

The Crime Cafe with Anne Trager

Presented By:



Debbi: Hi everyone. This is the Crime Cafe. Your podcasting source of great crime, suspense and thriller writing. I'm your host, Debbi Mack. Before I introduce my guest, I'll remind you to check out the Crime Cafe boxed set and anthology on my website. Just go to debbimack.com and click on the "Crime Cafe" link and you can find the buy buttons for both books and download them there. They're sold at a very reasonable price and you can also find the podcast subscription buttons there and the Crime Cafe merchandise, so check it out. And now, it's my great pleasure to bring on translator and crime fiction publisher, from France (living in France at any rate) Anne Trager. Hi Anne! It's so great to have you on. Thanks for being here.

Anne: Hi Debbi! I am thrilled to be here. Thanks so much for having me.

Debbi: Well, I am very happy to have you. Let's talk about Le French Book. Le French Book, is that correct?

Anne: That's correct, that's correct.

Debbi: Le French Book. Tell us about how you went to translating for others to founding a publishing company.

Anne: Well, so it happened in 2012. I was working...I had been living in France for a really, really long time. I moved over here in 1985 just because I was obsessed with France and so I ended up in France and then I just stayed and I worked as a translator for a really long time. I worked in publishing in France and I worked in international communications for international companies here, well, in Paris at the time when I was living in Paris. And one morning, I just woke up and I said, you know I've got to do something here. I am reading these fantastic French writers in French. I love mysteries and thrillers and they just weren't being translated into English.

Now some were, but very, very few. I mean at the time there were only ... like three percent of the books published in the United States were translations and that's all languages together. So, imagine the tiny, tiny percentage of French books that were actually getting into English. This is still the case, actually. I mean we can only do much, but we do what we can, right? And it was really frustrating because I'd read these authors and I couldn't talk to them to my friend and I couldn't share them with the people I wanted to share them with, you know? And I said, actually I can do this. I have a foot in the U.S. because I'm American and that's where I grew up and that's my culture and I have a foot in France because that's where I'm living and I speak French and I translate and I know about publishing. So, there you go. That's how we started Le French Book.

Debbi: That's fantastic! How many titles do you publish a year?

Anne: Well, it's really variable. I mean I wish we could do more. So far we've published about 30 titles and it goes up and down, and we've had years where we've published more and years when we've published fewer, you know depending on any number of factors including the fact that translation takes a really long time and you know you need to spend time translating books.

Debbi: Yes. I was going to ask who your favorite crime fiction authors, French or otherwise are?

Anne: Oh, you know, that's a really, really hard question. I mean we have published 30 titles. That's not 30 different authors because we have some series, but I have a bunch of authors and in our...you know we publish a bunch of different authors and I'm very involved in each one of those books. And you really, really have to love a book to want to translate it because it requires actually getting into an author's head, you know. Understanding who they are, where they're coming from, what they're trying to get across; getting into the story and building a bridge between that story and that author and a new bunch of readers who come from a different culture and who come from a different point of view. And so you're trying to make that bridge because culture really plays a really big role in anybody's writing, okay? So it's a really, really fascinating process and so I can't...when you get so involved in a book and with an author because I work with the authors.

I really, really like to work with contemporary authors. I don't work with dead authors. I work with authors who are alive because I like to work with them. I like that relationship and understanding who they are in order to translate their work. So I can't pick a favorite. I mean how do you pick a favorite [laughs]? From that point of view, from the point of view of a translator. I just, I couldn't even tell you, you know. I mean I do have my authors that, you know, the people I like to read. I love reading Lee Child. I love reading Michael Connelly. I mean as my U.S. authors. For me when I read an author who writes originally in English, then I can say that kind of thing. But I can't look at my collection of authors who we translate and say, oh well, which one is my favorite?

Debbi: No, no. I wouldn't ask you to, really. I'm thinking more of, say, classic authors in the genre.

Anne: Yeah, yeah well you know, I mean in French the big classic that everyone talks about that people in the U.S. know is Simenon and he wrote a whole bunch of crime fiction novels that are set in the very famous police headquarters in the center of Paris at an address which is 36 Quai des Orfevres, okay? And that is, it's like the French Scotland Yard, okay? And so his books were set there and with his very famous detective called Maigret. People have heard about Maigret and so he's very well known. And it's very funny, they brought out recently, I don't know which major publisher republished them again and I remember reading a few of them in the original French and thinking, wow, these are very dated, you know? But at the same time they still work, you know and they still work.

Debbi: Yes.

Anne: So we have, you know for example we have a contemporary author whose name is Frédérique Molay (it's a woman) and she set her books in the same building with the same Police Chief (it's a commissaire in French, it's a Police Chief) who's got that same position. And so it's really interesting because it's very modern and what I'm finding so fascinating in that series (it's the Paris Homicide Series) and we've brought out three books in the series. Amazon Crossing then picked up the series and they brought out the next one and Frédérique is currently working on the next one and so on. Anyway, is that famous building, that Scotland Yard of France is moving. I mean, actually they moved this year. They moved from right...it was right across on the same island as Notre Dame, the big cathedral, right in the very center of Paris; that's where the traditional building is, and they moved the police headquarters to a modern building so that they could actually have something a little bit more modern, which for a

city like Paris is understandable and it's in an entirely different neighborhood now. And so I'm very excited to see (it's not in the next book here, it will be in the following book from Frédérique) to see that change, you know happen to the characters, you know. Because there's this whole history that goes back, you know to Simenon to Maigret and all of that. So you see this continuity in the author's writing.

Debbi: I love that kind of thing. When you get a sense of place in the books.

Anne: Yes, yes. And that's what's so fascinating about these books is because all of the French writers, you know, we choose books that are usually set in France, okay? Because obviously we're catering to an international audience and so one of the appeals is that they are set in France. And it's very interesting because for all of the authors, well, France is home, okay. So they're going to bring to light different aspects of France and so, you know when they chose the Eifel Tower...we've got one thriller by Eric Giacometti and Jacques Ravenne and they're Freemason thrillers, okay? And we've got one that begins with a body hanging from the Eifel Tower, I mean of course, you know? But when they write it, the Eifel Tower has such a different, I don't know. It's so much part of their everyday life. I don't know how to explain it. It's not like a tourist attraction, okay.

Debbi: I understand. I grew up in New York City and I live down near Washington, D.C. so [laughs].

Anne: Right, right.

Debbi: The idea of tourist attractions is everyday things is something that resonates with me. I was going to ask you something else that just slipped my mind. Oh, about cultural differences in writing. Do you ever run into a situation where you have a particularly difficult time translating something that somebody is saying in French to English?

Anne: You know it happens all the time in a translation that you really have to work on finding an adaptation to something. Now it can be a reference; a cultural reference. For example, in one of our Winemaker Detective novels, it took place in the Cognac Region. In a town where a very famous French president, Francois Mitterrand, who was president for 14 years or something like that, where he lived and died, okay? And so when in the dialogues, all the dialogues that took place in this little town would make reference to this (not all of them obviously, but a lot of them) would make reference to different aspects of Francois Mitterrand, who was such a very famous French president who did so much for France, right?

And so when you come across that, as a translator you have to say, okay, how much of this is really pertinent to the story for a reader who is not going to pick up on it? So, how much of it is pertinent? How much do you have to explain, because some of it you need to explain because otherwise they're not going to get in the story and then some of it, well, you just drop it. You know you just have to say, okay this is not going to make it across the ocean. It's just not going to work, you know? So, you're making those kinds of decisions all the time, you know? And that's part of what's fascinating about it, because a translation it's not just word for word. It's really taking the story and saying, okay how can I make this accessible to another reader who comes from a totally, totally different place?

Debbi: That's very interesting. It reminds me just a little bit of what it's like to adapt a novel into a screenplay.

Anne: Exactly!

Debbi: There are parts that don't translate well to film so to speak, so very interesting.

Anne: Exactly! And it's interesting I find that some of my writers, you know, the Winemaker Detective Series for example, has been made into a TV series in France, which is actually available on Amazon I think with subtitles. So the authors are very aware of what it means to adapt, you know because they're involved in the adaptation to the TV series. So when we work together on saying, okay, so what are we going to do, you know? Here we are, here's the audience, you know? I pick up things and then we make suggestions and we have back and forth and they really understand the process.

Debbi: It's a collaborative effort.

Anne: Yeah, it's a collaborative effort and the English language books are actually quite different than the French books. And then you have a different kind of progression for the characters in the English books. I mean, it's really fascinating. It takes on a life of its own.

Debbi: Wow [laughs]. Well, you've given me a new appreciation for translation. Not that I don't think that's an amazing talent anyway. But, I was going to ask you about, you have...your books run the gamut from cozies to hardboiled, correct?

Anne: That's correct, that's correct. Exactly!

Debbi: And your latest book release is *Minced, Marinated, and Murdered*?

Anne: Exactly!

Debbi: I believe it was?

Anne: Exactly!

Debbi: Tells us about some of your most recent releases to get people a sense of what's out there that they can be looking for.

Anne: Well, exactly. So, first of all I'd like to go back to that idea if you don't mind of this...of all of the different kinds of crime fiction that we translate, and this is a real choice on our part because what we found is that the very few French books, titles that were coming into English, were of a very similar kind in that people actually had in mind that French writing is kind of intellectual and, you know, oh it's French, you know? And I said to myself, you know that's so unfair, actually, because there's so many different kinds of writers and every kind of writer is going to come from their own point of view, their own culture. But also have their own story to tell, you know and they do have all these different genres in France, too.

So, it's a real choice, okay? And, you know when you say cozy for example, I have to actually say they're French cozies because well, the Winemaker Detective stories, they take place in French vineyards and they're very wine oriented and they're very gourmet epicurean French. I don't know, there's only one way to say they're ... very French, okay? And that's part of what's appealing about them, so that was by Jean-Pierre Alaux and Noël Balen, they're the two authors, and Noël who had written after writing 25 books in the Winemaker Series, which he continues to write, he said, you know I'm going to leave the vineyards and I'm going to go into the kitchen, okay? And so he started up another series which he's writing with somebody else with his wife, Vanessa Barrot and this takes place in French restaurants; in gourmet restaurants throughout France and there are a lot of gourmet restaurants in France. So, you were going to be getting to go to all the kinds of different regions and learning about the regional food and with some murders thrown in.

And so the first one, *Minced, Marinated, and Murdered* takes place in Lyon. Lyon is two hours away from Paris by the Bullet Train and it is one of the historic food capitals of France. It's where Paul Bocuse has his restaurant, or had his restaurant, I guess. And it's where he comes from and there's this whole rich tradition of food that comes from that town in that whole region, and so they chose to set the first book there. And of course there's murder, obviously from the title. Actually more than one murder, okay?

Not to give too much away and lots of food and wine and epicurean delight and you can almost use...what I really like about what they do is that you actually can use it as a travel guide. You can go to Lyon with this book in hand and you can go to all the restaurants, except the restaurants where the murders take place because those are ones they make up, right? And if you have any sort of not very, like criminal-like restaurant owners, well those are not real either. Those are made up, okay. But the restaurants where they get to have nice food and they chit and chat about whatever, you know who did this and are looking for clues or whatever, those tend to be real. So, you can actually use them. Use it as a travel guide so it's kind of fun. It's armchair travel.

Debbi: That is really cool! Speaking of traveling in France, what would you advise a tourist who is visiting France to do in terms of dress? Does it matter if you don't speak French, that sort of thing? I know some people get nervous about that kind of stuff. I know I do.

Anne: Well, so what I think people should keep in mind is that the French really, really do like English speakers. They love English speakers and they might not show it in the same way, in a way that we are familiar with, but they do love English speakers and they love Americans. So, in particular in the larger cities like Paris or Lyon or Bordeaux or whatever and you don't have to...I mean really just keep that in mind. And they actually, a lot of French people love to speak English, so if you speak English, sometimes you know they'll actually like to practice their English, so you don't really need to worry about that. The things that do shock French people are like ordering Coca-Cola with a fine meal, you know? They just don't understand it, although they drink a lot of Coca-Cola. They're not going to order it with a fine meal in a restaurant, okay? And it's something that deep down they just don't understand. You drink wine with your meal and that's what you do, you know? So, you know those kinds of things you might get some kind of reaction to, okay?

Debbi: [laughs]

Anne: [laughs] Maybe, you know

Debbi: Possibly.

Anne: Possibly, you know and because it's a deeply engrained cultural thing. I mean you have to understand that for the French eating is a social event, okay. So, you sit down with people and you spend time enjoying the food. And you can spend, you know, three hours around a dinner table and at the end of the meal, the French will still be talking about food. They'll be talking about, oh and then my neighbor she found this guy who's got this great food, this great pâté that he makes on whatever and then after three hours of sitting around and eating, you know. So, another series of books...I could just go on and on and on. You're going to have to stop me.

Debbi: [laughs]

Anne: Another series of books by David Khara and that's an entirely different style, and they're action film kind of movies that have a whole connection to World War II. And I really actually invite readers who are interested in that time period to go to our website and to look up this stuff, some of the blog posts that David Khara has written about his inspiration about how he was inspired by people who survived the death camps in order to really understand and create the characters in his books and the story that came out of that. That turned into really entertaining, you know, how octane thriller, but that has a very, very deep meaning for the author. I mean I really encourage readers to go and explore that a little bit more, because he's just a fascinating author and there are three books in that series. So you see we've really been able to a lot of different kinds of books with a lot of different kinds of authors. It's really very interesting. I mean people can find out more on our website, which is lefrenchbook.com.

Debbi: Cool! Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish up?

Anne: Oh, boy! I don't know [laughs].

Debbi: We can just finish up then.

Anne: All I can say is I hope that we do manage to, you know, keep bringing more books out to readers and that readers find something in this and I invite the readers to, you know, share their experience reading these books with us on our Facebook or however they like to share that because we're really, really interested in knowing how this resonates with the readers. You know what we're doing resonates with the readers and what they're getting out of it, you know.

Debbi: There you go.

Anne: Because that's why we do it.

Debbi: There you go. And don't forget to post reviews, because speaking on behalf of all authors, we love reviews.

Anne: Yes! So, thank you for bringing that up.

Debbi: No problem and thank you for being here, Anne. It was great talking to you, and for everybody else, this is our second to the last podcast of the season and I'm going to have David Swinson next time. In the meantime, I hope you'll check out *Le French Book* and *vive la France*. Thank you so much for bringing French culture to the English speaking world, especially the crime part of it, because I just love crime fiction of all sorts and go to the "Crime Cafe" link on my website, debbimack.com. Check out the Crime Cafe publications and in the meantime, til next time happy reading.