

Publisher Focus: Archipelago Books

Samantha Schnee

Archipelago Books is a Brooklyn-based not-for-profit press devoted to publishing excellent translations of classic and contemporary world literature. In its first eleven years, Archipelago has published over 100 books from more than 30 languages.

Jill Schoolman, who founded the press, believes that artistic exchange between cultures is a crucial aspect of global understanding and that it has never been more important for voices from around the world to be available to largely monolingual English language readers. To this day, less than 3% of new literature published in the USA, where Archipelago is based, originates outside the Anglosphere; by publishing diverse and innovative literary translations Archipelago is doing what it can to change this lamentable circumstance and to broaden the Anglophone literary landscape.

They hope their translations will increase cross-pollination between readers, writers, thinkers, and educators across borders. Archipelago partners with like-minded organizations both in the United States and beyond—local independent bookstores, community centers, literary and arts organizations, universities, foreign institutions and embassies, and reading series across the country—to host a wide array of literary events, including interviews, discussions, and readings.

I spoke with Jill by email about the creation of Archipelago eleven years ago, what the press has accomplished over the past decade, and what the future holds.

SS: What was your inspiration for founding Archipelago? How did your career to that point in time prepare you for launching the press?

JS: During the time I was working as an editor at Seven Stories Press, I became increasingly aware of how many masterworks from around the world weren't being published here. I knew that I wanted to be a part of changing that reality. I learned an enormous amount from my three years working with Dan Simon at Seven Stories. Beyond taking in the nuts and bolts of editing, design, publicity, and the rest, I was inspired by how much can be accomplished by a small group of dedicated and passionate people. Being there surrounded by all that good energy gave me the confidence that leaping into the unknown with my own ideas and hopes (surrounded by a circle of good people) might actually be possible.

SS: How did you choose your first authors, and has your method for selecting works to publish changed over the years?

JS: Some of our first authors were authors and translators I learned about during my days at Seven Stories. Bill Johnston had sent us a beautiful excerpt of Magdalena Tulli's *Dreams and Stones*. I remember calling him from a payphone in Vermont telling him how much I loved those pages (and hoping that we could publish the book with SSP) and then later when I was ready to start Archipelago asking him if it could be one of our first books. He was game. Our other first books included *Sarajevo Marlboro* by Miljenko Jergović, which I read in a Penguin UK edition that had fallen out of print, and Rilke's essays on Auguste Rodin, which I knew about from an old limited edition. It was a thrill when my dear friend Daniel Slager agreed to translate those and when William Gass agreed to introduce the book. I don't believe my method for selecting our books has changed too much over the past twelve years. For me it is still about finding original voices that have something profound and new to say, that create an entire universe for the reader to lose herself or himself in. I think that from the early days of the press, we didn't take on an author or a particular book unless we found an extraordinary translator at the helm to bring the work into English with skill and magic.

SS: How do you select your translators? What do you look for in their translations?

JS: Our translators find us and we find them in a variety of ways. Often we will approach a translator whose work we admire and who we feel might have a natural connection to the book at hand. We spoke with Richard Sieburth, for example, about translating Büchner's *Lenz* after having read his remarkable Hölderlin translations. Sometimes we will reach out to a translator we'd like to work with even before we have a specific project in mind. We did this with Richard Zenith, and his beautiful João Cabral de Melo Neto collection grew out of our conversations. Very often translators will propose projects to us, and we will bite if we fall in love with both the work itself and the translation. A translation sample doesn't need to be spotless of course, but what matters is that it comes alive in English. I always look for a translator's ability to capture both the spirit and the language of a work, both the atmosphere and an author's style and rhythm. We look for translators who are inventive and impressive writers in the English language, and who have the ability to listen carefully and find ways not only of recreating the voices they hear but also of reproducing the music of a text.

SS: What has been your greatest success to date, in your own estimation?

JS: More than the reception of a particular author or book, I feel that our greatest success has been Archipelago's survival. The margin is so narrow when it comes to selling books that even when a particular title does well, it doesn't necessarily translate into resources for a publisher after everyone receives their share. And fundraising is a delicate and difficult art too. It is necessary for our tiny staff to discover the kindred spirits out there who might be willing to support our efforts, to carve out time and energy to connect with them and write grants, plan events, and keep the supportive individuals in various corners involved with our books and with our larger mission. It continues to be a tightrope walk, but a satisfying one for both the spirit and mind. We realize how central every author, translator, reader, book critic, librarian, bookseller, contributor, sales rep, educator, and literary agent has been for us over the past decade. We remain ambulatory thanks to them.

SS: How does Archipelago differ from other independent presses publishing translations?

JS: I feel that our growing archipelago of books has strong connective tissue. Although the range of the titles we publish covers a lot of ground, I think that certain elements run through them: perhaps it's a pull towards the thought- and emotion-provoking, toward unmistakable voices, towards a certain human impulse, a gravitas, and in many cases an element of serious play: a luminous humour that cuts deep and stays with the reader.

SS: How do you find the people that serve on your small staff?

JS: We've been incredibly fortunate. From the press's inception, I've always been able to rely on one other person to co-pilot our operations. Recently we've hired a third full-time person. And we have an excellent internship program. Often just the right person (with genuine love of world literature, an open and generous spirit, and an ability to keep a dozen balls in the air) will surface at just the right time... Kendall Storey is my current accomplice. She's brought amazing energy and creativity and passion to the press. My colleagues (including our devoted interns) are really the ones who run the press when it comes down to it, and we are guided by a caring, committed board who bring some excellent ideas into the mix.

SS: If you were an Archipelago author, who would you be?

JS: I think I would be a translator. I have the deepest admiration for their work, they perform miracles on a daily basis.

SS: Do you have a favourite language or country literature?

JS: No, every language and culture and literary tradition reveals an entire world. We do hope to look actively for works from smaller languages as we move forward. We would like to keep exploring.

SS: Do you think English-language editors approach editing differently to editors working in other languages?

JS: I wonder... I know that Eastern Europeans tend to be more hands-off than we are, but beyond that I suspect it might be a combination of an editor's individual personality and the editorial culture he or she is working within. It would be an interesting question to explore further.

SS: What is your vision for Archipelago's future?

JS: We will be launching a children's imprint called Elsewhere Editions in April of 2017 focusing on inspired picture books from around the world. We'll be starting with Claude Ponti, Roger Mello, and Jostein Gaarder. Beyond that we hope to continue to find beautiful books that change people's lives, and to be passionate shepherds.

Focus on New Independent Publishers

Thomas Bunstead

Will Evans, Publisher of Deep Vellum

What kind of books do you publish? What flavour are they?

What flavour are my books? They're mango with chilli powder and lime squeezed over it—you shake it up in a bag and you eat it; the dog kebabs that are described so lusciously in *Tram 83*; the shashlik and Dagestani flatbread that the characters eat in *The Mountain in the Wall*; the taste of absinthe in 80s Parisian discotheques (*Sphinx*). Oh, and the fermented shark poor Jón Gnarr (the former mayor of Reykjavik) had to eat growing up. His dad would keep these vats of rotting meats and alcohols in the basement and try to make poor Jón eat it. When I was there in September they were trying to foist that on me and I was having none of it. I'm vegetarian and they were trying to convince me I could eat it because it's transcended into the ether.

I am a political person, and so the books I publish are political. Translations are political. When a book strikes me, I go for it. Some people want books that will be read and discussed in 100 years. Some people will say that it's language that drives their choices, some people will say it's narrative. For me, it's all that, plus something that jumps out and says "Will, you have to read this book." The books I sign are books I want to read and that I think other people want to read, too, and they're important for their artistic quality, their political quality, their social quality, all part of our interconnected global culture.

That's what makes all of us translation publishers unique; even though it's a small world, we all have very different tastes. I've tried to build a very diverse list from the beginning—that's been important to me—to have authors from every continent, and women authors as well as men. I'm still learning, I have a long way to go, and I have a lot still to do. But it all adds up into this delectable combo that is Literature.

How do you view the market?

I'm an optimist; I truly believe there's a large readership out there in the world for literary works in the English language. I don't blame readers for not reading the kind of books I would like them to read; I blame the increasingly corporate publishing industry structure, which wastes money on weird marketing campaigns, creating a pervasive sense of hype around books that have so much money wasted on them.

I don't think that any average person who shops on Amazon will be able to find

writers like Mikhail Shishkin—writers of his calibre. How are people going to find out about such books? Word of mouth. But how do you effect word of mouth sales? That is what keeps me up at night. 70 to 80% of our sales in the USA are through word of mouth. There's a tiny percentage of people who are the influencers, so you gotta figure out who your influencers are. Booksellers, librarians, bloggers, readers who read adventurously and widely—those are the kinds of readers we all want. They have great taste so people come to trust them. We need to grow the number of them and develop relationships with them.

A book that is a success to us would be a failure in a corporate setting. So I guess I'm pessimistic about the industry as a whole but optimistic about readers. It's really amazing to see how well our books sell in cities that have independent book stores, and how well our books do after they get reviews in certain media outlets like our local newspaper—that type of local support has really helped us because it's connecting us to people who may never have thought about what kinds of books they're reading; they've just read what people tell them to read. Yet reader numbers seem to be growing. There's a good community right now of publishers, reviewers, booksellers, translators, and authors, which forms a community of engaged readership, and I'm very happy and proud to take part in that.

We're opening a bookstore in Dallas this year because we want a place where we can get the right books in the hands of those people. When someone walks in and says, "Man, I read *The Girl on the Train* and I just want something more out of books," I can say, "Look this store is for you and we'll tailor our recommendations to what you want; I can get you a book that is the next level up. If you want to grow, grow with me." (It's not going to be just me, I'm hiring booksellers.) The word of mouth thing doesn't depress me, I just wonder if books are unique in this way. You can spend a ton of money on marketing and just waste it but maybe it's the same way with CocaCola, which spends hundreds of millions of dollars every year just to get their name everywhere, so that when you do get thirsty you might drink a Coke. It's the same kind of thing, you can try to spend that money to influence the influencers and hope that a book gets into the word of mouth chain. I've had that happen to a couple of books and it's awesome.

Which book of yours has been most successful in that regard?

Tram 83 and *Sphinx* tie. *Tram 83* by Fiston Mwanza Mujila (translated by Roland Glasser), our best-selling title so far, got great reviews from prominent media, but we also booked an extensive, three-week tour across the USA for Fiston, fully sponsored by the French Embassy's Cultural Services office, but it was Roland Glasser's idea to do an author/translator roadshow for the book rather

than just *Fiston* alone, which made each reading an immersive performance, and for that I give him all the credit. It's a neat book that struck a nerve in a lot of readers—not just readers specialized in African literature—who were hungry for a different story. It's like nothing you've ever read from the content of Africa before; it's funny and ribald, it runs around, it's the present and the future of Africa and everything that is. Thanks in part to the roadshow it received the biggest reviews we've gotten—we got a *Fresh Air* (a popular book show on National Public Radio) review with Terry Gross; that's amazing! You see it on Twitter, people talking about the book, and they've never heard of *Deep Vellum* before.

With *Sphinx* by Anne Garréta (translated by Emma Ramadan), if I had told you a year ago that one of my bestselling books was going to be a novel by a woman member of the Oulipo that was written 30 years ago, a de-gendered love story, I don't think that you would have agreed with me. But the book has taken on a life of its own among readers that I don't know in the literary world. For instance there's this a cappella group called Pentatonix—let me back up and I'll tell you the whole story.

I was hanging out with some translators in Warsaw this summer and it was 1:30am so I go back to my room to schedule some tweets to go live while I'm sleeping and then I go pee and I come back two minutes later and see that a tweet I had just posted with the *Huffington Post's* review of *Sphinx* has been retweeted 200+ times in two minutes. I traced it back and it all started with a guy from a band called Pentatonix I'd never heard of at the time—I feel bad saying that, but I've definitely heard of them now—a guy called Mitch Grassi who's in the group. He quoted our tweet about the book and said, "Just bought my copy today at Skylight Books in LA." The band has something like two or three million followers on Twitter and all of these followers have names like "Mitch's Girl" and "Pentatonix #1" and "IWouldDieForMitch"—he has this whole Bieber-like fanbase—and people started going "OMG what book is Mitch reading, let's read it!" The book jumped something like 500,000 places on Amazon's sales rankings overnight; it was our first book to crack their top 1,000, and it's all thanks to one of those influencers I mentioned getting into the book and spreading the word. And now his fans are our fans. So I wrote to him and said, "Hey man, thanks for tweeting this, I'm really excited to hear what you think about the book," we've written back and forth several times now, and in my research on the band, it turns out they're from the Dallas area, though they all live in LA now. This guy Mitch has been talking about gender from what I gather, publicly, with his fans, a lot of kids who are wondering about gender identity, all part of the larger discussion about gender and identity going on in the USA this past year, and it's interesting that the book hit

on a cultural nerve; remember the book came out in English *30 years* after it was written and it was just the right time for the book to become part of a much bigger discussion; for instance, one of the questions raised about the book in reviews and discussions, highlighting the differences in the French and American (and British) readings of it: Can a book be feminist and pro-queer if it strips all gender away? It's been really amazing to publish this book; to this day it sells insanely well, was our first book to sell out of its first print run (with *Tram 83* immediately after it) and it came out over nine months ago.

Why start now?

It was the right time for me to get into publishing. I studied Russian literature in graduate school and back around 2010, 2011, I was fascinated by the amazing books being published in Russia, but was wondering why so few of them were ever being published in English. So I started translating and doing research into the business of translation and discovered Three Percent, ALTA (the American Literary Translators Association), Conversational Reading, the Complete Review, a whole world discussing these same issues. I had a big problem with what Chad Post clued me into with his Three Percent blog, about how few books are published in translation every year. Since I've started working in publishing I've learned that translation is just one small part of the industry and that there are even more gaps that need to be filled—like for women writers, and for writers of colour in the USA—and it will be really interesting to see what happens there.

But if you want to make a difference you can't just complain about it; you have to do something; you have to get out there and go for it. Of course it's a hard fight, and it's something we have to work at constantly. I really enjoy being in Dallas, far from the corporate publishing structure, so I can figure out a different way to build readership. That said, there are still some good books published out of that corporate structure, but it's a very small figure, it's probably 3%. The other 3% problem. The other 97% don't even need to be printed. Save the paper!

When is your next trip to the UK?

My wife is pregnant and she's due in May so I'm not going anywhere for a while. On the home front I need to build up Deep Vellum locally, so it's good timing for me to be in Dallas for the summer and try to make inroads with some of the local foundations here. I probably won't go to the UK until 2017. I've only been to London twice and I'd love to go other places too, like Norwich, and see East Anglia, and of course I'd love to go to the Edinburgh Book Festival sometime, especially if one of our authors gets invited. Maybe by then if I do have everything

on firm footing here we can start scouting to open a Deep Vellum London office. That would be the bomb.

Deborah Smith, Publisher of Tilted Axis

What kind of books will you publish? What flavour are they?

The kind that might otherwise be unlikely to make it into English, for the very reasons that excite us—artistic originality, radical vision, the fact that they've been written in one of those so-called “minor” languages used by the majority of people on the planet (so far, our list includes Bengali, Korean, Indonesian, Thai, Uzbek, and Japanese). We're on the lookout for distinctive aesthetics—the most exciting story in the world is unlikely to work for us if it's told using traditional realism, linear chronology, and a fairly unremarkable prose style.

This in itself also helps to ensure that we're not putting out the same old narratives that have come to be almost clichés of certain regions—our Indian books aren't sweeping family sagas, our South-East Asian titles have little to do with colonialism, our Japanese books can be filed under neither “ultra-violent” nor “quirky, with cats”. Which in turn helps us to not slap the same godawful covers on them that almost every other book gets lumbered with—chopsticks, veils, henna, woman looking wistful/seductive/enigmatic/oppressed/like she can't keep her hair out of her eyes.

Alongside the desire to redress these damaging stereotypes, and simply to see what we're all missing, there are couple of reasons why the Asian focus makes sense. For me, one of the most exciting things about Asian literature is the formal multiplicity—the novel doesn't have the same stifling hegemony as it does in the Anglophone world, and the fact that most authors will be equally adept at short stories and poetry results in some particularly fertile hybrid forms. We've got an Uzbek novel by Hamid Ismailov that's an experimental weave of poetry and multiple historical narratives, and a prose poem accompanied by author and activist Khairani Barokka's own “tactile” artwork—plus a Braille translation. We have authors who are also translators, publishers, visual and performance artists, activists, filmmakers, theatre producers and podcast hosts. As well as feeding into their writing in startlingly original ways, this also makes them fascinating as people, and I want to publicise as much of this work as possible. Hopefully this will be a way for us to demonstrate that we're committed to acting as a cultural conduit, not just flogging products.

Second, the fact that we're one of very few publishers with our ear to the ground in these markets means we get to snap up authors who are bestsellers and/or major

prize winners—this September we're doing a novel by Hwang Jung-eun which won the South Korean equivalent of the IMPAC Award (judged by booksellers, for a critically-acclaimed book which also had wide popular appeal), next February we have the book which made Prabda Yoon a household name in Thailand when it won the Southeast Asian Writers' Award, and our latest acquisition is by an extremely cool winner of Japan's most prestigious literary prize, the Akutagawa.

How do you view the market? Why start now?

There are so many opportunities in publishing right now. Financial struggles in recent years seem to have led the bigger publishers to become ever-more conservative, hence the rise in smaller, independent publishers who are both more willing and more able to take risks.

I'd been thinking about starting a publishing house about a year before I put in an application for an Arts Council England grant—at the time, I'd just started my third year of a PhD in contemporary Korean literature, and had been working as a literary translator for a bit over a year. That gave me enough of an insider's view of the publishing industry to be aware of all the implicit biases that made it so difficult for the amazing-sounding books my translator friends raved about to make it through, especially if these were Asian—Asian literature is less likely to get discovered in the first place (fewer agents, book fair delegations, or international contacts); almost certainly can't be read in the original by a UK editor, yet is also less likely to have an established programme funding sample translations; and the authors are less likely to speak English (publicist's nightmare). Three years before, I started teaching myself Korean because it seemed the quickest way to get to read all the great work I knew must be out there—starting a press that would focus on under-represented literatures came from a similar impulse.

There's definitely a gap in the market for the kind of books we're publishing, which really helps us stand out among the flood of new titles. It's also a great time to launch because there's already a lively community of translation publishers (and readers) to ensure you're not going it alone. Everyone's very friendly and cooperative, though I'd like to see more official collaboration, particularly to try and get better terms from booksellers and distributors.

What's your story so far, and the way you see Tilted Axis operating going forward?

There must have been something in the water, because soon after I decided to start a press I read Will Evans's article about doing just that. I saw that he'd apprenticed with Chad Post at Open Letter, and I convinced Stefan Tobler to let

me do the same at *And Other Stories*. A number of useful things came out of that, but none more so than meeting Simon Collinson, a former lawyer from Australia who'd come to London to study publishing. He was incredibly smart and full of ideas, frustrated by traditional publishers' old-fashioned attitudes towards digital, and a master of all the things I was hopeless at (coding, spreadsheets, contracts, managing data). I practically begged him to work with me as Tilted Axis' digital producer. Sarah Shin, communications director at Verso, offered to help us out with publicity, and then I put out a call for an art director and found Soraya Gilanni.

I'm so grateful to be working with these brilliant people—their professionalism and enthusiasm constantly pulls me back from the brink of insurmountable panic at this ridiculous thing I've decided to do. Having them on board was also instrumental in us securing the Arts Council grant—just enough to start up, but it's brilliant that they believe in what we're doing. Like any other not-for-profit, funding is going to be vital for us. We're aware that our cash flow is going to look fairly alarming for the first few months, as we'll be paying for advances, overheads and print runs before we can expect any sales revenue, so there was a collective sigh of relief when I was recently awarded an Arts Foundation Fellowship with a £10,000 cheque attached.

I've signed an MoA with LTI Korea, whom I already work with as a translator, and will be looking to build similar relationships with funders in other countries. It's saddening and infuriating to see publishers who just take the money, print some books, and that's it—no one even knows the book's been published, and it's so clearly been done on the cheap that they wouldn't want to read it even if they did. Printing does not equal publishing, so the task now is to convince funders that we know the difference. Which will be easy once we've got our first few titles out!

We're thinking that foreign rights will be a useful avenue for us, too—as a translator, I already have a lot of useful contacts at great presses in both the USA and Australia who share my taste and are very interested to see the authors I'll be publishing. And by the time we pitch to them we'll have a full, professionally edited manuscript, and likely some publicity already drummed up, which reduces the risk for them. It would also be great to think that we could support or at least encourage a greater flow of translations between Asian languages, rather than just into English (though the prestige still associated with the latter will itself help with this).

But those are longer-term goals: immediate, and imperative, is to ensure that everybody who works with or for us is paid properly, as opposed to “as little as I can get away with”, which sadly holds true for some organisations I've encountered as a freelancer. To set up an internship or work experience for someone from a low-

income background is another definite goal. I've publicly stated that we won't have unpaid interns, which is one of the things I'm most proud of. Everything we're trying to do with Tilted Axis would be completely undermined if it was dependent on any form of exploitation.

Did I mention I got a tattoo of our logo?

Any upcoming trips?

In a couple of weeks I'm flying out to Japan for the Tokyo International Literature Festival, where I'll be scouting potential authors, meeting with agents, schmoozing funders, and buying as many bizarre snacks as I can find. In May there's an editors' scouting trip to Istanbul, where I'll apply to attend the ITEF festival and find out more about the Turkish authors that have caught my eye. Then in October I'm hoping to attend my first-ever ALTA conference, which is being held in Oakland (also my first-ever trip to the States—I hear it's big), which will ideally tie in with a cross-country publicity tour for Bae Suah's *A Greater Music* (published by Open Letter)—actually the first book I ever translated, and by a writer I could not be more obsessed with. Then I'll be back in London to make sure Khairani Barokka's *Indigenous Species* gets the launch it deserves, before heading off to Dhaka Lit Fest with Han Kang.

David Shook, Publisher of Phoneme Media

What kind of books do you publish?

Phoneme Media publishes the most exciting voices in translation, period. Our mission is to publish translated literature that contributes toward making the world a more connected, understanding place. We publish about half poetry and half fiction, and this year we're beginning to publish graphic novels. In addition to publishing translations from less translated languages and cultures, like Jeffrey Yang's translations from the Uyghur of Ahmatjan Osman and Clare Sullivan's translations from the Isthmus Zapotec of Natalia Toledo, our books engage with larger sociopolitical conversations, everything from exile to language endangerment, African immigration in Europe to prison reform in the USA.

Perhaps the best way to introduce what Phoneme does is to tell you about two of our forthcoming novels.

Spomenka Štimec's *Croatia War Nocturnal*, translated from the Esperanto by Sebastian Schulman, was written as its author hid in her bathtub during the aerial raids of the early 1990s—on a primitive translation machine invented by a man named Toon (Really!). In a series of thinly veiled missives Štimec recounts the two

failed utopian projects of her life, Esperanto and Yugoslavia.

Richard Ali A. Mutu's *Mr. Fix-It: Troublesome Kinshasa*, translated from the Lingala by Bienvenu Sene Mongaba, recounts the story of twenty-something Kinshasa resident Ebamba, whose misfortunes are at turns hilarious and tragic. Ali A. Mutu was one of the only *Africa 39* writers working primarily in their native language, and his depiction of the Congolese megacity is bold and unforgettable.

One of the things that makes us distinct is our production of literary films: book trailers, video poems, para-textual or book-extending films, and short literary documentaries, shot in places like Cuba and Equatorial Guinea and featuring languages like Mazatec and Kirundi, and all available free of charge on our website. The films reflect our commitment to engaging as wide an audience as possible, to innovating in the field of literary translation by incorporating audiovisual material to the literary experience, and to travelling to the places that our books come from. That's important too. Of Phoneme's books so far, exactly zero have been acquired at book fairs, and very few have been agented. That's a reflection of our editorial philosophy, our work to discover the newest writers, writers often working on the margins of established literary culture. I don't at all mean that as a slight against book fairs or agents—I love them both! And I'm always just an invitation away, should anyone like to facilitate that first book fair acquisition...

How do you view the market? Why start now?

There's never been a better time to publish literature in translation. I'm heartened by the great interest that Phoneme's books have generated both within the literary community and beyond its confines. We've been quickly welcomed to the critical conversation, with reviews of our first book appearing on four continents, in places like the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Words Without Borders*. Our first collection of poetry, Rocío Cerón's *Diorama*, translated from the Spanish by Anna Rosenwong, won the 2015 Best Translated Book Award, and we were the only publisher to have two books longlisted for PEN America's Poetry Translation Prize, with Hilary Kaplan's translation from the Portuguese of Angélica Freitas's *Rilke Shake* making it to the shortlist.

Here in the USA we're experiencing a real flowering of the independent bookstore. I'm not suggesting that running a bookstore is anything less than a crazy, mostly thankless endeavour fuelled by a love for books, but that I see a real, vibrant cultural conversation taking place, centred on the bookstore and predicated on the relationship between the bookseller and buyer. Booksellers are my heroes. They've been huge to our success, and I'm grateful for their enthusiasm.

We're still learning—as I hope we always will be—how to best get our books

into readers' hands and what those readers are most excited by, and in that we're helped a great deal by our stellar distributor, Publishers Group West. I myself don't come from a literary family—both my parents are great readers, but primarily of pop psychology and commercial thrillers. So I'm always asking myself what would make a book interesting to that sort of intelligent, non-literary reader. I'm really keen to expand our readership, and I think that literature in translation offers us a great opportunity to excite new readers.

Why now? As Phoneme's founding editor, our timing has everything to do with my own trajectory as a writer and translator, learning the ropes at places like *World Literature Today* and the Poetry Translation Centre in London, serving as the 2012 Parnassus Translator in Residence (which I wrote about for *IOW!*) and translating more and more writers from Latin America and Africa. My own faith in the importance of this work has been reinvigorated by encountering writers whose very lives were at stake because of what they were doing—people like Al-Saddiq Al-Raddi, now exiled in London from the Sudan, and the Equatoguinean novelist Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, whom Jethro Soutar has so wonderfully translated for *And Other Stories*. In a very real way Phoneme is for and because of the many writers around the world that I stay up late in Los Angeles to talk to on WhatsApp or Facebook about their life and work.

What's your story so far, and the way you see Phoneme Media operating going forward?

In 2012 I met C. P. Heiser, the other half of Phoneme as well as the publisher of our sister publisher, the Unnamed Press, which focuses on international fiction. His experience as a bookseller, marketer, and editor was essential to our founding. In fact, we lived on the same street in Los Angeles but didn't know each other until we were introduced by a friend at the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, where C.P. built out their membership programme.

Of course there's our initial fiscal sponsorship by PEN Center USA, which didn't fund us but gave us the opportunity to raise funds under its non-profit status. Phoneme wouldn't exist without PEN Center USA, and is proof positive—as if anymore were needed—of their commitment to translation and freedom of speech.

The Phoneme Media story is one that I hope many *IOW* readers will become a part of, as readers, translators, reviewers, booksellers, Facebook fans, and more. We will continue publishing about twelve books a year, and we have some very exciting books coming up from French, German, Hebrew, Icelandic, Mongolian, Persian, Polish, Russian, and Yucatec Maya, in addition to the ones I've already mentioned. In early 2017 we're hoping to launch our imprint of children's books with

a Guerrero Nahuatl picture book—the contemporary rendition of an Aztec version of Brer Rabbit, illustrated by a Central Mexican farmer in the *amate* tradition of the Balsas Valley. We'll complement our new City of Asylum—Pittsburgh imprint with a Dhaka Translation Center imprint dedicated to publishing new translations of contemporary Bangla classics. And we'll continue to produce our short literary films.

What we've done so far has been accomplished on a shoestring, as a labour of sacrifice and love, so the next few years of organisational development will be key to our longterm sustainability. In addition to fully entering the grant cycle, I'm hoping we can continue to build our LA-based team, which has recently been strengthened by the addition of Publicity Wizard Zoë Ruiz and Fiction and Development Editor Zinzi Clemmons.

Any upcoming trips?

I'm actually in transit as I write, on my way to New York for a few events with Mexican novelist Mario Bellatin. I'm travelling less than in the past because of all of my responsibilities for Phoneme, but I realize I'm still travelling more than most people are able, and I'm grateful for those opportunities. In May I'm planning to visit Phoneme author Roland Rugero in Burundi. In June I'll be in Mexicali with William T. Vollmann. We've planned our own strange residency to assemble an anthology of narcocorridos that we're editing for Phoneme in 2017. Then I'll be in Pittsburgh at City of Asylum, a fantastic nonprofit that helps exiled writers find their bearings and get on their feet in their new homes. Phoneme's first imprint features their writers, beginning with Sara Khalili's translation of Yaghoub Yadali's *Rituals of Restlessness* in May 2016. In September I'll be in Malmö to read my own poetry, which is being translated not only into Swedish but also into Arabic for the city's large immigrant community. And then in November I'm hoping to visit the Dhaka Lit Fest again, perhaps the most interesting literary festival in the world! I have a few other schemes and dreams, but nothing I'm ready to reveal just yet.

And of course I often feel like I'm travelling when I read Phoneme's submissions—we accept submissions year round, and I personally read each and every one. So do submit, talented readers of *IOW*!

Joshua Ellison, Executive Editor of Restless Books

What kind of books do you publish? What flavour are they?

We call ourselves Restless Books because that's what we are looking for in our readers: *restlessness*. People who are seeking out new destinations, experiences,

and points of view. We invite our readers to explore the world not just as tourists or spectators, but as participants, ready to engage with timeless (and timely) questions of culture, politics, and human potential.

We have great ambitions and expansive tastes, so our catalogue is a reflection of our restless temperament: international fiction, memoir, reportage, essays, science fiction, and revitalized classics. At the moment, I am especially excited about an innovative new series called *The Face*, in which a diverse group of writers will take readers on a guided tour of that most intimate terrain: their own faces.

Our inspiration comes from a passage by Jorge Luis Borges: “As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face.” (Translation by Mildred Boyer.) We have just published the first three instalments: from Ruth Ozeki, Tash Aw, and Chris Abani. We have forthcoming editions from Roxane Gay, Lynne Tillman, and more.

We are also looking forward to publishing Juan Villoro’s collection of essays about football, *God is Round*. It’s a chance to introduce a major world writer to a broader audience and celebrate the world’s most beloved game. We have extraordinary fiction coming from Iceland, Brazil, Cuba, Israel, Mexico, Iran, and beyond.

How do you view the market? Why start now?

Restless started at a moment of both optimism—about the potential of digital distribution and the internet to radically change the way we consume and discover books—and deep trepidation about the future of book culture and the viability of our traditional models. In a sense, neither sea change fully arrived and the book business has proven more resilient than many expected, while still facing enormous challenges. Publishing has always been, and will likely always be, a labour of love and a leap of faith. Encouragingly, there are some signs that the notoriously insular English book market is starting to wake up to the incredible offerings available from writers around the world; and the industry is starting to recognize that our biases about international literature are sorely out of date.

What’s your story so far, and the way you see Restless operating going forward?

Restless is the product of our frustrations about the parochialism of publishing in the English-speaking world, and our deep hopefulness about the transformative potential of reading. Since the beginning, this has been an experiment in how to

create the kind of publisher we wanted to see in the world; the experimentation continues, and our education continues. We will continue to expand our offerings to reach more readers and further diversify the diet of our readers. Our goal will always be to produce beautiful books that we believe, sharing voices and ideas that matter.

Any upcoming trips?

The London Book Fair is coming up, which I always look forward to. It's enormously productive to have the chance to meet personally with publishers and agents from around the world, and it's a real thrill to spend time with so many peers who share my passion for this work, and for the culture of books and ideas. I'll spend the following three months buried under an avalanche of manuscripts.

Mitchell Albert, Publisher and Commissioning Editor of Periscope Books

What kind of books do you publish? What flavour are they?

I've never been able to formulate a reply to this type of question to my satisfaction. Over the past year, therefore, since launching Periscope in April 2015, I have begun to express our approach in the simplest and most naïve way: If the books we consider publishing don't keep us awake into the night, engrossed and hungry, then they just won't populate our list. We publish too few titles to just add one to the heap because it's halfway good and *might* find a readership, or because we don't yet have a writer from this or that country, and so on. It's got to have that tractor-beam draw.

As for "flavour"... ah, well, recently it was remarked upon that we needed more light-heartedness on the list, some more humour, as though we're a bunch of miserablists here, sitting around and counting the seconds until our hearts give out. Wrong, I say! There's plenty of humour in, say, Zakaria Tamer's *Breaking Knees* (2016), Peter Gonda's *Drinking and Driving in Chechnya* (2015) and Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat* (2015)—though it's true that the giggles are of the gallows variety. Our brand of "funny" is definitely dark. But that's just the way it's turned out so far; another year's list might be all belly laughs.

All the same, Hannah Lowe's *Long Time No See* has a serious premise—there's the growing up half Chinese-Jamaican in a changing Essex, the waiting for her gambler dad to return from midnight dice—and yet it's told compassionately, warmly, no grimness there. Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (longlisted for the 2015 Man Booker Prize) tells of a doomed expedition to the New World and the narrator's descent into slavery, but the overall effect is hugely uplifting. Hwang

Sok-yong's *Princess Bari*, translated by Sora Kim-Russell, should be the standout depression-inducing work in the bunch—starvation in North Korea, human trafficking and almost unbearable loss—but the title character's winsomeness and grit, the fable-world woven through the text, and the author's ultimate faith in humanity all generate the opposite effect.

Of course, we publish non-fiction too, and Mark Schatzker's *Steak* is a good example of how to entertain readers thoroughly whilst making them more intelligent by teaching them stuff (in this case, everything you ever wanted to know about meat and its discontents, from an irrepressible carnivore).

Next year we have more "serious" books: *A Man with a Killer's Face* by Finnish crime writer / news anchor Matti Rönkä, translated by David Hackston; Bakhtiyar Ali's *I Stared at the Night of the City*, an epic allegory of modern Kurdistan, translated by Kareem Abdulrahman; *No One Escapes* by Carole Hayman, which investigates the impact of the Rosemary West case years later on the lives of ten people involved in it; and much more... nothing happy-clappy, it's true. Perhaps in 2017?

So, coming back to flavours: tangy, for sure, occasionally pungent too, but punctuated with intermittent yet undeniable notes of sweetness...

How do you view the market? Why start at this time?

The market is challenging, I ain't gonna lie. (Nor would you believe me if I did.) I'm becoming notorious for discouraging the ever-swelling hordes of young people seeking a life in publishing: "Get into law school, dammit! Study accounting! Become a bricklayer!" Seriously, though, we are undoubtedly living through a renaissance in small, independent publishing—that's not news, by now, but it still holds true, and it's wonderful. Everyone is sharing resources, advice, experiences; there's a climate of genuine support. However, this supportiveness is a byproduct of how much twisting and turning we must all endure to sell books today. The amount of energy output (pretty huge) required for the amount of return (erm, variable) is bewildering. It genuinely does not make sense unless you are passionate about the work, and about making a contribution to culture. Of course, passion, culture and publishing intelligence are not enough to bank on by themselves, so we, for instance, are working hard to make sure we secure North American and translation rights as often as we can (to name but two elements of our strategy), and take advantage of the generous translation grant programmes offered by various countries (to name a third).

As for "why now", I'm very fortunate in that at the very end of 2013 I was asked to steer the trade and academic publishing division of a big company (Garnet

Publishing) that's been around for a while, but which had seen its trade list become somewhat anaemic over the previous few years. It took all of 2014, basically, to learn where the stationery cupboard was and to reorganise and restructure, and in 2015 we launched Periscope to give a home to any books that did not fall into the category of Middle East Studies (the focus of our academic imprint, Ithaca Press) or trade non-fiction specifically about the Middle East (that would be Garnet, the other of the three imprints I oversee). Periscope, therefore, is given over to literary fiction and trade non-fiction from around the world.

How do you see the press operating going forward?

Well, we've had a fascinating first year, and we're on an even keel for the next. It's a great battle, given our tiny capacity and outsized ambition, to ensure that everything that needs doing is done in a timely and efficient fashion—but that next book, that next translation, that next cover (by the gifted designer James Nunn, who has done all our jackets to date), that next accolade... all of that keeps the machinery humming. That, and a little luck. Can't have enough luck.

Ana Pérez, Publisher of Hispabooks

What kind of books are you looking for? What 'flavour' are they?

At Hispabooks we focus on contemporary Spanish literary fiction. We therefore look for works of fiction by living Spanish authors, mainly novels. We are particularly interested in publishing books that we feel are insightful in some way or other, and might resonate with English-language readers.

Our aim is to build a list that reflects what Spanish literary fiction looks like today. In that sense our approach is broad-minded when selecting works for publication. Although we don't publish genre writing (noir, historical, romance...), within the genre of literary fiction the taste of the books we publish varies widely. We have some very slow-paced and reflective books, like Marcos Giralt Torrente's *Paris*, and other, action-packed and even violent ones, like *Still the Same Man*, by Jon Bilbao. We also have two or three titles that don't fall within the "fiction" definition, because they are more memoir-like, but their strong literary sensibility also engages us; we like to be flexible.

How do you view the market?

The global book market is flooded. More and more good writers are producing good books, and there's not enough room in bookstores to showcase them properly. This means that publishers must make really strong publicity and marketing

campaigns if they want their books to have any visibility. For independent publishers like Hispabooks, working with limited budgets, this sometimes seems like a David versus Goliath battle. Still, there always seems to be room for more books—like a packed Tube car when it looks like there’s no room for anybody else but then you jump in and next thing you know you’re a bit squashed but enjoying the ride!

Why start now?

Because it’s both possible and necessary. Twenty years ago setting up a press involved having a structure that is no longer needed. Nowadays it just takes a laptop with internet connection and a really motivated publisher to run a press. Of course you also need a good team of collaborators and partners to do the work in the different departments, but that can all be outsourced. So we thought it made sense to try to give these works of Spanish literary fiction (our native literature), which we believe in, an introduction to English readers. Why not?

Jacques Testard, Publisher of Fitzcarraldo Editions

What kind of books do you publish? What flavour are they?

It is quite difficult to answer the first question. An imprecise answer is that Fitzcarraldo Editions publishes contemporary fiction and essays, both in English or in translation, that explore and expand formal possibilities, that are innovative and imaginative in style, that tackle subjects and themes that are relevant to the world we live in. All of the books we’ve published to date could be described in this way.

To give a more precise answer is tricky, because within these broad terms the books are very different in form, style and subject matter. On the catalogue there is Mathias Enard’s *Zone*, a 521-page stream of consciousness novel written in one sentence about violent conflict in the Mediterranean during the twentieth century, translated from French by Charlotte Mandell, and there is *It’s No Good*, a collection of prose poems and essays by a Marxist poet on what it means to write and publish in contemporary Russia, translated by Keith Gessen, Mark Krotov, Cory Merrill and Bela Shayeveich. You’ll also find *Nocilla Dream*, a novel in fragments about indie cinema, collage, conceptual art, practical architecture, and the history of computers, but really perhaps about trying to find a form for the novel in the twenty-first century, and alongside it Simon Critchley’s *Notes on Suicide*, an essay in the classical tradition attempting to find a way to speak rationally about suicide, and then our latest book, Dan Fox’s essay in the polemical style, in

defence of pretentiousness. Each of these books is a singular work, to paraphrase Roberto Calasso, which forms a link in a single chain, or 'segments in a serpentine progression of books... formed by all the books published by [a] publisher'. That's the aim, anyway. This probably doesn't make the kind of book we publish any clearer to anyone who hasn't encountered them. I suppose that, to truly get it, you'd have to read everything we have published to date, which would be good for our bank balance, and would enable us to add more books to the serpentine chain, which you'd then have to read to keep a grasp of that understanding of the kind of books we publish, etc., etc.

Forthcoming segments, in 2016, include Ben Lerner on the hatred of poetry, Jean-Philippe Toussaint on his love of football, and Clemens Meyer's Leipzig sex trade novel (which you'll have to read to decide whether he loves or hates it, in Katy Derbyshire's excellent translation). And Svetlana Alexievich's new book *Second-hand Time*, which at 704 pages has been giving me (and the translator Bela Shayevich) headaches since early January (in a good way).

Last thing: I would like to make it clear that I am ignoring the flavour question on purpose.

How do you view the market? Why start now?

The closest I get to a view of the market are the sales reports I receive each day from a fairly antiquated software that tells me how many books have sold, and through which outlets. Joke aside, my view of the market is pretty foggy. So far, the books are selling enough that usually a little more money comes in each month than goes out (I can't emphasise the meaning of the word 'little' in the preceding clause enough, having already used three typographical emphases). This has happened earlier than I thought it would. But I also think that we could be selling more books and that we have not yet reached Maximum Sales Potential (MSP), which is a thing I just made up. So my view of the market is hopeful, and largely ignorant.

As to why start now (clearly not because of any intuition about the state of the market), it's not a particularly interesting story, which I can't tell here because then I won't have much to say in answer to the next question.

Your story so far, and the way you see Fitzcarraldo operating going forward.

After I'd been working on *The White Review*, the literary magazine I started working on with Ben Eastham in 2010, for a couple of years, I got offered a job at Notting Hill Editions as a commissioning editor, working alongside an editor

called Paul Keegan, who taught me how to publish books. At the end of 2013 everyone then working at NHE left, because Tom Kremer, ‘a man like no other’ (as it puts it on his self-titled website), didn’t want us to work for him anymore. I didn’t really know what to do next; there weren’t any publishers I could really see myself working for—not that there were any jobs going anyway. So after a few months of hesitation, boredom, fear, and resignation, the opportunity to launch Fitzcarraldo Editions came up and I decided to go for it. That was in February 2014, and we published the first book in August that year. I work closely with Ray O’Meara, who designed a typeface for us, and the books themselves. Nicci Praça has been doing the publicity on a freelance basis from the beginning. And as of a month ago we have a part-time publishing assistant, Bryony Quinn.

The twelfth book, *Counternarratives* by John Keene, comes out on 6 April 2016. There will be eight more to follow this year. I have recently noticed my first grey hairs. We will continue to operate in much the same way as we do, which is to say, in our very own, probably not very rational, way. I do have some short to medium-term objectives. I’d like for one of our books to win an individual book prize (for the English-language edition we have published, as opposed to, say, Mathias Enard winning the Prix Goncourt for *Boussole*). I’d like for one book to sell more than x number of copies this year, a step further towards achieving MSP (see above). I’d like to publish books in languages that we do not yet translate (we currently have French, Spanish, Russian, German and Danish). I’d like to publish more debut fiction in English (and have been toying with the idea of a novel prize to mirror our recently launched essay prize, which we’re about to start judging).

Upcoming trips

I’m going to Hay Festival for the first time with Svetlana Alexievich in May, which, to paraphrase Claire-Louise Bennett, will be nice. I have applied for one of those meet-and-greet publishing trips taking British publishers to Lisbon in June. I’ve never been on one of those, so it will be interesting (if I am deemed worthy of the honour). Then I’ll be in Edinburgh for the festival in August. I can’t tell you which of our authors will be there because the programme is embargoed until June. There should be three of them, it will be nice. (Is that a clue?)