

The 2019 DRF David Miller Bursary Report

I came to rights as an intern at AM Heath, starting a week before the Frankfurt Book Fair. It was an exciting introduction to the world of publishing, and being part of a small team allowed me to learn about all aspects of agenting. Two years later, as a rights assistant in a team of three, I started handling my own territories (Greece, Israel, Russia, Turkey, the Baltic countries and much of Eastern Europe), working on a list of authors such as George Orwell and Hilary Mantel, Kamila Shamsie and Maggie O'Farrell.

It was at this formative stage in my career, when I was looking to build experience, strategy and relationships that the DRF David Miller Bursary proved an invaluable opportunity.

I decided to choose five placements at publishing houses, rather than agencies, to develop my understanding of 'the other side' of publishing. Two UK publishers, two European houses and one US publisher would provide a broad perspective of the industry, and allow me to experience different working cultures in companies of varying sizes, some independent and others part of larger groups. Rosinante in Copenhagen, Profile and Vintage in London, Grove Atlantic in New York and Einaudi in Turin.

The common thread throughout my selections was undoubtedly the books themselves. Each publisher I chose has an incredibly exciting list, and I was drawn to the comparisons between them. Rosinante and Einaudi publish Sally Rooney and Rachel Cusk, Grove and Vintage publish Isabella Hammad, Jeanette Winterson and Samantha Harvey, to name a few of the connections. I felt that the intersections between these lists would enrich my placements further and reveal different approaches to publishing a book.

Alongside translation rights, I was keen to learn more about the wider aspects of publishing, from editorial and publicity to sales and production, as well as the relationship between agents and editors. The unique nature of the bursary allowed me to contextualise rights within the industry as a whole, and to connect with a huge range of people across international publishing.

Rosinante & Co, Denmark (6th – 17th May)

When I visited Rosinante & Co in May 2019, they were operating as an independent company within the Gyldendal group, which is the oldest and largest publisher in Denmark. The company is comprised of four imprints: Rosinante (literary Danish and translated fiction), Cicero (commercial translated fiction), Høst & Søn (upmarket children's and YA fiction) and Pretty Inc (romance and erotica). Initially established as a feminist press, Rosinante has published translated fiction alongside Danish fiction from the beginning. In 2019, around half of their new publications were translated books. The variety in their lists is important, as an editor from a different house noted, to be a publisher of certain significance in Denmark, you have to do a bit of everything. The Rosinante editors have close relationships with their authors and frequently welcome them into the beautiful Copenhagen offices to join them for lunch and to meet the team. It's a small house of around 40 people, and this adds to the warm, collegiate atmosphere.

I arrived in Copenhagen to a brilliant schedule for the two weeks, which Rosinante had kindly arranged for me. Along with in-house meetings with each department, I had lunches and meetings with different publishers and agencies all over Copenhagen: Licht & Burr Literary Agency, Hr. Ferdinand, Politiken Literary Agency, Gyldendal, Forlaget Grif, Information, Gyldendal Group Agency, Lindhardt & Ringhof, The Danish Arts Foundation, as well as visits to various bookshops and to the Louisiana museum. This really allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the Danish market and the current trends and challenges within the industry.

My time in Denmark proved very useful for contextualising the market within Scandinavia, as so often the Nordic countries have been bound up together in my mind, and indeed, at AM Heath, we work exclusively with one co-agent for the whole of the region. Each market has its own complexities however. Sweden is twice the size of Denmark and books are cheaper there. In Norway, there is a greater support system for new books, as the State buys 1,000 copies for libraries at the outset, and there is fixed pricing. Finland is particular, with a strong literary emphasis, and Iceland is even more obscure, and of course much smaller. I was told that there tends to be one Nordic country doing well at any given time, and the consensus throughout my trip was that it was currently Norway's turn. Denmark had a particularly good run some years ago, when big auctions caused people to brand it the 'new Germany', but now everyone is much more cautious with their spending, particularly in the context of the book fairs.

In Denmark, very few debut authors will be bestselling. As I learnt from the editors at Rosinante, it takes years to establish a bestselling author, and this is reflected in their approach to publishing. I was impressed by the emphasis on patience, longevity and author care. Indeed, on the Danish fiction side of Rosinante, an editor explained that it's rare for her to take on new authors: she had one debut in 2018 and one in 2019. It is equally difficult when it comes to translated fiction. This is partly because the market is so small that there is usually only one trend at a time, and there is no space to publish 'clones' – as one editor observed, rights agents promising 'the next Sally Rooney', or claiming 'you published X, so you must acquire Y' are frequently disappointed.

In terms of exporting local talent internationally, Rosinante's translation rights were previously handled by the Gyldendal Group Agency (GGA), however at the time of my visit GGA was only handling Høst & Søn's titles and film and TV. For a select number of Rosinante titles however, the publisher collaborates with RCW for translation rights. For these six titles, a reader's report is sent along with translated blurbs and reviews. The editor selects a sample of the text to be translated, which is usually 20-40 pages long and will form part of the submission. Generally, the Nordic countries will be approached first, with Sweden and Norway receiving the manuscript at an early stage. Holland and Germany are often the next territories to be considered, with the UK and US usually proving more difficult to break into.

My time in Copenhagen provided me with an in-depth knowledge of Danish publishing. As it is a small market and I was able to meet with so many different editors, agents and rights people, I came away from the two weeks with a really good sense of the individual tastes of editors and houses. I have a greater understanding of market trends such as the role of audio streaming in building a whole new digital market (70% of listeners are doing something else at the same time), and the threat of English language exports cannibalising Danish sales. Finally, I have a better sense of what the Danish readers themselves are looking for. All of this will inform my decisions and strategies

when selling translation rights. The relationships I developed within Rosinante are part of what makes this bursary so valuable. Spending two weeks within an organisation really allows you to experience a different working culture, and the staff at Rosinante took this one step further by including me in every aspect of their camaraderie. I joined the '2 x 25 year jubilee' celebrations for the CEO and the Publisher of Høst & Søn, I was welcomed into a publisher's home for an impressive four course dinner, and even spent a Sunday visiting the striking Kronborg Castle at Helsingør, in the footsteps of Hamlet.

In September 2019 I was stunned to hear that Rosinante & Co would cease to exist as an independent company, following a merger with Gyldendal. The four imprints were moved to Gyldendal's Klareboderne offices, with many of the staff going their separate ways. Subsequently, there have been a lot of changes in the landscape of Danish publishing, and I feel very fortunate to have visited before this upheaval and to have spent time at Rosinante & Co. It was a wonderful place, and I'm sure I am not alone in saying I will miss it.

Profile and Vintage, UK (17th – 28th June)

I spent a week at Profile followed by a week at Vintage, both of which were enormously useful experiences given that I have only worked on the agency side of the industry. The publishers arranged extensive schedules for me, which were a combination of one-to-one conversations alongside internal meetings stretching across editorial, sales, marketing, publicity, art, production and of course, rights. My aim was to come away with a better understanding of UK publishing as a whole, and all its moving parts.

As a rights person (and also as a reader), it was particularly exciting to attend the various editorial and covers meetings, Profile's acquisitions meeting and the Vintage 'hot titles' meeting. It was a unique opportunity to follow what happens on the publisher's side once a manuscript or a proposal has been submitted. For an agent, these processes can remain a mystery. I discovered that not only is there a discussion of the text, any comparisons, and the sales and rights potential, but there are a myriad of other things to consider at this early stage: how to make the jacket stand out, how citizenship can affect eligibility for prizes, and if an author is living abroad then the cost of travel must be factored into the publicity budget. The editorial and production meetings further illuminated the different timelines publishers must constantly work with. The focus on current titles is paired with a view to what will be published in the next couple of years, along with being continuously on the lookout for new projects. It's a lot to juggle, and observing these processes first hand provided me with some much needed insight into the path to publication and beyond. In the Vintage hot titles meeting for instance, it was particularly evident that the publisher's work is not done upon arrival of the finished copies, as key titles are regularly assessed by monitoring pre-orders and reviews, author events, relative performance in the UK and the US and the success of export editions.

At Profile, the acquisitions meeting was followed by the weekly meeting, which, among other things, contained a run-through of sales figures and company accounts. I was struck by the fact that everyone in the company has such a strong sense of the financial side of the business and that there is a feeling of shared responsibility, where each department is involved in the decisions taken to publish a book. As a counterpoint, agenting is sometimes described as a 'lone wolf' profession. Although there is

collaboration, often with the rights team forming the bridges within an agency, I found there to be more transparency on the publishing side. Both Profile and Vintage have a working culture which lends itself to this openness, in a literal sense. Profile's offices at the time were entirely open plan, and although the Vintage floor at Vauxhall Bridge Road has several individual offices, there was much discussion about how the new office move would change this.

This openness was extended to me during my time at both companies, and, as I have already touched upon, I was fortunate to benefit from a range of opportunities within the office and further afield. Helping with an author signing, spending an afternoon with Andrew Nurnberg Associates who handle Profile's translation rights, a meeting at the Wellcome to talk about their partnership with Profile, and an afternoon visiting several Central London bookshops, with a PRH Territory Manager. The visits to the bookshops displayed the end of the publishing journey, and gave me the unique opportunity to talk to booksellers about what their readers are actually looking for. What became evident was the difference in taste (and therefore sales) between readers in London and the rest of the UK. Working in this small publishing bubble in London, it is important to be reminded of the broader market realities.

These UK placements were perhaps the most crucial in allowing me to piece together a picture of how publishing functions as a whole. I gained a lot of practical knowledge about the industry: the boundaries between sales, publicity and marketing, what exactly a P&L is, the different formats a book can be printed in, and perhaps most importantly, a stronger commercial awareness. This will help me to consider the value of rights in a completely different way, as well as its place within the publishing system. It was also at this point in the year that I became aware of how my placements have allowed me to start drawing connections between different markets. I observed that a particular trend or challenge in one country would invariably appear in another, or a book that I'd heard about from one editor would crop up in conversation with someone else. Some weeks after my placement at Profile, I read in *The Bookseller* that the publisher had in fact acquired a book that they had been considering at the acquisitions meeting I had attended. It's hugely satisfying to be able to contextualise things in this way, and the bursary allowed me to fully immerse myself in the world of international publishing and begin to connect the dots.

Grove Atlantic, US (22nd July – 2nd August)

Following my UK placements at Vintage and Profile, my time at Grove Atlantic proved to be an excellent counterpart to what I had observed in London. Grove, like Profile, is an independent company which certainly 'punches above its weight', as I heard on several occasions during my time in New York. Alongside their successes in literary fiction and the upper end of commercial fiction, Grove's heavy hitting non-fiction adds real breadth to their impressive list. There are seven editors, plus a crime-editor-at-large, and the rights team is made up of a rights director, a rights manager and an assistant. It's a small team with an open-door culture, and there is a strong sense of collaboration. A theme which recurred in several conversations with the editors, was the importance of thinking like a publisher, and not like an editor. At Grove, the editors are involved in all aspects of the publishing process, and I, in turn, was able to experience this through my discussions with editorial, rights and publicity, and in observing their wider meetings.

During my time in New York, both Grove and the Deborah Rogers Foundation were invaluable in putting me in touch with agents, editors and scouts. My two weeks were spent dashing across town to meetings, lunches and drinks with LitHub, S&S, ICM, Abrams Press, InkWell Management, Bettina Schrewe, Knopf, Janklow & Nesbit, Aram Fox, Edmison Harper, Liz Gately, Maria B. Campbell, HarperCollins and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. This felt like a truly authentic New York experience. Having planned my visit for July-August, I was unsure of what to expect in terms of the season, but whereas London offices empty out in the summer months, in New York the pace was surprisingly brisk, especially given the 40-degree heatwave I arrived in the midst of. One agent spoke of year-round books, which are not affected by the seasons. This was confirmed by several others who said that even August can be a good time to go out with a big submission. So, my visit was particularly fruitful in that there were plenty of people still in the office and available to meet me, but not so overwhelmed by an upcoming busy season as to not have the time to chat. The result was a series of productive and inspiring meetings with a wide range of publishing people. Thanks to the prestige of the bursary, I was able to walk into these imperious New York offices and discuss books with some of the most respected individuals in our industry. It was a unique experience and one that I am immensely grateful for. My New York placement was perhaps the best example of the importance of office meetings: of making those face-to-face connections outside of the context of a book fair, in order to establish an international network of contacts. At this early stage in my career, it has provided me with an enormous amount of confidence.

In terms of the US market itself, there were many similarities to what I had been hearing in the UK: that literary fiction is more difficult than it used to be and that reviews in the press don't guarantee sales. The ongoing struggle for rights between agents and publishers and the importance of social media campaigns. The US market does have its own unique challenges, however, and at the time of my visit it was the printing problems that were causing concern for publishers nationwide. Print runs had to be judged very carefully as reprints were taking eight weeks. This was due to the closure of printers in the Midwest and the merging of centralised printers, leaving a backlog of titles. On top of this, the latter half of 2018 saw some exceptionally popular books in the US, such as Michelle Obama's *Becoming*, which monopolised the few printers still available.

I had several conversations about the efforts to diversify US publishing, which is of course a discussion at the forefront of the industry these days. One rather candid conversation with a young editor revealed the progress, specifically in literary fiction, with 'bi-costal' books addressing issues that are important to readers in cities such as New York, Boston, Seattle and Portland, however she acknowledged that it is still a struggle in other respects. Southern booksellers will simply not talk about these books, and similarly several US scouts commented on the difficulty in persuading their international clients to consider diverse voices. For translated fiction in the US, there is a modest audience, and it is publishers such as Grove who are so important here. In terms of staff within the industry, the diversity gap is a well-documented issue. Lee & Low's often cited study of minority representation from 2015, reported that 79% of the overall publishing industry (including executives, sales, marketing and publicity, and reviewers) identified as white/Caucasian, with this figure dropping to 76% in 2019. Similarly, there has been little change in the last four years in terms of gender (99% cisgender to 97%), orientation (88% straight/heterosexual to 81%), and disability (92% nondisabled to 89% in 2019). I met one or two younger editors who are actively involved in inclusion within

publishing, and while they observed that in recent years there has been significantly better representation amongst interns, it is undoubtedly harder at a higher level. As in the UK, there is still much to be done.

Giulio Einaudi Editore, Italy (11th – 22nd November)

The decision to undertake a placement at Giulio Einaudi was an easy one. I studied Italian literature for my undergraduate degree and my masters, and I was keen to learn more about the texts that I had pored over at university, and their place in the local market as well as internationally. Einaudi is an incredibly distinguished publisher. Part of Mondadori, the largest and most powerful publishing group in Italy, it retains an air of independence, cemented by the distance between their Turin office and the group's headquarters in Segrate, Milan. They also have a Rome office, which is the main seat of *Stile libero*: the more commercial imprint, and which houses the publicity team responsible for radio, film and TV. Einaudi's status as Turin's principal publisher adds to the aura of sophistication and prestige of the house. Einaudi was founded on the publication of 'saggi', or essays, and although their lists have multiplied and broadened since then, their books are always thoughtful, carefully curated and intended for a 'cultured' public. The brand is instantly identifiable in Italian bookstores, and synonymous with status. For this reason, it is important to keep the aesthetic consistent: a classic and pared-back design. It's rare for the publisher to step out of the box visually, as their readers have come to rely on the elegance of their traditional formats.

I spent my two weeks at Einaudi based in the foreign fiction department, which is made up of a team of four. I was able to observe and participate in all aspects of their work, from crafting cover copy, liaising with publicity over interview questions, checking in with the art department for the latest cover design selections, sitting in on wider company meetings and working with translators. Alongside a busy schedule of internal meetings across the house, I met translators, authors, and spent a day at the BookCity Festival in Milan.

My time with the foreign fiction team really put the value of my own work in translation rights into perspective. Einaudi publishes the most books in translation in Italy, and they pride themselves on the high quality of these translations, which set them apart from other editions. They have recently started adding translators' biographies to their jackets, below that of the author, and discerning readers will refer to this. The editors have close relationships with certain translators and often work with them on the text directly, something I discovered is unique to Einaudi. Listening to those discussions and the careful consideration which goes into each phrase, each word, was truly remarkable. Similarly, I arrived at the office early one morning to observe one of the translators working with a copyeditor. The detail of this work is crucial: where to use articles in the Italian, how to render inconsistencies in the original text, fact checking, and the nuances of translation. I only wish this particular copyeditor could have been there to proof the original text.

So, producing quality editions is at the forefront of Einaudi's work. It's important for them to be selective when it comes to new titles, as one editor reminded me: there are several newer Italian publishers who are acquiring a lot these days, but they don't have the enormous backlist that Einaudi carries, or the 'house authors' who deliver a

book a year. As a result, new submissions need to be special and really stand out, as anything deemed mid-list would be lost amongst the publisher's big names. My visit took place in November: the busiest time of year in terms of pre-Christmas sales. Indeed, the two months before Christmas account for one third of the publisher's annual sales, as books are often bought as gifts. In terms of the digital market, Italian readers are still very traditional. There is very little commuting, and the appetite for ebooks is low: sales make up 4% of the market, while audiobooks are deemed 'irrelevant', according to one editor. Unlike in Denmark, there is little concern for any English language export editions, as Italian readers prefer to read in translation.

I learnt a lot about the habits of Italian readers during my time in Turin, and perhaps most interestingly, about the importance of festivals. There are easily a hundred literary festivals in Italy, and each needs its own identity. For the reader, it is crucial to be able to see the author in front of them: to have a book signed, to clasp their hand to thank them for visiting – to make that personal connection. This was something I had not encountered to the same extent during my other placements. Regionalism also plays a part here, and it can be particularly effective to promote an author's work in their hometown. For the public, it is all about being part of an event. Non-readers will still go to festivals and buy a copy of the author's book as a way of thanking them for their visit, even those who then won't purchase another book for the rest of the year.

As a previous student of Italian literature, the opportunity to spend two weeks at Giulio Einaudi was an unparalleled experience, which really allowed me to immerse myself in the Italian market. The staff at Einaudi were very generous with their time and indulged my many questions in wide-ranging conversations. It was refreshing to learn that despite its serious books and elegant veneer, within this formidable house, there is a great deal of warmth and humour.

Conclusion

Having now had some time to reflect upon my placements, I can really appreciate how much I have learnt in the past year. The bursary has provided me with a huge amount of knowledge, experience and confidence and has not only developed my understanding of translation rights, but has contextualised it within the industry as a whole. It has allowed me to develop my own relationships and working style, which is so crucial at this early stage in my career.

I had expected the bursary to offer the opportunity to connect with rights professionals across the world, but I did not anticipate the extent of this network of contacts. I have met a huge range of people from all areas of publishing, which has filled the gaps in my knowledge of the industry and strengthened my place within it.

Being part of an international community is one of the most rewarding aspects of working in rights, from recognising faces in the Agents Centre at a book fair to sharing a project that you love with readers across the world.

Everyone I met across my five placements was willing to talk frankly (and at length!) about books. That people were so open and generous with their time is surely a testament to Deborah Rogers, David Miller and RCW. It is an enormous privilege to

walk into a prestigious publishing house and have these conversations with experienced publishing people, particularly as a rights person, rather than as an agent or an editor. I recall meeting a young editor at an event, who, upon hearing that I worked in rights, declared: 'it's sort of the unsung hero of publishing.'

The DRF has recognised this often overlooked area of our industry, and I sincerely hope that it will continue to support young rights people at this formative stage in their careers.