of. What all of these writers have in common, I think, is literary craft. They are all extraordinary writers.

Translation

One of the joys of publishing translated literature is that there is just so much more to consider, and so much of it feels truly, thrillingly new – you could

find a writer like Flaubert, who will go on to shape the course of the novel as we know it. Commissioning a translation is a slightly different process to commissioning a novel from English. You still work with agents, and often foreign publishers, but before we decide to take on a translated work we approach an independent reader and commission them to write a report. We then use these reports, along with our own judgement, and any other sources we might have – sales to certain other European publishers, a recommendation from a translator, commercial and literary nous.

The Future

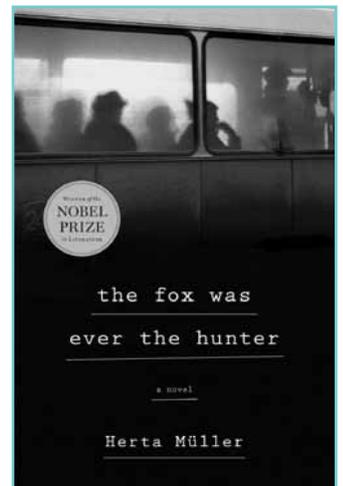
One of the many gifts of working for Granta and Portobello is that our first consideration is: is this a novelist whose work deserves to last for decades, who might change the face of the literary landscape, whose writing is breaking new ground? It means, of course, that we need to make a compelling argument for each acquisition, but it is, I think, the reason our list has so many extraordinary writers both in English and in translation. There's a whole world out there; it's a privilege to publish it.

[Interview with Emma Clarke](#)



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NBG interviews the translator Charlotte Collins

How did you get into translation, and how has your career developed?

I was living in Germany and doing a lot of voiceover work. A translated text can look fine on the page yet sound clumsy when read aloud, so studios like to hire 'speakers' who can also translate. Then I worked as a journalist for DW Radio in Bonn, and journalistic translation gradually became my bread and butter. About five years ago I asked myself what I could do that would make me love my work. I realised that I wanted to translate drama and literature. I went to the BCLT Summer School in 2012, and it all took off from there.

What have been your most enjoyable projects?

Translating *A Whole Life* by Robert Seethaler was a dream come true. I was asked to do a reader's report for Picador, and I absolutely fell in love with it. I told Picador they had to buy it, and asked if I could translate it. They took a chance on me because I was so enthusiastic. I gather that translators often feel very strongly that a book is theirs, which is how I felt about this.

What do you make of the great success of your translation of *A Whole Life*?

Naturally, I'm over the moon. I wanted others to love it as much as I did. It is so exciting that they do, and that I have been able to be part of that. I had a strong feeling that it had what it took to be a bestseller, but I had virtually no experience of publishing, and people kept saying that translated literary fiction doesn't sell on that scale. I hope this is proof that that's changing. The independent bookshops definitely played a big part – as did Matthew Garrett at Picador's art department, who created a beautiful object that people want to pick up.

What are you working on at the moment? Do you tend to translate one book at a time, or have several projects on the go at once?

I've just translated another Seethaler novel, *Der Trafikant* (*The Tobacconist*). It will be published in Canada by House of Anansi, and by Picador in the UK. I am also working on an amazing family saga for Scribe UK:

The Eighth Life by Nino Haratischwili, which I'm co-translating with Ruth Martin. Normally I've got both books on the go, but I prefer to immerse myself in one for a chunk of time.

Which book would you still like to translate?

I would love to translate *Mirjam* by Luise Rinser. Miriam (Mary Magdalene) recounts the story of her life, and sets the record straight – about herself, Jesus, the miracles, the origins of Christianity. The language is both direct and poetic, and Miriam is such a strong, believable, unexpected character. *Mirjam* was a massive success in Germany in the 1980s, and several writers – Colm Tóibín, Naomi Alderman, Philip Pullman – have had similar successes recently with Biblical retellings.

What advice would you give new translators?

Do reader's reports! Initially, I wasn't enthusiastic about the idea of reading some lengthy, possibly tedious book and writing a report on it for not a lot of money, but it really is a good way



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in. You need to get to know UK and US publishers, and they need to get to know your work. You should definitely join the Emerging Translators Network (ETN), a mostly online community that's a great source of advice. And I highly recommend doing one of the summer schools, at the BCLT or Birkbeck. They're very intense: you'll learn a lot.

[Interview with Johannes Hartmann](#)

Robert Seethaler's *A Whole Life* translated by Charlotte Collins has just been longlisted for the Man Booker International Fiction Prize 2016.