The Deborah Rogers Foundation (DRF) David Miller Bursary

The premise of the DRF David Miller Bursary is to offer a young rights professional an opportunity to gain international experience at a formative stage of their career, through offering work placements in publishing houses and literary agencies worldwide for a total of eight weeks. Offered every two years, the bursary includes a fund of £10,000 to cover travel and expenses. Applicants must have between two and six years' experience in the industry, and be currently working as a rights professional at a UK literary agency or publishing house.

In 2017, twenty publishing houses and agencies across the world signed up to offer the recipient a work placement; from Holland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Brazil, Germany, Australia, US, and more. Applicants were asked to identify which companies they intended to select, how long they would spend there, and how these companies (and the bursary as a whole) would develop their career.

There were 35 applicants, from which a short list of three was selected and then interviewed by the Judges.

The Judges were Andrew Franklin, Chair (MD of Profile Books), Michael Bhaskhar (Canelo), Anne Louise Fisher (founder Anne Louise Fisher Associates), William Fiennes (author and co-founder of First Story) and Hannah Westland (Serpent's Tail).

The winner of the inaugural DRF Bursary was **Sam Coates,** Senior Rights Executive of Vintage Books, PRH. The two runners-up were Celia Long (Senior Rights Executive of PRH), and Emily Randle, (Translation rights, David Higham Associates).

Gill Coleridge, Director of the Deborah Rogers Foundation, comments:

'One of Deborah's defining qualities was her total commitment to supporting and nurturing those with talent, whether a new author or someone within the agent and publishing community. Selling and managing rights is at the heart of our business so we set up the Bursary to help exceptional young professionals who are already working in this field develop their contacts and understanding of international publishing at a crucial point in their careers. I was delighted by the response to this Bursary and **Sam Coates** is a very deserving winner out of a strong shortlist. I am pleased to send his report herewith."

March 2018

DRF Bursary 2017 Report – Sam Coates

Like many who come to publishing with limitless energy and an almost total lack of understanding about the industry, I had little notion of what 'rights' were and what a team designated to them would do. Assistants in other departments would knit their eyebrows when asked, and offer a couple of sentences that would invariable end: 'but don't quote me on that'. So when I started applying for tranches of work experience placements after graduating from SOAS with an MA in Indian Religions, rights wasn't top of my 'to try' list. But I was lucky enough to experience a broad education in the various areas of publishing (rights included) at a small press, Anthem. And from there, a placement in the Penguin Adult Rights team led to a maternity cover in the same team in the summer of 2013, and from there a position at Vintage as rights assistant.

Four years on, as a senior rights executive handling translation rights for specific territories across the Vintage list (from Irvine Welsh to Ruth Ware, Bradley Wiggins to Lucian Freud) in a team of four, I am committed to rights selling. Why? Working with acquiring editors across the globe, each with a different cultural background, each with the same passion for books, each publishing into a market with its own rules and trends, meeting them all at book fairs, with the knowledge that them signing up to publish a book might be the difference between the author becoming a career writer or not: these are the joys of a rights professional's role. And this is the foundation from which I applied to the DRF Bursary.

The abstract I started from was to structure the bursary around four agencies and publishing houses that sell and publish literary authors – lists similar to the list I work on at Vintage. The rationale was to amplify the differences in focus (which territories they look to sell into first, the networks they've built) and working practices (structure of the rights department and methods of submission/follow up) rather than the difference in books, while absorbing the broadest of working cultures.

After two weeks at each organisation (Cappelen Damm in Oslo, RCW in London, De Bezige Bij in Amsterdam, and FSG in New York) I gathered far more in scope than I had anticipated. From Norway and the Netherlands I grew to understand the translation market there in some depth. RCW provided the colour to much of the framework I had understood of a literary agency, while presenting new practices in rights selling. And in the US I came to understand the differences and similarities that keep their market and ours tied.

At each placement, I relied heavily on a small set of individuals who supplied names, email addresses and contexts for the editors and rights people that made up the sum of the bursary. Without their help I would barely have scratched the surface of each territory.

Cappelen Damm, Norway (5th to 16th June)

The first and most frequent idiom I heard in Oslo was: 'Norway is the last Soviet state'. A dig favoured by the Swedes, alluding to the strong Social Democratic philosophy that is lived and breathed in Norway. Including its publishing industry.

All but a handful (those whose agents refuse) of Norwegian writers sign a standardised contract with agreed standardised terms for publication. The Authors' Association and Publishers' Association are aligned with a strength that enables them to level the Author-Publisher playing field of publishing. That might not sound like an incentive for authors aiming to subsist on their writing alone, but there are

perks: around 1,000 copies of each book published are bought by the Norwegian Arts Council to be made available in libraries. Another: books are valued highly, somewhere between 400 and 500kr (£37 to £46) for a new title, for which the price cannot be altered by the publisher or the bookseller for the first 9 months of its life. A third: while the big bookshop chains are linked to the largest three publishers (Tanum is related to Cappelen Damm, ARK is a sister venture of Gyldendal, and Norli is owned by Aschehoug), legislation ensures that all bookstores must make available books from each publishing house.

The result is an industry that feels collegiate, transparent and fair.

The hub of Norwegian publishing sits at the centre of Oslo. Sometimes too close for comfort. Gyldendal sits one on side of Sehesteds square, Aschehoug faces it from the other side, with only a small courtyard in between. The buildings are mirrors of each other. Occasionally, after an auction for a particularly sought-after book is concluded, the editor of translated fiction at Aschehoug puts good-natured signs in the widow that faces the editor of translated fiction at Gyldendal, or vice versa.

The schedule of meetings I was handed on the first day I spent with Cappelen Damm was a further reflection of the collegiate nature of Norwegian publishing. A day with the editors who acquire literary fiction in translation, a day with the commercial fiction department, two days across the non-fiction departments, a day at Aschehoug, a day at Gyldendal, all the while running back and forth with the Cappelen Damm rights department. Author events, summer parties, a day at Utøya with French journalists, a dinner at the Literaturhuset with German editors, and checking Twitter to see if the beloved Norwegian Roy Jacobsen had won the International Man Booker (he unfortunately hadn't).

Cappelen Damm encompasses most forms of trade publishing: the very literary, to the mass-market; children's books, to graphic novels, to poetry. The rights department there, though, know that their international success lies at the literary end of the scale. Each deal is hard-fought. Each manuscript must have an English language sample before sending out. Each author must be ready for a European tour. Each debut competes with every other debut across Europe. This was one of the clearest examples of the soft power of English language publishing; the language barrier mostly doesn't exist from English to other European languages. Much of the German publishing industry reads English, few read Norwegian.

And so when a deal is done, the rights department at Cappelen Damm swing into motion to promote it on social media. Every deal. This explains why the department of four is formed of two rights agents, one administrator and one social media marketer. The need to amplify good news and self-promote in order to yield further rights deals is integral.

But that's not to say rights agents are struggling; since the Salomonsson agency exploded onto the scene, in-house rights departments have had to explore new ways of finding its value. Each of the big three publishing houses have rebranded their rights departments as distinct from their parent company. This started with Aschehoug's department no longer representing Jo Nesbø, and rebranding as Oslo Literary Agency. Cappelen Damm Agency grew from the in-house department, etc. With the strict rules on publishing contracts between authors and publishing houses, these new agencies agree a secondary contract with the author separately to obtain translation rights.

My time with the editorial side of Cappelen Damm coincided with the introduction of the new Head of Fiction, who was said to be intending to move people and resources. This proved interesting from the outside, seeing a long-standing house going through restructure in order to prove more profitable. The hierarchy of the editorial teams was slightly different from what I was used to. There is a CEO, and MD who overlook the whole of the Editorial team. But underneath are a Head of Fiction and Head of Non-Fiction. Each managed the pockets of editors who specialised in a specific area; for example the

three editors who only acquire literary fiction in translation, the four who acquire upmarket non-fiction, etc. Without imprints, there is a different sense of identity, and it appears to be within those pockets of people, and among the specific publicity, marketing and production people they work with.

Over the course of two weeks I gained a deep knowledge of the book industry in Norway. The tastes that work in the bookshops, the tastes that reap the highest advances in auctions (often the two are not linked – international success and hype can push an advance beyond a logical P&L), the focus on Sweden, UK and Germany as the fertile grounds to translate from, and the idiosyncrasies of the day-to-day functions that editors and rights people must traverse to buy and sell. The time also allowed me to bed-in to Cappelen Damm, to grow relationships organically, not in a 30 minute meeting, and to gain a further understanding of the tastes of the editors. This will of course directly affect the way I submit books to the publishing house.

There has been an incredible value in meeting each editor, forming a personal bond, colouring their idiosyncrasies, their reading tastes, the number of cows on their farm (in one case); each piece of personality is valuable. There is logic in not sending a book to a specific editor, in not sending any books until the right one. That's the case across each of my placements, and I won't repeat the sentiment for each.

I'll end by saying that over a coffee with one editor who I grew particularly fond of over the two weeks I asked them if they see many in-house rights people from the UK at Frankfurt or London. Their response was candid: 'I'm not sure I would, as my time is spent meeting as many agents and rights agents who I know will send me something huge at some point in the future.' If nothing else, this gives credence to the necessity of visiting editors in their own cities, outside of book fairs.

RCW, UK (28th June to 12th July)

Having never worked on the agency side of the fence, the two weeks at RCW proved to be particularly insightful. My main aim before starting at the agency was to explore the intrinsic differences between an agency and a publishing house in rights selling. To come away with a better understanding of when and on what basis the decision to release translation rights to a UK publisher is made. And to see what differences, on a very basic level, there are in the submission process with my own experience and practice.

My time was spent half sitting in the rights department, and half among assistants, while meeting the full roster at RCW and a few people in the wider UK publishing scene. The rights department, agents and assistants were each extraordinarily open to discussing decisions and practice within the agency, and I ended the two weeks with a wealth of information. Much of which helped colour the more unknown sides of agenting for me.

The translation rights department is formed of six people, four of whom work solely as translation agents. The insights of these individuals have already been invaluable to my working practice. There is clearly a deep focus on the areas of publishing outside of the more mainstream rights selling network. For example, a strong knowledge of international literary festivals, an understanding of what it means when a specific journalist in a specific European newspaper positively reviews a local-language edition, etc. There is also an inherent proximity to the author which affords an agent's rights department a more direct relationship, where there may be a degree of separation from the publishing rights department.

Primarily due to their proximity to the authors, in-agency rights departments tend to retain translation rights with the more profitable and renowned authors. This adds value to their brand as a rights department, and in so doing adds value to the debut authors that come through. It is worth noting,

though, that this is particular to specific types of books; certain agencies are known for their successes with literary novels, others on sporting biographies. Publishing rights teams tend, in general terms, to have a broader spectrum of books to work with.

Standard practice when a submission comes in to a publisher's rights department is to read quickly, make a judgment on which international publishers may be interested in publishing, and putting a figure against the worth of the translation rights. There is always the knowledge that the agency offering the book will with all likelihood be intending to retain rights in-agency. What my time at RCW provided was the agent side of this dynamic. When a publishing house is quick, bullish with their offer and attractive to the author, it can be more useful to agree for the house to handle rights rather than the agency. An agency must be pragmatic, and advise the author accordingly.

I found it particularly interesting to discuss the role of the agent within the agency during my placement. From a rights perspective, a good working relationship with an agent is essential. 'Agents are planets', I was told, each orbiting at their trajectory, and their rights department needs to know how each function in their own idiosyncrasies.

For the assistants and agents themselves, the qualities that make an agent vary. To some agenting is a constant self-branding exercise. For others the brand comes through the authors on their list. And to a few branding is irrelevant: it's the book that sells itself. But in relation to the RCW colophon, every agent is collegiate.

While each agent presented agenting in a different way, the key tenets remained the same: pragmatism at all costs, an authenticity of personality, a limitless work ethic, and a desire with every book to go into publication with everyone involved happy. That last point can be the most difficult to achieve, and it's often down to the personal relationships of author-agent or agent-editor that can smooth out potential difficulties. We work in a small industry, with a long history.

The two weeks at RCW helped me consider the ways in which traditional rights selling can be expanded, particularly by drilling down into specific territories in order to have a broad perspective on its position. It also encouraged me to rethink how I interact with authors and agents. The preferable situation and target is to be as close and open with the author and agent as possible. This works both as a self-publicising exercise for an in-house rights department and an important way to feed information in real time, to avoid miscommunication, confusion and tricky situations in the publisher / agent / author dynamic. The only way to form long-lasting relationships in this small industry is to maintain an honesty and transparency with all people involved.

Finally, meeting with the variety of people of the two weeks has helped build a network of UK-based agents and rights people, which will no doubt be invaluable over the years and through the various book fairs.

De Bezige Bij, Netherlands (17th to 28th July)

Picking a Dutch publisher was a simple choice; the market is one of the fastest growing with a strong readership base, and as 75% of all books published there are translations (primarily from English) the Netherlands is a key territory for a rights agent.

My time at De Bezige Bij was spent mainly with the acquiring editors of fiction at DBB and Cargo (an imprint of De Bezige Bij), alongside a varied list of meetings with editors and rights agents across Amsterdam (Meulenhoff, Ambo Anthos, Marianne Schönbach, Das Mag, Atlas Contact, Signatuur, Bruna, Dutch Publishers Association). Each individual provided a slightly different perspective on

where the Dutch market is, each offered their own experience in an unguarded way, each proved superbly useful.

The rights department is made up of three agents working across the De Bezige Bij, Cargo and Thomas Rap lists. As with the Cappelen Damm Agency, there is a strong focus on self-promotion through social media and often the need for English-language samplers before submission. The assumption that a publishing house would handle translation rights for their Dutch authors is no longer the case, though. As with Scandinavia, there has been a rise in Amsterdam-based agents in recent years.

Having said that, the rights department at De Bezige Bij seem to have built such strong relationships with their authors that when one particularly important author moved to another publisher for a single book, the De Bezige Bij rights department handled translation rights. On one level they have achieved this through the personalities in the department. On another, they offer what I would warily describe as a more agent-like approach to translation rights selling. They are close to their authors, constantly in contact with them, informing them of progress or lack of progress. They connect with the translators who translate out of Dutch, taking the view that there is a value in knowing them personally, getting to understand where their reading lies, and which books would be useful for them to read in the hopes that they may speak highly of them to their local editors. As the rights department don't work with any European subagents, other ways of maximising their visibility is crucial.

The two weeks in Amsterdam coincided with a rare moment in which publishing was at the forefront of the national news. The Publisher of Atlas Contact was in a public standoff with the board members, citing independence of the publishing house endangered by expansion plans. Much of the industry and her authors sided with the Publisher, the latter making it known they would follow her if she were to leave. This conflict made its way into the biggest newspapers, onto news programmes. Which highlights the value placed on books and the industry behind them in the Netherlands; I've not experienced a similar outcry to the same public level in the UK.

Again dissimilar to the UK, there is greater mainstream visibility of books. A high profile TV show dedicated to new books picks four titles every month to discuss, often including debut authors. The Crossing Borders Festival in Den Haag melds music with literature with the conceit: inviting compelling contemporary and alternative authors and musicians from all over the world, who share a passion for spoken word, lyrics and language. There is dynamism in the Dutch market.

This is further highlighted by the meteoric rise of Das Mag (the publishing arm of the young literary journal Das Magazin) which crowdfunded for the publication of their first three books as a publishing house. One of which, Lize Spit's *Het Smelt*, won prize after prize, sold in numerous territories, and introduced Das Mag as the exciting, raw new publishing house. More so than in the other territories I found that the place of a publishing house in public consciousness – what it means to readers, the public and the industry – was incredibly important. De Bezige Bij has enjoyed the mantle of being a pseudo-revolutionary house, started illegally by a freedom fighter in the 1943 resistance in Occupied Netherlands to promote discord, with the offices half owned by the authors of the house. Das Mag sits in a loft extension, next to a hip hop record company, above an unashamedly expensive design store. The difference of history and direction is palpable.

There is a discussion around whether the new model that Das Mag employs will be the future – to publish as few titles as possible, designed strikingly, and publicised directly to their core audience – or if the more 'traditional' method (that of any large house across Europe and the US) employed by De Bezige Bij will continue to have primacy. But given the energy that exists in the Dutch market, there seems to be room for both. And objectively, the reader profits from the variety.

Amsterdam gave me the time to absorb quite an enormous amount of information on the characteristics of the industry in the Netherlands. This will inform the basis of my working practice with Dutch-language publishers in due course, as well as providing me with a solid professional and personal network of individuals each with a passion for books.

And specifically – alongside a similar thread picked up during my time at RCW – I intend to utilise the necessity and added value of exploring beyond the traditional rights selling network, and exploring the important fringes of translation.

FSG, US (5th to 15th September)

Selecting FSG as one of my four placements was perhaps an odd choice for someone working only on foreign-language rights, but proved to be unique experience. No other territory is as singularly tied to the UK market than the US. Tastes do align, as does the primacy of the shared language: broadly speaking English is one of most attractive languages to translate from.

I spent the two weeks part-time in the FSG offices just as they geared up to move offices. Other than offering to help move boxes, I organised a schedule of meetings and lunches with a number of the editors and rights people across the house. And in so doing, the people at FSG were vital in contacting and setting up meetings with editors and agents across New York: Picador, PRH, HarperCollins, Sterling Lord, New Directions and Grove Atlantic.

I was, though, always anchored to the rights department. I saw the familiar look in the eye of a rights person as the Frankfurt chaos built, I saw them submit, and I even saw them in the midst of hiring a new assistant. Their department is made up of four agents, three working across international territories, and one dealing with domestic rights.

The individuals in the rights department are conduits for their editors. They highlight what is working internationally, are constantly at the door of editors, badgering for information on submissions. FSG are able, like Knopf, to use the leverage of their name and colophon to move their books up editors' reading piles. Their vast and impressive history and strong backlist places them one step ahead of other US publishers by default. Though that's not to say rights selling is simpler; a publishing house built on rights has the pressure to continue to succeed as a rights-heavy business without slowing.

That the two main agents were both previously scouts, with networks already earned and built on transparency and honesty, helps enormously. And with the mantra 'the biggest deal isn't always the best deal', FSG are in a rarified position in relation to most in-house rights departments.

New York Literary agents have always been bullish, but in the last few years there has been a renewed 'conflict' with in-house rights departments over translation rights. Both sides seem a little more entrenched than the experience here in the UK. Some US publishing houses refuse to cede translation rights to agents; some agents do the same.

In the market in general, the indies appear to be thriving, partly through being brave, taking risks and building companies around a set of superb individuals. There's also a flexibility inherent in them. Editors can be rights sellers concurrently. Grove has two superb industry-focused and almost altruistic projects: LitHub and Book Marks. The latter of which is of particular genius. Critical reviews in the press are collated for each book, and then given an aggregated score. The MetaCritic of books. And the books are from publishers across the industry, not only Grove. It is an industry-wide benefit, with the conceit to bring more people to books in general, and that's a fight that seems to be happening in every

editorial meeting across the city. But in an indie the distillation of the idea appears to come from the smaller unit; in this instance a mid-sized house took a valuable idea and ran with it.

My time in New York broadened the role of a rights seller in my eyes, and their place within the publishing house as a whole. It also reinforced the necessity of being forever at the door of each editor, asking for material, or information, or to bid higher on a book in order to obtain the translation rights. The two weeks there also extended to me a bright future for publishing, an innovation that isn't based in social media, but in placing books in new contexts to find readers. I can see the value of bringing that to the international rights arena, with new platforms to present books in a different way.

In general, the competitive spirit that drives the industry in the US (stemming from working culture in general, I imagine) is conducive to perhaps a little less collegiate industry than in Europe. But the sheer scale of the publishing market there enables a varied and stable platform for indies and global houses to thrive in their own distinct way.

Conclusion

With hindsight the decision to split the eight weeks into four two-week placements gave me ample time to bed-in to each organisation, to become established in the office environment and to meet extensively with key figures at each organisation. And more importantly it afforded a broader spectrum of experience across key markets in the foreign rights industry. I would suggest future candidates for this bursary consider this option. Completing the bursary over the course of one summer while away from the office proved to be a good way to allow my employer to find ample cover while I immersed myself in each placement.

Unsurprisingly underneath the particulars of each city, each publishing house, and each individual, is a constant that binds them. A passion and unending need for great books. It has proven, unsurprisingly I suppose, a universal equaliser.

For myself, the bursary has provided a wealth of experience, knowledge and information which I intend to draw over the coming years. More specifically I have a more holistic understanding of the value (both culturally and financially) of a project in translation. And, I hope, a stronger ability to assess the likely sense of sales for specific books in the territories in which I travelled.

A greater sense of confidence has also been a welcome addition. Walking into the offices of some of the great individuals in publishing is not something often offered to the junior staff, especially from the hinterland of rights. And in relation to this, the weight behind the bursary in the form of Deborah Rogers, David Miller, and RCW as a whole has meant that every request I sent for a meeting with editors across the four territories was responded to with genuine warmth and positivity. All understood the value of the experience, and freely gifted their time, their expertise and in one case their home (temporarily at least) to me.

That the bursary has given me the chance to learn and grow has been special. I am enormously grateful for the chance, and hope I undertook it with the vim and spirit in which it was designed.

For those who find their way into this competitive industry without the contacts and theoretical experience that is earned through a masters in Publishing, a career is built from scratch. The first years are an exercise in learning what rights selling is, and how best to sell rights while building a network of social and professional contacts. A baptism of fire. This bursary is a unique springboard for the career of a young rights person, and I would urge all involved to continue to make it available over the years.