

Publisher Spotlight

USA (Language of translation: English)

Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

Grove/Atlantic, Inc was formed in 1993 through the merger of Grove Press, founded in 1947, and Atlantic Monthly Press, founded in 1917. Based in New York City, the company has published innovative literary fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and plays written in all the languages of the world. In Japanese literature, the company offers an extensive collection of Oe Kenzaburo, and continues to be involved with the works of Mishima Yukio, Donald Keene, Yoshimoto Banana, Murata Sayaka, and Kirino Natsuo, among others. In 2000, as part of a program inviting overseas editors to observe publishing conditions in Japan and engage in exchange with people in relevant positions, the Japan Foundation invited Morgan Entrekin, currently president and publisher of Grove/Atlantic, to Japan.

Website <https://groveatlantic.com/>

■ Projects supported by Japan Foundation grants

2018 *Convenience Store Woman (Konbini ningen)* by Murata Sayaka

2020 *Earthlings (Chikyu seijinby)* by Murata Sayaka

2022 *Life Ceremony (Seimei shiki)* by Murata Sayaka



Convenience Store Woman encountered at a German book fair— One of *The New Yorker's* Best Books in 2018 (USA)

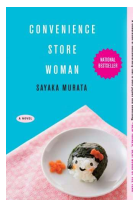
Peter Blackstock, VP, Deputy Publisher

The book *Convenience Store Woman* (by Murata Sayaka) has become very popular in the United States and around the world. How did you come across this work?

We're a medium-sized publishing house with a staff of about 30, and we publish about 60 titles each year. We're constantly on the lookout for new works and authors, and we're interested in works that are a bit different and have a reputation for being "new." Information often comes from editors, translators, publishing agents, book fairs, and so on. We make a lot of discoveries at every book fair we attend, and meet a lot of new people that way. Although we don't have any staff who can read Japanese or specialists in Japanese literature, I can read and write French, German, and Russian, so I'm able to read translations from Japanese into those languages. We also receive sample translations directly from translators, and sometimes we come across wonderful works mentioned by translators. We rely heavily on this sort of information.

The impetus for working on Sayaka Murata's book came from talking to a German editor we met at the Frankfurt Book Fair. First of all, I was intrigued by the idea of the work. Then I read Ginny Takemori's translation, and my colleagues and I immediately fell in love with the voice she gave the author, and so we decided that we should try to work on the book. We acquired World English rights and four UK companies made an offer to acquire the UK & Commonwealth translation rights from us, and Granta published the book in the UK. This level of interest is rare even for works by American authors. I found it reminiscent of Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen*, which had been very successful, although it's very different in some respects.

Incidentally, I'm still connected with the people I met at the Frankfurt Book Fair, and in that group we're able to share information on Japanese literature, reader reports, and so on.



English edition of Murata Sayaka's *Convenience Store Woman*



English edition of Murata Sayaka's *Earthlings*

How have readers reacted to *Convenience Store Woman*? You are also working on the publication of Murata Sayaka's second and third books, right?

Before the release of the book, we were also pleasantly surprised to have almost 10 authors volunteer to write short reviews for the book's jacket. And *Convenience Store Woman* has been a huge success, selling more than 100,000 print copies since its release in 2018, plus more than 35,000 copies of the e-book edition, and it has been successful in audio too. The paperback is also still going strong; it sold even more in 2021 than in 2020 and looks like it will sell even more copies in 2022. Readers have had diverse reactions to the book: it's a book about capitalism, it's a book about being a woman, it's very inside of Japanese culture, or it's exactly like being a woman anywhere in the world. As with any really great book, it has a strong voice that people can connect with their own experiences. It's a book that has created a new trend. We're also excited that the success of the English edition has led to a series of publications in other languages around the world.

Murata's second book, *Earthlings*, published in 2021, has only been out in paperback for a short time, but it is selling well and has already been reprinted. It's a little darker and more violent than its predecessor, which has surprised some of our readers. As a work that shows another aspect of the author, it's performing as well as expected. In addition, we plan to publish her third book, *Life Ceremony*, this year.

I understand that you also held an author event for Murata Sayaka.

We published the book in June, and in November 2018 we held five author events: three in New York City, one in Iowa, and one in Toronto, Canada. I attended the event at the Japan Society in Manhattan, and despite it being a busy Saturday afternoon and the fact that it had only recently been published, we had around 100 people show up. Some had been familiar with Japanese literature for many years, while others had just learned about it recently, and it seemed like a fantastic opportunity for Japanese-Americans to get to know a new author. It's not often that a debut author visits the U.S., but we were very happy to be able to make it happen. We hope that Murata will visit us again once the COVID-19 pandemic is over and it is safe to do so.



'Meet Author' event held in Japan Society, New York in 2018.



Convenience Store Woman on a shelf of a book store

Has the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the publishing world?

Yes, it's had a very significant impact. In the past two years, we've had so many experiences that have been completely different from the past. But when it comes to books, there have been some positive aspects. Firstly, there's been a movement among readers to read more books, including e-books, which has led to increased demand. This trend has allowed certain books published some time ago, including *Convenience Store Woman*, to gain new readers. There are also movements to support independent bookstores (such as bookshop.org*) that have been very successful. Although that support itself has been around since before COVID, it took off during the COVID pandemic. It has also forced us, as publishers, to change our strategy in several ways. For example, instead of inviting authors on actual tours, we've started to focus on digital marketing and that sort of thing.

*An emerging online bookstore in the United States that aims to support local independent booksellers. In January 2020, Andy Hunter, an author himself, founded the company to help bookstores survive in the face of Amazon's dominant market share. It also opened an office in the UK in November 2020. (<https://bookshop.org>)

What kind of works and fields are you interested in publishing in the future?

We hope to continue adding diverse authors and writers to our roster. As far as new fields go, I'm also interested in crime fiction. If anyone knows a wonderful book, I'd be very pleased to hear about it.

(Interview recorded February 24, 2022)

Photos courtesy of: Grove/Atlantic, Inc.