

Adam Freudenheim, Publisher and Managing Director of Pushkin Press, talks to NBG

Pushkin Press seeks to discover the best stories for adults (and lately, for children as well) from all over the world, from modern classics to the urgent and contemporary. There has been a strong focus on translation from the very beginning of the press's foundation in 1997, with a recent shift towards contemporary literature and to books from a wider variety of languages.

As Publisher and Managing Director, Adam Freudenheim is involved in every aspect of publishing at Pushkin, which includes commissioning and acquiring, editing, and working with designers and producers. He loves that he has a real overview of the entire publishing process. 'I never know what a particular day will bring,' says Freudenheim, 'and I'm constantly discovering new writers – past and present – from all over the world. What a pleasure!'

Publishing in London

Since London is such a cosmopolitan city, Freudenheim constantly meets people from all over the world. Stephanie Seegmuller, who works with him very closely at Pushkin,

is French. Their editor Gesche Ipsen is from Germany but also lived in Italy for a long time when she was growing up. 'It's a very international city and this certainly makes us more outwardly looking as a publisher,' says Freudenheim.

Translated Literature in the UK

'I'm pleased to say that I think Pushkin is part of a wider trend to publish more work in translation,' says Freudenheim, 'though our new children's imprint Pushkin Children's Books probably stands out more, as there's very little interest in translation from most children's publishers.' Although translation is still a very small part of the overall market, it is nonetheless a growing area. Freudenheim thinks that it will continue to grow in the coming years: 'Ultimately, readers don't care what language a book was originally written in. They want to read great stories, wherever they may come from.'

Selecting New Titles

'We have to feel that a given book is good and that we're passionate about it,' says Freudenheim. 'Ours is a small list, so if we're not passionate

about our books, how can we convince reviewers, booksellers and ultimately readers to take the time to read them?'

The current retail environment has more effect on how Pushkin publish rather than what they publish. 'We are trying to lead rather than follow the market,' says Freudenheim.

Translators often also play a role in Pushkin's selection process. The press is open to recommendations from translators, who on occasion pitch a book to them, accompanied by a sample translation, and convince them to publish it.

The Future

Pushkin Press have already published two dozen titles by Austrian author Stefan Zweig (1881-1942), who has developed a mainstream English-language following in recent years, and have two more in the pipeline. 'We are far and away the leading publisher of Zweig in English, worldwide,' says Freudenheim.



**PUSHKIN
PRESS**



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In 2015, Pushkin is publishing a new translation of Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des Jungen W* (tr. Romy Fursland) as well as the first English translation of Maxim Biller's recent *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* (tr. Anthea Bell). They will also be publishing Arthur Schnitzler's recently rediscovered novella *Später Ruhm*. In 2016, they'll be publishing Wolfgang Herrndorf's *Sand* and Saša Stanišić's *Vor dem Fest*. On the children's front, later this year they publish new translations by Anthea Bell of Erich Kästner's *Das fliegende Klassenzimmer* and *Das doppelte Lötchen*, followed by *Pünktchen und Anton* next year.

Interview with Tyler Langendorfer

NBG interviews the translator Isabel Cole

How did you get into translation and how has your career developed? Have you worked closely with any particular publishers?

I was always interested in language and writing, but I never thought of becoming a translator until I moved to Berlin in 1995 and realised my only really marketable skill was my language. I began with non-literary translation jobs, while simultaneously discovering more and more interesting German writers. After a few years I began translating samples and submitting them to magazines and publishers, but it was a lot of trouble for meagre results. I was discouraged and ended up shelving my literary projects for a while. Instead, I decided to create a place to publish German literature in translation: www.no-mans-land.org. In 2010, I was put in touch with Seagull Books. Their enthusiasm and élan were really a breath of fresh air, and I've translated several books for them since.

What have been your most enjoyable translation projects? I most enjoy the thrill of discovering a major writer who's unknown in English. I enjoy translating writing that resonates with me and carries me along, however dark or stylistically

difficult it may be. But I can't cite one of my projects over the others, because they're all close to my heart.

Do you get in touch with the living writers you translate?

Yes. It saves a lot of trouble to establish a cordial relationship with the author from the outset, and ask them questions rather than use guesswork. I have translated a number of dead writers, like Franz Fühmann and Wolfgang Hilbig, and I've immersed myself in their lives as much as I could, researching, visiting their haunts, talking to friends and relatives if possible. I'm now at the Neusiedler See in Austria where my current project, *Among the Biersch*, is set. I just met the author, Klaus Hoffer.

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

I don't like to juggle too much, especially not under time pressure, but I do lots of drafts and in between I need to be able to set the translation aside for a bit and switch to something else. Right now I'm translating this strange and wonderful Austrian novel, *Among the Biersch*, set in a semi-imagined Austrian-Hungarian-Slavic-Jewish culture on the edge of the puszta.

Which books would you still like to translate?

I would like to continue translating the work of Franz Fühmann and Wolfgang Hilbig, two East German writers of incredible immediacy and originality. Twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, I think we finally have the historical distance to appreciate the powerful writing that emerged from the pressures and tensions of that system, and realise that it has a great deal to say to us.

Do you have a favourite translated work by somebody else?

Let me instead mention a forthcoming translation I'm excited about – *The Country Road*, a collection of short stories by Regina Ullmann, translated by Kurt Beals, appearing this winter with New Directions. Ullmann was a protégé of Rainer Maria Rilke's, and had a truly unique, slightly off-kilter voice and sensibility. I'm sure Beals will have done an excellent job.

What advice would you give to new translators?

This is a great time to start – translation is cool again and there are lots of new (and old) publishers in the game. Translate what you're passionate about and learn to communicate that passion.



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Be patient and politely persistent – people in publishing are overworked and everything moves slowly. Don't be shy about contacting the authors and/or their publishers – they'll usually be thrilled to hear that you want to translate their work into English. Do be sure to settle rights issues, and so on, before investing time and effort. And if you are asked to do a translation, research recommended rates and contract terms. PEN America and PEN UK are good sources for model translation contracts and recommended rates. I've put together more detailed tips for translators on *no man's land* – check them out!

Interview with Alice Paul

Isabel Cole was shortlisted for the Oxford-Weidenfeld Translation Prize 2014, for her translation of Franz Fühmann's *The Jew Car* (Seagull Books).