

Il Pietrisco Translations

Narratives of Crisis

Edited by Blanca González-Valencia
Assisted by Gianluca Gallucci



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Notes on Contributors

JAMES ACKHURST AND ELENA BORELLI are a British-Italian team of translators. Their translations of Italian poetry are regularly featured in *The Italian Journal of Italian Translation* and other literary journals. They have co-translated Giovanni Pascoli's *Poemi Conviviali* and published them as *Convivial Poems* for Italica Press in 2022.

LUISA ADAMSON is an early-career translator working from and into French, English and Italian. In July 2025, she graduated from the University of Westminster in London, obtaining a bachelor's degree in French Translation and Arabic. During her academic training, she carried out translation work on medical, political, and legal texts from French into English and vice versa. In March 2025, she participated in the Warwick Undergraduate Translation Prize and received a commendation for her Italian-to-English translation of a chapter from Paolo Cognetti's *Le otto montagne* (2016). She has a strong interest in literary translation, cultural and postcolonial studies, with a particular focus on African literature and heritage. She is interested in working with texts that explore the themes of migration, identity and memory. For her final-year academic project, Adamson undertook a 4,000-word translation of *Adikou* from French into English. She will begin a Master's degree programme in Sociolinguistics at Sorbonne Nouvelle University, in Paris, in September 2026.

GUIDO CUPANI is an Italian poet and astrophysicist who lives and works near Trieste. Poetry collections: *Le felicità*, Samuele Editore, 2015, *Qualcosa di semplice sulla neve*, Edizioni Culturaglobale, Cormòns, 2013. E-book: *James A. Potato, Ad ventum?* (four Christmas stories), Kindle Direct Publishing, 2014. Poems in *Smerilliana*, *Novecento non più*, *Zenit poesia*, and online journals *Versante Ripido*, *Poetarum Silva*, *Circumference*, *Tupelo Quarterly* (poems translated by Patrick Williamson), *Atelier*, *Cinquesettecinque*, *Nazione Indiana*, and *Perigeion*. Translations: *Lettere – a te*, Samuele Editore, 2012, Patrick Williamson, *Presenza/Presence*, *Traversi*, *Beneficato*, *Nel santuario* (Samuele Editore, 2013-2023). Guido also collaborates on *Perigeion* and *Fare voci*, and has won first prizes in *Poesia Onesta* 2016, *Albiatum* 2016, *PAPS* 2015, *Giuseppe Malattia della Vallata* 2015 (non-exhaustive list of awards).

MIREILLE GAGNÉ was born in Isle-aux-Grues and lives in Québec City. Since 2010, she has published books of poetry, short stories and novels. Much of her work explores the tensions between nature and society, animality and transhumanism. Much of her language is imbued with insularity, forming a cross-section between symbolism, magical realism, and a keen awareness of ecology and territory. Her characters often embody the needs, instincts and desires of both human and non-human species in innovative and speculative ways. Her first novel, *Le Lièvre d'Amérique* (Éditions La Peuplade, 2020), which depicts a workaholic's slow transformation into an endangered snowshoe hare, was nominated for many prizes, including being shortlisted for the *Prix du Roman*

d'Écologie 2021. She has been translated into various languages, including her second novel *Frappabord* (Éditions La Peuplade, 2024) into English (*Horsefly*, Coach House Books, 2025). Alongside writing, she is a lover of the great outdoors and is a keen hunter and fisher.

MEGAN HARVEY was born in Sheffield, United Kingdom and is currently based in Norwich. She holds a Bachelor's degree in French and Spanish from the University of Sussex and an MA in Literary Translation from the University of East Anglia. Her dissertation, a translated extract of *Photosynthèses* by Camille Cornu (Editions Cambourakis, 2024) along with a critical commentary exploring themes of gender-, linguistic- and biodiversity, was awarded a distinction grade. The translation was also longlisted for the John Dryden Translation Prize in 2025. Her translation of *Scandinavia: Recipes and Ingredients* from French was published by Octopus Publishing Group in 2025. She is primarily interested in literary texts that explore themes of ecology, biology and gender. Outside of translation she has a background working in foreign rights in the publishing industry, she currently works in the charity sector supporting book lovers who have a print impairment.

SIBIȘTEANU HOREA is a Romanian author born in Bacău. He debuted in 2004 with "A șaptea viață", and its second novel, "Fetiș" was published in 2019. His texts have been published in multiple Romanian publications, such as "Subcapitol", "Revista de Povestiri", "Ateneu", "Iocan", "Steaua", "Echinox", and "Vitrăliu". He participated in the collective volume "Scrisori din Cipangu. Povestiri japoneze de autori români" in 2016 and the anthology "Plastic în carne" in 2022. He was also a grant holder of the "Prima Carte" scholarship, initiated by the foundation "Friends for Friends". The novel "Întinde mâna, Tiberiu!" is his first novel.

JOZEFINA KOMPORALY is a Reader in Performance and Dramaturgy at the University of the Arts London and a literary translator from Romanian and Hungarian. She is editor and co-translator of the drama collections *Matéi Visniec: How to Explain the History of Communism to Mental Patients and Other Plays* (Seagull, 2015), *András Visky's Barrack Dramaturgy* (Intellect, 2017) and *Plays from Romania: Dramaturgies of Subversion* (Bloomsbury, 2021), and author of numerous publications on translation, adaptation and theatre, including the monographs *Staging Motherhood* (Palgrave, 2007) and *Radical Revival as Adaptation* (Palgrave, 2017). Her translations were published by Bloomsbury, Seagull Books, Istros Books, Ugly Duckling Presse and numerous journals, and produced by Foreign Affairs, Trap Door, Theatre Y, Trafika Europe Radio, Menagerie Theatre. They were among the finalists for the EBRD Literature Prize, longlisted for the Dublin Literary Award and recipients of the PEN Translates Grant. She is a member of the UK Translators Association. Website: <https://jozefinakomporal.com/>

PAOLO NELLI, born in 1968, lives in London, where he teaches Italian language and culture at King's College. He has published short stories and novels, including *Golden Boot*, published by Fazi in 2012. *Trattato di Economia Affettiva* was released in February 2018 by La nave di Teseo. With La nave di Teseo, he also published *Il Terzo Giorno* in 2020, Nelli's first mystery novel, and *Sindrome da Assicuratore* in 2024.

MIHAI RADU is a Romanian writer and journalist born in 1977. He is on the editorial team of the satirical weekly *Cațavencii* and a writer for the programme 'Ce ne enervează?' (Things That Annoy Us), produced by Recorder, an independent platform for investigative journalism. Radu was also a writer on the popular 'State of the Nation' TV show and authored numerous screenplays. His publications include short fiction co-written with Simona Tache – *Femeile vin de pe Venus, bărbații de la băut* (Women Come from Venus, Men from the Boozer) (2013) and *Bărbații vin de pe Marte, femeile de la coafor* (Men Come from Mars, Women from the Hairdresser) (2015) and the novels *Sebastian, ceilalți și-un câine* (Sebastian, the Others and a Dog) (2014), *Extraconjugal* (Extramarital) (2017), *Contaminare* (Contamination) (2019), *Repetiție pentru o lume mai bună* (*Rehearsal for a Better World*) (2022), *Respiro* (2024) - all published with Polirom. His work – sharp-witted, alert and cynical – is concerned with current social issues through the lens of incisive dark humour

RAPHAËLLE RED is a French-German author and researcher born in Paris and based in Berlin. She began her literary career after completing her studies in social sciences. Her work is centred on the themes of identity, heritage and belonging in an African diasporic context. She was chosen as one of six authors by the Festival of Black German-Language Literature "Resonanzen" in 2022. Furthermore, she conducted research and taught contemporary literature of the African diaspora at Freie Universität, in Berlin. Red writes in French, English and German. Her first novel *Adikou* (2024), initially published in French and later translated into German, was awarded the Prix Première of the Institut Français and selected by "Die Zeit" as one of the 100 Best Books of the Year in 2024. Her writing also appeared in other works such as "Bella Triste", "The Funambulist", "L'Humanité" and "gal-dem". She has been awarded grants and residencies by the Berlin Senat für Kultur, the Maison des Artistes de Lomé, the Niedersachsen Foundation and the Centre National du Cinéma.

ȘTEFANIA MELINTE is a student in the European Master's in Traductology and Terminology at Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. She holds a bachelor's degree in Spanish Language and Literature from the same institution. She is particularly interested in modern literature and literary translation, as well as how narrative voice and tone can be carried across different languages and cultures.

PATRICK WILLIAMSON is an English poet, translator from French and Italian, and translating trainer. He divides his time between Paris and Rome. His latest poetry collections include *Get up eight* (Cyberwit.net 2025), and *Presence/Presenza* (Samuele

Editore, 2023). Poems in Italian translation in notably Smerilliana, online journals, Versante Ripido, Atelier, and Perigeion. Two anthologies of poets from French-speaking Africa and the Arab World: *Turn your back on the night* (The Antonym, 2023) and *The Parley Tree* (Arc Publications, 2012), and curated a supplement for The High Window on the same subject in 2022. Translator notably of Tahar Bekri, Gilles Cyr, Guido Cupani and Erri de Luca (*One Way*, poetry, Antonym Collections, 2024). He is a longstanding collaborator, as author and translator, for Editions Transignum. Member of the Italian association Linguafranca-Sabir and the European board of The Antonym.

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Bois de fer, by Mireille Gagné ©2022 La Peuplade, Québec.

While I have done my best to identify and correct any typos, I apologise for any slips and blunders we may have missed.

Blanca González-Valencia

Introductory Note

I would like to begin by thanking Monica Boria for her generosity in entrusting me with the role of lead editor of *Il Pietrisco Translations*, and Gianluca Gallucci, whose comments and contributions have greatly strengthened the present issue.

Few concepts have come to define twenty-first-century public discourse as pervasively as the concept of *crisis*. Since the 2008 global financial crash, references to economic, neoliberal, political, identity, and value crises have multiplied, although the term itself has a much longer history and has long been used to describe a wide variety of social, political, and cultural phenomena. In September 2025, the editorial team of *Il Pietrisco Translations* decided to dedicate this issue to exploring how crises are perceived, understood, narrated, and translated across Romance-language and anglophone contexts. As a multilingual journal committed to showcasing literary translation and promoting intercultural exchange, we seek to highlight how texts travel between languages and how translation facilitates new forms of cultural and critical engagement.

The decision to focus exclusively on twenty-first-century texts was intended to narrow our scope to contemporary literary works written in, or originating from, Romance-language contexts. At the same time, the theme resonated with my own research interests. Having recently submitted a PhD thesis examining the representation of austerity in Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), I became increasingly interested in the role that narratives play in shaping public understandings of social and economic hardship. My research considered how the consequences of the economic crisis were represented across multiple media, drawing on Mona Baker's (2006) concept of public narratives as stories disseminated by 'social and institutional formations larger than the individual' (Baker 2006: 33). It was through this engagement with crisis narratives that the idea for the present issue emerged. The project drew attention to how crises are framed in public spheres: not merely as the result of specific national circumstances, but also incorporating broader narratives of resilience, responsibility, and collective action in response. These observations prompted further reflection on how literary texts engage with crises and how such representations may shift when translated across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Although Baker's concept of narrative is not limited to literary texts (Baker 2006: 20), literature offers a particularly rich site in which individual experiences intersect with broader social realities. Novels, short stories, poems, and essays are embedded in specific historical, social, and economic contexts that inevitably shape authors, translators, and readers alike. With this in mind, we invited contributions examining contemporary works from Romance-language traditions as they enter other linguistic contexts through translation.

Before discussing the contributions themselves, it is worth pausing to consider the term that unites them and its circulation across the languages represented in this issue. Derived from the Greek verb *krinein* (κρίνειν), meaning "to separate", "to decide", or "to judge", the

term entered Latin as *crisis*. It was initially associated with a decisive turning point, particularly in medical discourse. Although that meaning remains relevant today, the word has come to denote states of emergency, instability, or profound change. This evolution is reflected across the Romance languages featured in this issue and in the word used to refer to it: *criză* in Romanian, *crise* in French, *crisi* in Italian, and *crisis* in Spanish. English, meanwhile, adopted the term through Latin, most likely via French, together with its plural form, *crises*. The concept's semantic breadth and adaptability perhaps explain its enduring appeal. Yet what is particularly striking in the originals and translations gathered in this publication is that, despite engaging directly with experiences of hardship, uncertainty, displacement, and social transformation, none of them explicitly employs the word '*crisis*'. Instead, crisis emerges through lived experience, interpersonal relationships, and the social conditions that shape everyday life.

The following paragraphs examine each contribution in greater detail. Despite their differences in language, genre, and context, these works share a common concern with the relationship between personal experience and wider public or national narratives. As both the translations and the accompanying translators' notes demonstrate, individual lives are frequently shaped by social, political, and economic crises that extend far beyond the personal sphere. Seen holistically, the contributions in this issue reveal the diverse ways in which contemporary literature from Romance-language traditions narrates moments of rupture, vulnerability, and change, and illustrate how translation enables these narratives to resonate from individual experiences to broader social and cultural concerns across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The issue opens with James Ackhurst and Elena Borelli, who translate a section of Paolo Nelli's *Trattato di economia affettiva* (2018) from Italian into English. Through the experiences of its Southern Italian protagonist, the novel reflects the social and economic crises that shaped Italy during the 1970s, a period in which, according to Paul Ginsborg (1990), 'Italian society was challenged at nearly every level' (Ginsborg 1990: 343). One manifestation of these tensions was the large-scale migration from the South to the industrial North, which exceeded 100,000 people annually, and often led migrants to settle in areas lacking basic amenities such as running water and indoor sanitation (ibid.: 345). The next contribution, by Louisa Adamson, translates a fragment of the French multilingual author Raphaëlle Red's *Adikou* (2024), a book in which a young woman travels from France to Togo in search of her absent father and a sense of belonging, transforming the postcolonial and diasporic experience into a deeply personal crisis of identity. Similarly, Ștefania Melinte has translated a part of the Romanian novel *Întinde mâna, Tiberiu!* (2022) by Horea Sibișteanu, where a protagonist struggles to reconcile childhood trauma, sexuality, and social expectations, illustrating how identity is constructed through experiences of vulnerability and exclusion. Across these works, crisis is experienced primarily at the individual level, as an attempt to establish coherence and a sense of belonging in an increasingly fragmented world.

Yet these narratives also demonstrate that personal crises are inseparable from wider social realities. The case of Mihai Radu's *Repetiție pentru o lume mai bună* (2022), set in contemporary Romania and partly translated by Jozefina Kamporalý, portrays divorce, ageing, dementia, and family secrets against a backdrop of moral, political, and civilisational instability, suggesting that the protagonist's disorientation reflects wider societal anxieties. Megan Harvey's contribution turns to *Bois de fer* (2022) by Mireille Gagné, set in Quebec, which transforms environmental degradation into a somatic experience through the figure of a woman-tree whose exhaustion and loss of self, mirror the ecological consequences of contemporary capitalism. Finally, Patrick Williamson has translated Guido Cupani's Italian poems from *Meno Universo* (2018), which address questions of religion, mortality, and violence, alongside an engagement with the European crisis of meaning in which traditional systems of belief no longer provide stable points of reference. In these texts, crisis extends beyond the personal sphere and becomes a social, ecological, and ideological condition affecting entire communities.

Taken together, these works reveal a common tendency within contemporary European and transnational literature: the movement between individual and collective forms of crisis. Whether expressed through a Togolese-French search for origins, Italian experiences of economic and spiritual uncertainty, Romanian reflections on social change and fractured identities, or Québec's ecological concerns, each text demonstrates how personal lives are shaped by larger historical and structural forces. Although the manifestations of crisis differ across cultural and national contexts, these narratives collectively suggest that crisis has become a transnational condition of the contemporary world. Literature, in turn, provides a space in which these disruptions can be narrated, interpreted, and reimagined, revealing the complex relationship between private experience and shared realities.

I hope you will enjoy this issue.

Blanca González-Valencia, September 2026

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Ginsborg, Paul. 1990. *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (Penguin Books)

PAOLO NELLI

translated from Italian into English by James Ackhurst and Elena Borelli

Capitolo 4 di *Trattato di Economia Affettiva* (Nave di Teseo, 2018)

Ragazza mia ti spiego gli uomini

Anche un uomo. Mina, 1979

Filomena Ricci ha diciassette anni quando Gabriele fa il suo ingresso nella casa della sarta. In casa della sarta, con Filomena, ci sono diverse ragazze e sono lì per imparare a fare vestiti. Gabriele ci entra con la scusa di accompagnare il suo amico Peppino, che deve andare a parlare con la sorella. Ma la sarta è stata avvisata. E anche le ragazze riconoscono che uno scapolo in possesso di un patrimonio, non necessariamente solido, debba essere in cerca di moglie. E Gabriele, uscendo, dice a Peppino che sì, gli piace quella giovane. Si chiama Filomena. È alta. Gabriele, questa cosa dell'altezza, per lui è una fissa. La Filomena di cui Peppino gli ha detto che è libera, non è bassa, ma nemmeno così alta da essere descritta, appunto, usando come primo aggettivo qualcosa che si riferisca all'altezza. Insomma, Gabriele ha messo gli occhi sulla Filomena sbagliata. Forse lei gli ha sorriso, ma non per malizia. Lei, quella Filomena lì, quella alta, è già promessa, si è già impegnata con un altro. Gabriele ci rimane male. Sì, ha visto anche l'altra Filomena, anche lei gli ha sorriso, l'ha visto lui stesso. Ma di ragazze ce n'erano parecchie e nella memoria di Gabriele un po' si mischiano e l'unico modo è tornarci. Inutile trovare una scusa che tanto l'hanno capito anche le ragazze. E stavolta, rientrando, Peppino gli dà le indicazioni più precise su quale Filomena puntare l'attenzione. Non è alta, pensa Gabriele. Questo gli dispiace. Ma non è neppure bassa. Questo gli fa piacere.

Che anche la Filomena giusta vada bene a Gabriele, Peppino lo dice alla sorella. La sorella lo dice alla sarta. La sarta lo dice a sua madre. La madre della sarta lo dice a Anna, la mamma di Filomena. La mamma di Filomena lo dice al marito, Antonio. In tutti questi passaggi anche Filomena lo viene a sapere e non è una sorpresa quando alla festa del paese Gabriele le si avvicina proponendole di accompagnarla a casa. E lei che può fare? Ormai se lo aspettano tutti. Così vanno le cose. E si fa accompagnare.

Per il matrimonio nonna Rita, la madre di Gabriele, regala loro un cassettone. Ma non le spese per il viaggio di trasporto dall'Abruzzo alla Lombardia. E ci mancherebbe! Ci dovete pensare voi! E se non avete i soldi, il cassettone lo tengo io. Lo prenderete quando li avrete. Ha già fatto troppo per i figli, lei, che è rimasta vedova troppo presto, lei, che il marito Luciano se lo porta sempre attaccato al cuore, lei, nell'ovale appeso alla catenina. Quando ne parla se lo avvicina alla bocca, con gli occhi che le si piegano, e lo bacia.

La tenerezza che ha difficoltà a esprimere coi vivi, le viene meglio coi morti.

Gabriele già abita lassù. Adesso che è arrivata anche Filomena hanno trovato una camera al pianterreno di una casa alle Terresecche, una frazione fuori dal paese. Prima c'erano le stalle ma adesso hanno sistemato. Il bagno è fuori. L'acqua corrente è fuori. I panni si lavano nella roggia. 1961, Brianza. Nella stanza adesso che sono sposati, ci dorme anche zio Pasquale, il fratello di Gabriele. Si è trasferito anche lui al Nord.

Il cassettone è ancora giù in Abruzzo.

Nella camera in affitto ci si adatta. Non è la reggia di un pascià e c'è pure Pasquale. Ma i turni in fabbrica differenti permettono di adempiere i doveri matrimoniali. E così nasce Luciana. Filomena ad allattare fa come ha sempre visto fare al suo paese, in Abruzzo, si mette fuori, seduta alla sedia bassa, in cortile, al sole di settembre, sotto l'albero di cachi che tu, Luciana, crescendo, dirai che mai ne hai mangiati di così buoni, ma adesso, mentre sei nelle braccia di tua madre, sono ancora verdi e tremano, un poco, quando le mine della cemenzeria esplodono ad allargare la cava, accerchiando le Terresecche, riducendo il bosco intorno. E Rosina, la padrona di casa, le si avvicina e le chiede se è matta, ma cosa fa, in mezzo alla gente! Questi terroni non sono terroni per niente, varda te, se si può stare *coi pech al vent!* Poi nasce Dorian. Filomena lo allatta, ancora seduta alla sedia bassa, ma stavolta non si mette in cortile. L'estate dopo che è nato Dorian, zio Pasquale torna dalle vacanze in Abruzzo con Concetta, che è una ragazza giovane giovane. Bella bella. E lei non vuole più starci nelle campagne. Anche lei sta per un po' con Filomena Gabriele Pasquale e i due figli piccoli. Ma ormai il danno è fatto. Se Concetta non si sposa con Pasquale è una svergognata, per sempre. Si sposano, infatti, e trovano una sistemazione da soli.

Nella stanza di Gabriele e Filomena adesso c'è più spazio. E nasce Rita. E poi, tre anni dopo, all'inizio dell'estate, anche Nello si affaccia al suo destino e nel pianto della nascita sente, per la prima volta, la felicità che è propria delle vecchie cose. Come la vita. E ringrazia i genitori da subito, dai primi respiri. Li ringrazia di non aver fatto alcuna pianificazione familiare. Grazie mamma, grazie papà, grida a squarciagola nella sala parto. Se aveste pianificato una famiglia in accordo con le vostre possibilità economiche io, grida Nello nel suo garrulo pianto, non avrei neppure avuto l'occasione di sperimentare questa meravigliosa presa per il culo che è la vita umana. Non avrei sperimentato la profonda e stupefacente irrazionalità del sentirsi vivi, del crearsi viventi nell'atto di pensarsi, appunto, come tali, uomini e donne che si sorprendono di quanto in fretta arrivi la sera. Grazie e grazie, continua a urlare piangendo. Non smetterò mai di esservene grati, strilla, e poi si addormenta nelle braccia di Filomena. E Filomena, subito dopo, anche lei, si addormenta.

Chapter 4 of *Treatise on the Economy of Feeling* (La Nave di Teseo 2018)

My girl, let me tell you what men are like

Anche un uomo, a song by Mina, 1979

Filomena Ricci is seventeen when Gabriele first enters the seamstress's house. At the seamstress's house, there are various girls besides Filomena, and they are all there to learn how to make clothes. Gabriele goes there on the pretext of accompanying his friend Peppino, who has to have a word with his sister. But the seamstress has gotten the hint. And even the girls acknowledge that a single man in possession of a fortune – though not necessarily a good one- must be in want of a wife. And as he leaves the house, Gabriele says that yes, he likes the girl. Her name's Filomena. The tall one. Gabriele is sort of obsessed with tall girls. But the Filomena that Peppino said was single is not short yet not tall enough for tall to be the defining adjective when describing her. In other words, Gabriele has laid eyes on the wrong Filomena. Maybe she smiled to him, but not in a naughty way. But that Filomena, the tall one, is already taken, she's already going out with somebody else. Gabriele is quite upset about it. Yes, he saw the other Filomena, and she smiled at him, he saw that himself. But there were quite a few girls girls, and they're all mixed together in Gabriele's memory, so that the only way to be sure is to go back. No

point in finding an excuse, the girls know why he's there. And this time, when he goes back, Peppino is clearer about which Filomena he should focus on. She's not tall -Gabriele thinks – and he's put off by that. But she's not short either. He likes that.

Peppino tells his sister that Gabriele finds the right Filomena acceptable too. The sister tells the seamstress. The seamstress tells her mother. The seamstress's mother tells Anna, who is Filomena's mother. Anna tells Antonio, her husband. Through all these exchanges Filomena comes to be aware of it, too, and therefore, it is not a surprise to her when, at the village fair, Gabriele approaches her and asks her to walk her home. And, anyway, what can she do? By this point everyone is expecting her to say yes. That's the way things go. So she says yes, and he walks her home.

For the wedding, Grandma Rita, Gabriele's mother, presents them with a chest of drawers. But she does not pay to transport it from Abruzzo to Lombardia. "Obviously not! You need to take care of it! And if you don't have the money, I am keeping the hope chest. You can come back and get it when you've earned the money." She's already done more than enough for her children, having lost her husband too soon, her dear husband Luciano, who is always close to her heart in the little oval locket that hangs from her necklace. When she talks about him, she brings the locket to her lips, her eyes squinting, and kisses it. The tenderness she has trouble expressing with the living, comes easier to her with the dead.

Gabriele has already moved up North. Now that Filomena is there too, they've found a room on the ground floor in Terre Secche, a hamlet just outside of town. Previously it was a stable, but they have converted it. Outside toilet. Outside tap. They wash their clothes in the canal. Brianza, 1961. Now that they're married, they share the room with Uncle Pasquale, Gabriele's brother, who has also moved to the North.

The hope chest is still down in Abruzzo.

They just adapt to the rented room. It's not a mansion, and Pasquale is there to boot. But different shifts at the factory allow conjugal duties to be fulfilled. And so, after a while, Luciana was born. Filomena breastfeeds her baby like she always saw other women do in her village in Abruzzo: she sits outside in the courtyard, on a low chair, in the September sun, under a tree that is heavy with persimmons that you, Luciana, growing up, will always say that are the best you've ever tasted, but now that you're a baby at your mother's breast, the persimmons are still green, and they shake when concrete factory's charges are set off to enlarge the quarry, the quarry which now encircles Terre Secche, pushing out the surrounding woods.

And Rosina, the landlady, goes to Filomena and says "Are you crazy, what are you doing, feeding your baby in public?" "Jeez, they don't call these Southerners hicks for no reason, look at her, with her tits in the wind!"¹ Then it's Dorianio's turn to be born. Filomena still feeds him sitting on the low chair, but not in the courtyard this time. The summer after Dorianio is born, Uncle Pasquale returns from his holiday in Abruzzo with Concetta, who is his girl. Very young. Very pretty. And she doesn't want to live in the country anymore. She lodges with Filomena, Gabriele, their two little kids, and Pasquale for a bit. But by then the damage is done. If Pasquale does not marry her, her reputation is ruined forever. So, they marry, and they find a place of their own.

¹ "with her tits in the wind" is uttered in the local dialect of Brianza, Lombardy.

Gabriele and Filomena have more space in their room. And Rita is born. And then, three years later, in the early summer, Nello, too, first looks out upon his destiny. When he is born, he cries, and in that moment, he feels, for the first time, the happiness that is the birthright of everything old. Such as life. And with his first breath, he is already thanking his parents. Thanks for having engaged in no family planning whatsoever. Thanks Mum, thanks Dad, he screams at the top of his lungs in the delivery room. If you had planned your family in accordance with your financial means, says Nello in his garrulous cry, I would have never had the opportunity to experience the wondrous piss-take that human life is. I would not have experienced the profound, astonishing irrationality of feeling alive, or making myself a living being just by thinking myself into being, just like the men and women who are then taken by surprise by how quickly the night falls. Thank you, thank you, he keeps on shouting as he cries. I will always be grateful to you, he wails, then he falls asleep in Filomena's arms. And Filomena falls asleep too, right after.

Context

Trattato di Economia Affettiva is a novel written by Italian author Paolo Nelli and published by La Nave di Teseo in 2018. The novel is set in 1970s Italy and explores the relationship between lives, emotions, and money during the rise of consumerism, as seen through the experiences of a child and his working-class family. Combining a profound yet ironic tone, the novel is ambitious for its frank treatment of personal issues and vivid portrayal of the era. Illustrating how a person's character and identity are inextricably shaped by the socioeconomic background of the family's origins, Nelli's oeuvre blends gritty realism with a poignant exploration of memory. The narrative follows Nello, coming of age in 1970s Italy – a period defined by the stark contrast between the lingering momentum of the economic boom and the violent political unrest known as the "Years of Lead." As the son of a factory worker and a housewife, Nello inhabits a world where financial resources are scarce and emotional affection is often inconsistent.

Nelli captures the epic of small things, charting Nello's journey through a landscape of black-and-white television, pop culture, and burgeoning consumerism. Through the adult Nello's retrospective lens, the novel argues that our identity is a form of emotional capital, built not just on what we possess but on the voids left by our unfulfilled aspirations. The treatise in the title is, in fact, a reference to Karl Marx and the novel's recurring theme is that psychological development is governed by Marxist economic laws.

Stylistically, Nelli employs a "synthetic" language heavily indebted to the Cannibali movement of the 1990s and early 2000s (Niccolò Ammaniti, Aldo Nove, and Isabella Santacroce are Nelli's inspirations in his early novels). This influence is evident in the use of short, punchy sentences and a rejection of dense psychological introspection in favour of external action and dialogue. Another key feature of this text is its raw blend of colloquialisms and profanities juxtaposed with sudden bursts of lyricism.

The story is told by an extradiegetic narrator, whom the reader recognises as adult Nello. This creates a non-linear experience, using frequent flashbacks and flash-forwards to weave together objective historical accuracy with deeply personal subjective insights.

Praised for its originality, many reviewers dwell on the quality of Nelli's prose: fresh, supple, ironic, and at the same time deeply empathetic, capable of abolishing time and turning memory into a living experience. Balancing tragedy and hope, humility and joy, the work has been described as a "little miracle of a book," one that can make readers laugh and ache while restoring narrative dignity to an Italy shaped by migration, deprivation, and emotional resilience.

Translator's note

Paolo Nelli's 2018 novel, *Trattato di Economia Affettiva*, presents a compelling paradox: a "synthetic" prose style that is deceptively simple yet layered with dense intellectual and cultural scaffolding. The translation seeks to preserve Nelli's indebtedness to the Cannibali movement. To mirror this style, we utilised short, punchy direct speech – even where the original employed free indirect discourse – to maintain clarity. For instance, in the second paragraph, we rendered Nonna Rita's free indirect speech as direct speech enclosed in quotation marks. This minimalism frequently gives way to "climactic" moments of poetic quality, where the syntax accumulates to reflect Nello's thinking.

While the surface language is gritty, the text is a web of disguised references. We have worked to anchor these for the English reader. There are several literary allusions, as the prose includes nods to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Blaise Pascal's philosophy, and a poem by Salvatore Quasimodo called *Ed è subito sera*, which is paraphrased in the sentence 'uomini e donne che si sorprendono di quanto in fretta arrivi la sera'. *Trattato* is also layered with pop-culture references, as each chapter title is an Italian song from the 1970s, serving as a nostalgic backdrop to Nello's "micro-history". In this text, we have translated the line from the song that gives the chapter its title to clarify this aspect for the reader.

Ultimately, the translation balances these high-culture echoes with the novel's folktale-like quality by using words like *seamstress* rather than *tailor*, a reference to archetypal characters in folk ballads and fairy tales, and by foregrounding references likely to be recognisable to an English-speaking reader, such as the reference to Jane Austen. This interplay of folkloric elements, poetic register, and profanity is most evident in the story of Gabriele's choice of bride and in Nello's birth, which is framed as a miracle to behold despite life's mockingly cruel nature.

RAPHAËLLE RED

translated from French into Italian by Luisa Adamson

Adikou

Un an et quelques plus tôt, quand le pasteur a proclamé, *You can never go too far where you can't come back home again*, Elle avait voulu lui donner tort, et puis elle s'était rappelé que ce n'était qu'un morceau de musique dans ses écouteurs, un bout de gospel dans du rap US. Le vent était tiède pour un début d'hiver à New York. Ça donnait un air idiot et attachant aux décorations de Noël empilées dans les vitrines. De ce côté-là de la ville il n'y avait pas vraiment de gratte-ciel, juste des gros bouts de béton encerclés par des autoroutes larges comme des bandes de désert. C'était ni le bord de mer ni les terres, une ville boueuse, bâtarde, aux avant-goûts de brisure et aux relents d'extermination. Pour un peu elle aurait pu être reconnaissante à ce Whiteboy-ci de précipiter un nouveau départ. Mais non: en repensant à la veille, Adikou a senti monter une solide envie de vomir. Elle a jeté le gobelet de café à moitié plein dans une poubelle en métal et noté sur son téléphone les horaires des bus vers le sud. Ils étaient couverts d'un grand dessin de lévrier, l'air méchant.

De toute façon, ça lui avait déjà pris avant, cette envie de s'enfoncer dans le continent, de ne plus fixer tous les jours l'océan vaincu par le béton. Il était d'un bleu profond, ça lui rappelait une tenue de sa grand-mère. Elle qui venait hanter de temps en temps la nuit, s'excuser pour son fils, cette pièce vacillante. Elle portait toujours ce tissu bleu profond, le portait en tout cas invariablement sur l'unique photo qu'Adikou avait vue, la tenue était bleue et sa grand-mère était assise, droite et fière, sur une chaise à Lomé. C'est ce qu'Adikou spéculait. L'intérieur du studio de photographie aurait pu être n'importe où. Avec le peu qu'elle avait vu de Lomé pendant ses quelques semaines humanitaires au Togo l'été précédent, elle aurait à peine pu reconnaître une artère principale, certainement pas l'ambiance d'un studio photo dans les années 80.

Adikou a traversé le passage piéton suivant, frissonné entre les hauts bâtiments gris. Ça faisait un moment qu'elle se disait qu'il valait mieux fuir avant les fantômes. À son arrivée six mois plus tôt, elle avait essayé de s'expliquer avec le formulaire d'inscription de l'université d'échange qui la priait de bien vouloir dire si elle était finalement caucasienne, ou africaine, ou afro-américaine. Elle s'était demandé s'il fallait appliquer la loi de la goutte : sur les plantations états-uniennes et dans le monde auquel elles avaient donné naissance après l'abolition formelle, il suffisait d'une goutte de sang noir pour teinter une personne. Elle avait une envie pressante d'aller fumer, elle avait coché Autre.

En tout cas on l'avait invitée à l'espace des étudiant-e-s noir-e-s. Elle a dit : Ah c'est gentil, mais... Elle a dit qu'elle ne l'était pas vraiment, noire, plutôt fifty-fifty, impur produit de la somme des moitiés. Qu'elle ne croyait pas trop à ces choses-là, qu'elle ne voyait pas l'intérêt de l'espace sécurisé si elle devait s'y sentir comme une intruse, la blancheur en elle comme la prothèse métallique qui alarme le portique. La fille l'avait regardée tristement, plus jeune qu'elle et plus grande aussi, en attrapant son manteau au fond de la salle de classe vidée.

Comme tu veux, elle avait dit. Adikou était sortie derrière elle, doucement, pour ne pas la rattraper. Ce n'était pas très audible, son histoire de grand-mère. Elle rencontrait des

garçons dont la géographie était rouée de coups, et des filles aux nuques marquées du soleil du Sud qui se reflète sur les champs de coton, qui se tatouaient X juste sous le cœur pour encore sentir l'absence et toujours sentir la perte. Elle trouvait ça impoli, de leur affirmer le drame d'une origine connue. Elle gardait pour elle la grand-mère lointaine, les racines pleines d'épines, le père envolé, la méfiance vis-à-vis de la terremère et du mot même. Elle avait honte de leur voir tant d'espoir – butait quand ils parlaient d'un voyage en Afrique de l'Ouest comme d'un retour, les imaginait se faire plumer dans des attractions touristiques par leurs black sisters et brothers du continent.

Adikou

Poco più di un anno prima, quando il pastore aveva annunciato: "You can never go too far where you can't come back home again". Avrebbe voluto dargli torto ma poi si era ricordata che non era che un pezzo musicale nelle cuffiette, un po' di gospel nel rap americano. Il vento era tiepido per essere l'inizio dell'inverno a New York. Ciò dava un aspetto bizzarro e affascinante alle decorazioni di Natale impilate nelle vetrine. In questa zona della città non c'erano dei veri grattacieli, solo dei grandi pezzi di cemento circondati da autostrade grandi come strisce di deserto. Non era né il litorale, né l'entroterra, una città sporca, malmessa, con presagi di rottura e sentore di sterminio. Avrebbe potuto quasi essere riconoscente a quel Whiteboy lì per averle dato un nuovo inizio. Oppure no, ripensando alla notte precedente, Adikou aveva sentito un forte senso di vomito. Aveva gettato in un cestino di metallo il caffè d'asporto mezzo pieno e poi si era segnata sul telefono gli orari dei bus diretti a sud. Erano ricoperti dal disegno di un levriero dall'aria minacciosa.

In ogni caso, le era già arrivata questa voglia di sprofondare nel continente e di non guardare più tutti i giorni l'oceano vinto dal cemento. Era di un blu scuro e le ricordava un abito di sua nonna. Lei, che la tormentava di tanto in tanto la notte, si scusava per suo figlio, quella stanza tremolante. Indossava sempre un tessuto blu scuro, inevitabilmente lo portava nell'unica foto che Adikou aveva visto di lei, l'abito era blu e sua nonna era seduta, dritta e fiera, su una sedia a Lomé. Era ciò che Adikou sosteneva. L'interno dello studio fotografico avrebbe potuto essere ovunque. Col poco che aveva visto di Lomé nelle settimane umanitarie in Togo l'estate precedente, avrebbe a malapena riconosciuto una via principale, di certo non l'atmosfera di uno studio fotografico degli anni '80.

Adikou aveva attraversato tremolante le successive strisce pedonali tra gli alti edifici grigi. Era da un po' che si diceva che era meglio fuggire prima che arrivassero i fantasmi. Al suo arrivo sei mesi prima, aveva provato a spiegarsi nel formulario d'iscrizione dell'università in cui faceva lo scambio che la pregava di chiarire se fosse caucasica o africana o afroamericana. Si era chiesta se avesse dovuto mettere in atto la legge della goccia di sangue. Al tempo delle piantagioni statunitensi e nel mondo che quest'ultime avevano generato dopo l'abolizione formale, era sufficiente una sola goccia di sangue nero per schedare una persona. Aveva un forte bisogno di fumare, aveva selezionato "Altro".

Ad ogni modo, era stata invitata allo spazio degli studenti e delle studentesse nere. Lei aveva risposto: «Ah grazie ma...» Aveva risposto che non lo era davvero, nera, piuttosto fifty-fifty, un ibrido impuro della somma delle due metà. Che non credeva troppo a quelle cose lì, che non vedeva il senso dello spazio protetto se poi doveva sentirsi un'intrusa e che la bianchezza in lei era come una protesi metallica pronta a far scattare il metal detector. La ragazza, più giovane di lei e anche più alta, l'aveva guardata con aria triste

mentre prendeva il suo cappotto in fondo all'aula svuotata: «Come preferisci», aveva risposto. Adikou era uscita lentamente dopo di lei per evitare di rincontrarla. La sua tiritera non era facile da ascoltare. Incontrava ragazzi provenienti da zone geografiche segnate dalla violenza, ragazze con le nuche marchiate dal sole del sud che si riflette sui campi di cotone, che si tatuavano una X proprio sotto il cuore per sentire ancora l'assenza e sempre la perdita. Lo trovava scortese dover confermare loro il dramma di un'origine già nota. Teneva per sé il pensiero della nonna lontana, le radici piene di spine, il padre scomparso, la diffidenza verso la madre terra e la parola stessa. Si sentiva a disagio nel vedere così tanta speranza in loro. Si bloccava quando raccontavano di un viaggio in Africa Occidentale come di un ritorno e li immaginava mentre si facevano spennare alle attrazioni turistiche dai loro black brothers e black sisters del continente.

Context

Adikou by Raphaëlle Red was first published by Grasset in 2024. After the initial French edition, the book was then translated into German by Patricia Klobusiczky and published by Rewohlt (2024). *Adikou* is a narrative, descriptive novel that focuses on themes of identity and belonging. It tells the story of the young French-Togolese Adikou, who faces the challenges of being a mixed-race woman in the Western world. Eventually, these difficulties will lead her on a journey to Togo: her father's homeland, from whom she has not heard in a long time. As she travels, she connects with her African roots and begins to explore another side of her identity that she had been distant from for so long.

Regarding my translation, I chose to work on the first 698 words of the second chapter: a flashback to Adikou's study experience in New York. In this part of the novel, she finds herself reflecting on the relationship with her own identity while dating a white American boy. She also compares herself with her fellow African American classmates and begins to question her roots, all while her Togolese grandma haunts her in her dreams. Thus, this chapter could be considered as Adikou's exploration of identity and understanding her place in the world.

This section of the novel is told in the third person by an omniscient narrator, who serves as Adikou's sister and alter ego. It contains direct speeches, and it is written in an informal register. The text contains a few English sentences or terms such as *Black sisters* and *Brothers*. Furthermore, the text is rich in detailed descriptions, carefully depicting both the protagonist's actions and those of the other characters. Moreover, Red carefully employs adjectives to highlight the characters' emotions, creating vivid understandings of their feelings and emotional states. An example of this can be found between the tenth and the eleventh line on the second page of the source text: "La fille l'avait tristement regardée" ("The girl sadly looked at her").

Translator's note

There is always a list of steps that I follow when approaching a text for translation. First, according to Vermeer's (1989) Skopos theory, I identify the function, or intention, of the text, which, in this case, is to tell a story about identity and travel. Then I move on to the target audience for which the text was written, to determine which linguistic register to adopt. This novel was written for passionate readers of reflective and descriptive texts,

so I made sure that my translation respected the author's careful use of adjectives in the original. I also maintained an informal register when translating dialogue and fragments of speech. Despite having to modify the punctuation in certain parts of the text and adapt it to the Italian orthographic system, I could base my translation process on a "Word for Word" approach. In contrast to other parts of the novel, the passage I selected does not include specific French cultural references, so I was able to translate it into Italian without too much consideration for cultural discrepancies or misunderstandings, working off the theory proposed by Peter Newmark in *A Textbook of Translation* (1988, p 45). This method of translation was further aided by similarities in lexis and grammatical structures shared by French and Italian as Romance languages. When approaching the translation of English words and sentences, I chose not to translate them to respect Red's choice to reflect the American social context Adikou experiences. Given how frequently her thoughts are expressed in the source text, the use of English expressions in this part of the novel shows how changes in surroundings shape her mind and personality.

I chose to translate this novel because I see myself in Adikou. As a mixed-race young woman of Italian and Jamaican descent, raised between Italy and the UK, I experienced many of the issues described in the novel. The constant feeling of not being white nor black, micro-aggressions, as well as having a more extensive knowledge and attachment to my Caucasian roots, have always been part of my lived experience and always will. But the beauty of being two things; of belonging to two different cultures while at the same time being uniquely one is just ... powerful.

SIBIȘTEANU HOREA

translated from Romanian into Spanish by Ștefania Melinte

O vară mai târziu (din romanul „Întinde mâna, Tiberiu!”)

Când am aflat că a murit soră-mea, nu am simțit nimic. Nici furie, nici supărare, nici măcar bucurie. Nu știu dacă am urât-o, dar sigur nu mi-a plăcut tare de ea. Nu mi-a convenit că a apărut dintr-odată și a acapara toată atenția.

N-am fost un copil aventuros. Aș putea spune că eram mai degrabă precaut. Analizam fiecare propunere în detaliu până să iau o decizie. Nu traversam strada mare să mă duc la ruine și nici nu mă urcam în copaci. Nu participam la concursul de mâncat lucruri scârboase și nici nu băteam la ușile vecinilor, ca după aceea să fug. Copiii de la bloc mă strigau „fricosul,” și se jucau cu mine doar pentru că veneam la pachet cu ea, sora mea. Ea era capul răutăților, cea care mereu inventa provocări și jocuri periculoase.

Probabil că nu am simțit nimic și pentru că, timp de un an, nu am știut că a murit. Într-o zi de vară mama m-a dus la cimitir și mi-a arătat mormântul. În jurul movilei de pământ, era toată lumea, până și tata, care ne părăsise de vreo jumătate de an și locuia cu o femeie de care bunica zicea că e varianta vulgară și ieftină a mamei. „Uită-te la ea”, spunea, „cum încearcă să o copieze pe mă-ta. Da’ nu-i iese. N-are sânge de doamnă în ea.” Tata o adusesse la cimitir și bunica era foarte nervoasă. „Cum să vină cu ea, nu se cuvine...I-am spus să nu se mărite cu el! Am simțit că nu e om de caracter. Dar dacă ea l-a iubit...”

După ce tata a plecat, eu și cu mama ne-am mutat la bunici. În același bloc, un etaj mai jos. Fostul nostru apartament a fost vândut după divorț. În locul nostru s-a mutat o familie cu doi copii: un băiat mai mare și o fată de vârsta mea, Ioana. Pe tata îl vedeam numai la școală. Venea din când în când, în pauze, și îmi aducea câte ceva. Mă întreba cum sunt și dacă am vreo nevoie. Îi spuneam că sunt bine și că am tot ce-mi trebuie. Aș fi vrut să îi spun să vină acasă, să ne jucăm, dar mama nu mă lăsa. Când suna clopoțelul, mă ciufulea, îmi spunea să fiu cuminte și să le ascult pe mama și bunica. Ochii i se umezeau, se ridica de pe vine și pleca. „Fugi, să nu întârzi la ore!” spunea din mers.

Era o zi fierbinte, hainele negre frigeau pe piele, mirosul de ceară era înecăcios și în jur era un murmur de plâns înăbușit. Am plâns și eu. Am plâns pentru că plângea bunica și îmi era milă de ea; apoi, de draci, că i-am întins mâna mamei, acolo, lângă mormânt, și m-a plesnit. S-a uitat la mine cu privirea rece și mi-a spus să o las măcar atunci în pace. [...]

Mi-am adus aminte de după-masa când am intrat în casă să beau apă și toate vecinele bunicii erau în bucătărie, împletind o lumânare de topită și moale. Am întrebat ce se întâmplă și bunica m-a luat de braț și m-a scos afară. Mi-a spus că doamna Aprofirei face o pomană pentru soțul ei și că e treabă de femei. Am întrebat unde e mama și mi-a zis că e la poștă, să lase o scrisoare pentru Cosmina, care era încă în tabăra Cireșarilor, o organizație de copii a unui partid unde erau cu toții membri. Fusesem și eu o săptămână, dar nu mi-a plăcut. Cât am stat acolo, am plâns de dimineața până seara, așa că au sunat acasă să mă ia. Toți copiii au râs de mine că plâng după mama; iar Cosmina, proasta, în loc să îmi ia apărarea, râdea cu ei. Așa de tare m-a enervat, încât am vrut, pentru prima dată în viață, să mă răzbun. Și am avut eu ac de cojocul ei. „Na, să mai râzi de mine!” îmi ziceam în gând, în drum spre casă. Trecuse ceva timp de când mă întorsesem. Când mama a revenit, am întrebat-o cât mai stă Cosmina acolo. Mi-a răspuns așa cum făcea ea când era supărată, cu o povață: „Fiecare acțiune are și repercusiuni. Ține minte asta!” Era

obosită și plânsă. Tata își lăsase barbă. Nu Înțelesesem de ce. Ceva părea schimbat, dar nu-mi dădeam seama ce și mi-era ciudă.

Vara a trecut repede și am uitat de lipsa Cosminei. Mai ales că eram din nou în centrul atenției. Copiii de la bloc se jucau acum cu mine și parcă păreau mai drăguți. Când mai apărea câte unul răutăcios, brusc o mamă de la geam îl certa și-i zicea să mă lase în pace. [...]

Lucica a început să plângă și mi-a spus că sunt prost. Am întrebat-o de ce sunt prost, când tocmai eu mi-am dat seama că a trișat. A strigat tare, printre lacrimi, că sunt prost pentru că sor-mea era moartă și numai eu nu știam. Mi-a zis și că ei nu-i e frică de mine. Atunci domnul Munteanu a ieșit de sub motoretă și a țipat la ea să intre în casă. Nici nu-l văzusem acolo.

Lucica a ripostat, dar tatăl ei a luat-o de mână și a smucit-o. A condus-o până la ușa apartamentului și a băgat-o cu forța înăuntru. M-am ridicat de pe banca din fața blocului și am fugit. Nu de nervi că Lucica mințise că sora mea e moartă, știam că minte, că e în tabără, ci de rușine că o făcusem sărăntoacă de față cu tatăl ei, care nu comentase nimic legat de asta.

Un verano después (fragmento de la novela “Întinde mâna, Tiberiu!”)

Cuando descubrí que mi hermana había muerto, no sentí nada. Ni rabia, ni pena, ni siquiera alegría. No sé si la odiaba, pero está claro que no me caía muy bien. No me encantó que apareciera y acaparara toda la atención.

Yo no era un niño arriesgado. Podría decir que más bien era cauteloso. Analizaba cada propuesta en detalle antes de tomar una decisión. No atravesaba la calle principal para ir a las ruinas y no trepaba los árboles. No participaba en concursos de comer cosas asquerosas ni llamaba a las puertas de los vecinos y luego huía. Los niños del barrio me llamaban “el cobarde”, y jugaban conmigo solo porque yo venía de pegote con ella, mi hermana. Ella era la cabecilla, la que siempre inventaba retos y juegos peligrosos.

Es posible que no sintiera nada porque, por un año, no había sabido que ella había muerto. un día de verano, mi mamá me llevó al cementerio y me mostró su tumba. Al alrededor de ese montón de tierra estaba todo el mundo incluso mi padre, que nos había abandonado hacía medio año. Él vivía con una mujer de la cual mi abuela decía que era la copia barata y mezquina de mi madre, “Mírala”, dijo ella, “tratando de copiar a tu mamá. Pero no le sale. No tiene el alma de una verdadera mujer en ella.” Mi padre la había traído al cementerio y mi abuela estaba muy enojada. “Cómo puede traerla, no es apropiado... ¡Le dije que no se casara con él! Sentí que no era un hombre íntegro. Pero si ella lo amaba...”

Después de que mi padre se fuera, mi madre y yo nos mudamos con los abuelos. En el mismo edificio, un piso más abajo. Nuestro antiguo apartamento fue vendido después del divorcio. Nuestro lugar lo ocupó una familia con dos hijos: un chico mayor que yo y una chica de mi edad, Ioana. A mi padre lo veía solamente en la escuela. Venía de vez en cuando, en mis recreos, y me traía algo. Me preguntaba cómo estaba y si necesitaba algo. Le decía que estaba bien y que tenía todo lo que necesitaba. Ojalá le hubiera dicho que volviera a casa, pero mi mamá no me dejaba. Cuando sonaba la campana, me despeinaba, me decía que me portara bien y que escuchara a mi madre y a mi abuela. Sus ojos se

llenaban de lágrimas, se levantaba de cuclillas y se iba. “¡Vete, no llegues tarde a tus clases!”, me decía mientras marchaba.

Era un día caluroso, todas las prendas negras que llevaba me quemaban la piel, el olor de la cera era asfixiante y a mi alrededor había un murmullo de llanto ahogado. Yo lloraba también. Lloraba porque mi abuela estaba llorando y sentía lástima por ella; luego, de pura rabia, le di la mano a mi madre, allí, al lado de la tumba, y me abofeteó. Me miró con una mirada fría y me dijo que, por lo menos, la dejara en paz.

Recordaba la tarde en que entré en la casa para beber agua y todas las vecinas de mi abuela estaban en la cocina, trenzando una vela derretida y blanda. Les preguntaba qué está pasando y mi abuela me tomó del brazo y me sacó afuera. Me dijo que la señora Aprofirei estaba haciendo una ofrenda para su marido y que era un trabajo de mujeres. Le pregunté dónde estaba mamá y me dijo que estaba en correos dejando una carta para Cosmina, que todavía estaba en el campamento “Cireșarii”, una organización infantil de un partido del que todos eran miembros. Yo también había participado durante una semana, pero no me gustó.

Cuando estuve allí, lloré todo el día, y por eso llamaron a mi madre para que fuera a recogerme. Todos los niños se burlaban de mí porque lloraba por mi madre; y Cosmina, esa tonta, en lugar de defenderme, se burlaba de mí junto a ellos. Me enfadé tanto que, por primera vez en mi vida, quise vengarme. Y tenía cuentas pendientes con ella. “Oye, ¡ríete de mí otra vez!” dije en mi cabeza, cuando volví a casa. Había pasado tiempo desde que yo había vuelto. Cuando mi mamá regresó a casa, le pregunté cuánto tiempo más se quedaría Cosmina allí. Me respondió como solía hacerlo cuando estaba triste, con un consejo. “Cada acción tiene una repercusión. ¡Recuerda esto!” Estaba muy cansada y estaba llorando. Mi padre se dejó crecer la barba. No entendí por qué. Algo parecía diferente, pero no me di cuenta de qué y eso me molestaba.

El verano pasó rápido y olvidé la ausencia de Cosmina. Especialmente porque me convertí de nuevo en el centro de atención. Los niños del barrio jugaban conmigo y me parecía que eran más amables. Cuando aparecía uno un poco malicioso, de repente una madre desde la ventana le regañaba y le decía que me dejara en paz. [...]

Lucica empezó a llorar y me dijo que era un tonto. Le pregunté por qué, cuando me había dado cuenta de que ella había hecho trampa. Ella gritó, entre lágrimas, y dijo que era un tonto porque mi hermana estaba muerta y yo era el único que no lo sabía. Me dijo que no me tenía miedo. Entonces, el señor Munteanu apareció de debajo de la moto que estaba reparando y le gritó que entrara en la casa. Ni siquiera lo había visto allí. [...]

Lucica se resistió, pero su padre la tomó de la mano y la empujó hacia adentro. La llevó a la puerta del apartamento y la forzó a entrar. Me levanté del banco frente al bloque y huí. No por los nervios, porque Lucica me hubiera mentido diciendo que mi hermana estaba muerta, yo sabía que no era la verdad, que mi hermana estaba en el campamento, sino por vergüenza de haberla dejado mal frente a su padre, que no había dicho nada al respecto.

Context

The selected text is part of a chapter from the 2022 novel *Întinde mâna, Tiberiu!*, published by Nemira in Romania. The narrative focuses on the protagonist's dual identity: Tibi, the provincial kid nicknamed "the fat one", and Tiberiu, the grown-up copywriter living in Bucharest.

The book presents a fragmented chronicle about identity, exploring one's trauma and its intersections with sexuality. The selected chapter represents a key moment in the character's development; the realisation of his older sister's death. The internal processing of death and the relationship between siblings highlights the fractured bonds in the family, exemplified by the numbed reaction when Tibi finds out and the divorce in the aftermath of the tragedy.

As a puzzle novel, the events of the funeral and the memories surrounding his sister are structured as a mosaic, allowing the reader to experience how Tibi/Tiberiu recalls them and his feelings about them. This puzzle is "solved" with the chapter's culminating moment when Lucica, a child from the block, who, after being accused of cheating in a game, violently delivers Tibi the news of his sister's death. Thus, the anagnorisis is no longer a personal one offering closure; instead, it is weaponised.

The language used by the author blends candour with the grotesque and absurd world of Romania's "transit generation". By using powerful yet simple language, the author transports the reader into post-communist Romania through the eyes of a queer man who navigates the spaces in between: life and death; provincial roots and big-city aspirations; feelings of estrangement; and the search for belonging and approval. Thus, the novel becomes a sincere meditation on the fluidity of identity, in which the protagonist must constantly reconcile with the past to confront the anxieties of the present.

Translator's note

I chose this text for its simple yet impactful language and its portrayal of early-2000s Romania in contrast to the present. Furthermore, as the author and I share the same hometown, I felt more connected to the narrative landscape and portrayal of characters. As I translated, I could clearly imagine the geographical space that we share.

My primary challenge was conveying the narrator's distinctive voice, one that is "empty" yet filled with a profound, hidden substance. The delivery, though affectless, hints at meditation beneath the short sentences. I chose to tackle this issue by stripping the language of excessive emotion, focusing on preserving the sentence structure and language where the void can still be felt, albeit in a more pensive way. Grief is a difficult feeling to convey, especially when it is unconventionally effective, so the language used in translation needed to express that muted feeling, which in Romanian is conveyed through a lack of traditional sentimentality. Thus, the language used is not embellished and favours clarity over ornament. To maintain that blunt, slightly detached voice, I used simple verbs accessible to any reader ('Nuestro antiguo apartamento fue vendido después del divorcio. Nuestro lugar lo ocupó una familia con dos hijos: un chico mayor que yo y una chica de mi edad, Ioana.'). Ultimately, using simple words that focus on the action creates a space where grief, confusion and hate can manifest without being conditioned by intricate descriptions or metaphors. The goal was to let the reader

witness Tibi's memories without being influenced by overly emotional language, using *apartamento* instead of *hogar* to avoid evoking familiarity and warmth.

Using the past tenses was challenging due to the novel's non-linear nature: the present and the past are often muddled together (much like a memory being reconstructed). When translating the text, it was important to maintain a clear timeline to distinguish between the present – adult Tiberiu – and the past – child Tibi – and even older memories from child Tibi's past. Beyond the general handling of tenses, individual fragments posed more specific technical issues tied to idioms and registers. For example, the idiom 'am avut eu ac de jocul ei' (literal translation: "I had a needle for her fur coat") could not be translated word for word in Spanish, so a Spanish equivalent was chosen: "tenía cuentas pendientes con ella". Similarly, the interjection *na* became *oye* in Spanish, as a more natural way for a child to refer to someone. Regarding grammar, the alternation between imperfect and indefinido is a key tool for highlighting the text's blurred sense of time: verbs like *preguntaba* and *recordaba* express the unfinished and ongoing nature of the action, in contrast with the indefinido; the moment when Mr Munteanu scolded his daughter, for example. This usage shows how memory operates: it is not a fixed event, but something renegotiated.

Finally, the translation of the text is an emotionally lipographic exercise in which the word choice shapes the reader's reaction. The translator's task becomes more challenging when trying to maintain a "flat" voice to convey feelings of grief and confusion. Like a discussion with a friend over coffee, the language may, at first glance, seem simple; however, it hides deeper sentimentality upon analysis.

MIHAI RADU

translated from Romanian into English by Jozefina Komporaly

Conacul speranței

Doar ce mă urcasem în mașină când am primit din nou telefon de la „Conacul speranței”. Mă mai sunaseră cu o seară înainte. Le spuseseam că voi reveni eu cu un telefon, însă nu am făcut-o și nici nu aveam de gând.

— Chiar trebuie să veniți să-l luați pe domnul Negrescu, mi-a zis vocea din partea cealaltă.

Știam cum arată partea cealaltă, holul alb, luminos, în mijlocul căruia era un oficiu la fel de alb, toată comicăria asta cu albul.

— V-am zis, putem să găsim variante, a continuat vocea.

I-am spus că singura variantă bună mi se pare să rămână acolo și că la vârsta lui variantele oricum cam dispar. Ar mai fi varianta ocolitoare a Capitalei, să-l îngropăm acolo.

— Vreau să cred că nu mi-ați spus asta, a zis femeia.

Mi-am luat și eu o voce de teatru radiofonic și-am continuat:

— Oare nu asta e, doamnă, viața: o continuă reducere a posibilităților până când singura variantă care-ți rămâne este să te oprești din respirat?

A rămas blocată câteva secunde.

— Trebuie să hotărâți împreună cu familia ce vreți să faceți, însă chiar trebuie să-l luați acasă, vă rog.

Nu voiam să mă gândesc la asta, la starea lui taică-meu ori la moartea lui. În mintea mea era ceva care ar fi trebuit să se întâmple mai degrabă ca o alunecare de teren din Chile. Vezi o știre la TV despre niște morți, un prezentator de la o televiziune locală chiliană, agitație la fața locului, iar în câteva secunde se trece la meteo. Și gata.

Fuse o dimineață frumoasă în ultima zi de noiembrie, călduroasă chiar, Patricia mă chemase la ea să bem cafeaua și să facem sex, simțeam în corp un început de weekend, deși era marți. Rămăsese să trec să-l iau pe Slavic și să mergem la Giurgiu, apoi voiam să închei ziua cu câteva beri la „Mecanică fină” în cartier.

— Trebuie să înțelegeți! mi-a mai spus femeia de câteva ori.

Nu-mi place atât de tare asta cu „trebuie să înțelegeți”, așa că am vorbit de-a dreptul iritat spre finalul conversației.

— Afară cu el, pe trotuar. Cum scot americanii frigiderul vechi în fața casei, așa scoateți voi un om de 85 de ani în fața căminului de bătrâni. Poate cineva îl vrea, își mai face un an, doi treaba cu el. Niște tineri căsătoriți, la început de drum, cine știe, poate au nevoie de un bătrân, măcar până strâng bani să facă credit de un bătrân nou.

I-am mai zis că, oricum, scos în fața centrului, în cel mai rău caz tata o să creadă că visează.

Din nou tăcere, ca mai înainte.

— Domnule Negrescu, nu glumim cu asta! a spus vocea.

— Oricum, mai sunt zece zile plătite din luna decembrie, am zis hotărât, ca cetățeanul antipatic care își revendică legea și drepturile de partea sa și am închis.

Abia după aceea însă m-am întrebat ce înseamnă exact treaba asta cu „luatul acasă”. Era limpede că avea să se întâmple, dar cum să-l iau acasă pe tata? Cu un taxi, cum? Îmi dau ei o targa și trag de ea prin oraș? Am sunat înapoi.

— Și cum îl voi lua acasă mai exact? Mă scuzați că vă întreb.

Centrul „Conacul Speranței” se închidea, clădirea fusese vândută, iar tata rămăsese ultimul internat. Celelalte familii își luaseră bătrânii acasă sau îi internaseră prin alte centre. După ce am încheiat conversația, mi-am dat seama că trebuia să-i fi spus de ironia întâmplării: azilul murise înaintea bătrânilor din el.

Credeam că taică-meu va muri acolo, la „Conacul speranței” de la marginea Bucureștiului, unde era vizitat zilnic de doctorul Dumitraș, cu aerul lui adormit, de bodyguard de farmacie, și unde privirea caldă a asistentei Dana, „doamna Dana”, plimba deasupra lui doi ochi mari, albaștri și cumiți. Ce-și poate dori mai mult un om de 85 de ani care habar n-are pe ce lume trăiește? Dumnezeu, cum era Dana! Femeia asta pur și simplu absorbea suferința din jurul ei. Uneori, când mă uitam la ea, mă surprindeam zâmbind tâmp, gata parcă să adorm sau chiar să leșin, atras de o lume mai bună. Ce trist e, totuși, să te naști cu menirea de a face bine. E mai rău ca un viciu. Nu poți să te lași, cum te lași de țigări. Mori ajutându-i pe unii și pe alții, te ciopârțește viața ca o psihopată și te dă de mâncare la suferinzi și profitori. Suferinzii sunt mai răi ca porcii uneori. Te cer mereu, te vor lângă ei, se agață, gustă din tine, te halesc cu totul în final dacă nu ești atent. Horror, Dana! Dacă o apeși pe piele, dacă o storci, ies din ea gemetele muribunzilor, picură din ea privirile spălăcite ale bătrânilor neputincioși.

Mai era apoi directoarea „Conacului”, o tipă care se străduia din răspuțuri să strecoare cuvântul „occidental” pe unde putea. „Occidental” pe post de supozitor: unde vedea o gaură, îl băga. Sunt astfel de oameni care folosesc cuvintele pe post de supozitoare: o găurică în realitate, o tăcere undeva, hopa, înfig chestiunea. Și sunt harnici, neobosiți. Condițiile de acolo erau „occidentale”, spațiul era organizat „occidental”, iar asistenții și asistentele făceau cursuri speciale de îngrijire a bătrânilor bolnavi, exact ca-n „Occident”. Îmi venea s-o întreb: de ce curs de specializare să aibă nevoie Dana? Orice întrebări îi puneam îmi răspundea răbdător, luminos. În acest timp, tata ne fixa din pat cu ochi mari, mirați, de parcă era un dispozitiv care înregistra scena. Mă uitam la el din când în când, îi făceam cu ochiul, hei, tata!, însă el rămânea la fel de serios și dedicat comparației de mai sus.

Cu o săptămână înainte, când îl vizitasem, asistenta Dana mi-a spus că trebuie să vorbesc cu directoarea, pentru că trebuie să-l iau pe domnul acasă, apoi scăzuse cu o treaptă vocea și adăugase:

— Știți, uneori mai spun lucruri noaptea. Unii, nu toți. Dar unii spun.

Aceasta era deci recomandarea asistentei Dana: să nu-l transfer pe tata în altă parte, ci să-l iau acasă pentru că nu mai are mult de trăit și, cine știe, poate spune noaptea „lucruri”. Am vrut să-i spun că, dacă nu înșiră numerele de la loto, cu mare lucru nu mă mai poate surprinde. M-am gândit s-o întreb dacă bolnavii au cumva acces noaptea la o altfel de luciditate, la un soi de conștiință comună a muribunzilor, o memorie a celor aflați pe moarte. Aș fi vrut s-o întreb și ce au spus alți bătrâni înainte să moară, în astfel de nopți, dar nu am făcut-o. Aș fi putut să-mi potrivesc vocea ca pentru poveștile de adormit copiii:

Dragă Dana, noaptea e o lume în care muribunzii planetei deschid ochii larg și spun ceva esențial despre viață?

— Cu boala lui, am zis însă, nu cred că o să spună ceva. Plus că el a fost mereu omul scufundat în foi, care s-a limitat la „Dă-mi o lingură, te rog” și altele de felul ăsta. Nu-l văd venind acum cu cine știe ce chestii. Dar mai știi?

The House of Hope

I barely managed to get into the car when I received another call from ‘The House of Hope’. They had already tried to reach me the night before. I told them that I’d call back, but I didn’t and had no intention to do so.

— You really must pick Mr Negrescu up, the voice on the other end said.

I knew what the other end looked like, a bright white corridor with a similarly white office.

— I told you, we can find other options, the voice continued.

I said that as far as I was concerned, the only viable option for him was to stay there, seeing that options simply disappeared at his age. The only other option would be the ring road around the capital, as a place to bury him there.

— I’ll pretend that you didn’t say this, the woman on the other end of the line replied.

Hearing this, I adopted my radio drama voice:

— Is that not what life really is, though, ma’am: a continuous reduction of possibilities until the only option is to stop breathing?

She appeared to be lost for words for a few seconds.

— You have to decide, together with your family, what you want, but you really must take him home.

I didn’t want to think about this, about my father’s health condition or his death. In my mind, this was supposed to happen like a landslide in Chile. You see a story on TV about some dead people, a newsreader from a local television station, a big commotion on site, and then a quick switch to the weather forecast. And that’s that, done and dusted.

It was a beautiful, warm morning on that November day. Patricia had invited me over for coffee and sex, and my body could sense the imminent weekend, although it was only Tuesday. I had plans to pick up Slavic, go to Giurgiu, and end the day with a few beers at our local, ‘Mecanică fină’.

—You must understand! the woman reiterated.

I can’t bear being told that I ‘must understand’, so I got rather annoyed by the end.

— Out with him, onto the pavement. Just like the Americans who put their old refrigerator in front of the house, you put an 85-year-old man in front of the old people’s home. Maybe someone can still make use of him for a year or two. A young married people, at the beginning of their journey for example, maybe they need an old man, at least until they save up for a mortgage for a new old man.

I added that if I were to put him out in front of the care home, my dad would think that he was dreaming. This was the worst-case scenario.

Silence again, as before.

— Mr Negrescu, this is no joking matter, the voice reprimanded me.

— Anyway, there are ten more days in December we paid for, I said firmly, like some frustrated citizen insisting on their legal right.

I only started wondering what this business with ‘taking him home’ really meant after I hung up. It was clear that it would have to happen, but how do I take my dad home? In a taxi, or how? Will they give me a stretcher to drag around town? I called back.
— And how will I take him home exactly? Forgive me for asking.

‘The House of Hope’ was closing down, the building had been sold off, and my father was the last remaining resident. The other families had already taken their elders back or to other care homes. After we hung up, I realised that I should have told her about the irony of the situation: the asylum had died before the elders inhabiting it. I thought my father would die there, at ‘The House of Hope’ on the outskirts of Bucharest, where he was visited daily by Dr Dumitraş, a tired-looking man with the appearance of a pharmacy security guard, and where nurse Dana was casting the kind, warm gaze of her big blue eyes over him. What more could an 85-year-old man, who doesn’t have the faintest idea about the world he’s living in, want? [...]

Then there was the manager, a woman who was trying her best to slip in the word ‘Western’ wherever she could. This term was like a suppository: she simply inserted it wherever she spotted a hole. There are such people who use words as if they were suppositories: whenever there is a hole in real life, a moment of silence, off they go and insert them diligently and relentlessly. The conditions at the care home were ‘Western’, the space was organised in a ‘Western’ way, and the nurses were doing special courses for the care of the sick and the elderly, just like in the ‘West’. [...] Meanwhile, my father was staring at us from his bed with his big, bewildered eyes, as if they were some recording device. I looked at him from time to time, winked at him, ‘Hey, Dad!’, but he remained just as serious and invested in the situation as before.

A week earlier, when I had visited him, nurse Dana told me to talk to the manager, because I had to take ‘the gentleman’ home. She then lowered her voice and added:

— You know, sometimes they say things at night. [...]

It turns out that the recommendation of Nurse Dana was not to transfer my father to another place, but to take him home because he doesn’t have much time to live and, who knows, he might say certain ‘things’ at night. I wanted to tell her that he can’t really surprise me unless he comes up with the lottery numbers. I thought to ask whether patients somehow have access to a different kind of lucidity at night, to a kind of common consciousness or memory of the dying. I would have wanted to ask her what other old people had said before they died on nights like this, but I didn’t. I could have matched my voice to the tone of bedtime stories: Dear Dana, do the dying of the planet really open their eyes wide and say something essential about life at night?

— Bearing in mind his illness, I don’t think he’s going to say anything at all, I said. Besides, he has always been buried in papers, limiting himself to phrases like ‘Can I have a spoon, please?’ I don’t see him coming up with any amazing stuff at this point. But you never know.

Context

This is an excerpt from *Repetiție pentru o lume mai bună* (*Rehearsal for a Better World*), published by Polirom Publishing House in 2022. A sophisticated novel about old age, forgetfulness, guilt and breakups, it is a novel about a crisis that can be felt at moral,

political, ecological, and civilisational levels. Focusing on an ordinary Romanian family, the novel is equally relevant to Western civilisation as a whole. At the heart of the story is Paul, a cynical middle-aged man with no significant relationships, for whom his father's imminent death seems to cause little distress. The novel offers a minimalist yet radical and uncomfortable portrait of society, pinpointing the solitude and confusion of humankind in our times.

From small details, Mihai Radu crafts relatable characters and this novel – written with tender irony – explores the difficulties of intergenerational communication. It shines a light on the issues of filial responsibility and constantly shifting societal expectations, charting the inner complexities of Paul, who feels as though life is simply passing him by. The perceived reality of adults is completely different from that of children – these are Paul's thoughts as he waits for his father in front of 'The House of Hope', a home for the elderly, soon to close. The fact that he has to take this old man diagnosed with dementia back to his own home is just another challenge in a long series: a divorce; the loss of his mother; the strange relationship with his daughter, who moved abroad; the paradoxical relationship with his ex-wife, who asks him to recover her dog held hostage by an ex whom she herself had betrayed. To top it all off, after his father's death, Paul reveals a secret that profoundly affects everyone else's lives. He tries his best to face all these challenges and ultimately manages to escape a self-imposed morality trap.

The book was reprinted multiple times, becoming one of the Romanian cult novels of the last few years, with translation rights sold in Greece and Hungary. A further testament to the novel's popularity was an almost immediate stage production by Radu Afrim, one of the most important Romanian directors of our time, at the National Theatre of Bucharest, March 2023. The dramatisation, retaining the novel's original title, was written by Mihai Radu in collaboration with cultural journalist and playwright Ionuț Sociu.

Translator's note

I was drawn to this text because it is about an ordinary Romanian family whose fate may resonate with that of many others, regardless of location. Such similarities between lives and experiences are aspects I value in contemporary fiction, and I embarked on a career in translation precisely because I wanted to bring the universal dimension of Romanian literature to the attention of an English-speaking readership. I am an exophonic translator, translating from my heritage languages, Romanian and Hungarian, into my quotidian language, English. In my view, it is imperative to adjust the landscape of literary translation to the multitude of Englishes spoken globally, and to challenge the myth that only native speakers can translate. Migration has reconfigured the notion of the "native speaker", especially regarding diasporic identities and less widely spoken languages, and I advocate an inclusive approach to cultural belonging. I find Mihai Radu's work particularly relevant in a transnational framework because it conveys a lucid analysis through borderless black humour and presents relatable details of everyday life without adopting an emotional or moralising tone. As a satirist, Radu refrains from exploiting the sentimentality inherent in this scene: a home for the elderly is about to close, and residents must be reassigned to their families. I wanted to retain his sarcastic tone, epitomised by turns such as 'Will they give me a stretcher to drag around town?' Romanian humour tends to favour the absurd, and in my translation, I aimed to emphasise the protagonist's casual, narrative voice, for whom the various demands of day-to-day life have equal billing.

Moreover, it was essential to uphold the dynamic between the protagonist's narrative voice and the ongoing dialogue. This contrast in register, between what is construed as a formal yet firm rapport involving the protagonist and the representative of the home for the elderly ('there are ten more days in December we paid for'), and the intimacy of the narrator's inner thoughts ('I wanted to tell her that he can't really surprise me unless he comes up with the lottery numbers'), sets the tone for the remainder of the book,

MIREILLE GAGNÉ

translated from French into English by Mireille Gagné

Bois de fer

1. Si un jour vous m'aviez dit que je me métamorphoserais en arbre, j'aurais amorcé des recherches plus exhaustives sur les différentes espèces et leurs caractéristiques afin de connaître celle qui a le cœur le plus dur.

2. Tout a commencé il y a quelques semaines. Sorties de nulle part, des taches, plein de taches, jaunes, orange, mauves, rouges, écarlates. Depuis j'ai beau retourner ma peau dans tous les sens, l'asperger d'eau de Javel, la faire tremper avec de l'OxiClean, la gratter. Les meurtrissures ne veulent pas disparaître. Bien au contraire, elles s'accroissent chez le psy.

3. Je ne saurais même pas décrire ma sensation : une fatigue extrême décuplée par la présence de parasites envahissants. Un insecte nuisible, une spongieuse d'Amérique qui pond ses œufs dans l'une de mes crevasses, arrache le poil rugueux de son abdomen pour protéger sa progéniture. Quand on touche aux amas duveteux, ça provoque de l'urticaire. Pour s'en débarrasser, on doit détruire les nids un par un, laver l'écorce avec de l'eau et du savon, noyer les petits avant qu'ils ne fassent d'autres petits.

4. Malgré tout, je continue, je persiste, je m'acharne, je coupe du bois jusqu'à l'épuisement, j'enfile mon écorce la plus scintillante, je rase le sol lors de vos visites. Pour camoufler mes taches, c'est simple, j'attire votre attention ailleurs, vers le ciel, sur les écureuils, la maladie de l'arbre d'à côté, la fleur sur le point d'être écrasée. Je redoute que vous m'étaliez par terre, que vous me disséquiez sous une loupe lumineuse. Je n'ai jamais véritablement compris le small talk.

5. Vous parlez de moi tel un tilleul. Je grandis beaucoup trop vite pour ma capacité commerciale. Mes ramures poussent si haut, si loin, qu'un jour je risque de me fendre en deux au passage de l'une de ces furieuses bourrasques du nordet.

6. Dans l'espoir de me ranimer, j'ingurgite toutes sortes de savantes mixtures bios, de vitamines, de capsules colorées, décolorées. J'arrête de consommer du gluten, du soya, du riz, du maïs. Vous angoissez tous à m'arroser. Donnez-moi juste un peu d'espace, allouez-moi une terre, un champ, une forêt, une île, pour m'enraciner.

7. Cette désagréable aperception d'asymétrie. Je ne suis jamais entièrement satisfaite de mon feuillage, de ma droiture. Toujours inquiète d'être déclassée. Un balai de sorcière coince quelque part derrière la nuque. Mon écorce tire entre l'omoplate et la clavicule. Malgré tous les efforts investis pour lâcher prise, je repère toujours une surface, votre œil, une flaque d'eau, un souvenir, une fenêtre, ou mon image se reflète inachevée.

8. J'ai perdu de mon essence Je doute que vous vous en soyez rendu compte, comme si mon effluve intime s'était échappé par une toute petite lésion dont j'ignorais l'existence. Depuis, j'ai peur de me perdre dans le boisé du quartier, de ne pas retrouver ma propre trace.

9. Vous fantasmez de me transplanter dans un pot avec l'objectif de me rentrer pour l'hiver. Sans doute vous êtes-vous convaincus que je pourrais purifier autant votre intérieur que votre extérieur. Vous avez oublié quelque chose de crucial: les arbres aussi ont besoin de se délester.

10. L'anxiété est dense. La banlieue est paquetée d'échos, de silences, de grésillements. Mon corps se cabre, adopte des positions inextricables. Mes vertèbres bloquent, se tassent, se déplacent. Le temps se fait cru. Mes feuilles se rétractent. Le chiro ne trouve jamais le bon nœud. Il insiste sur les balançoires et les mangeoires d'oiseaux quand tout ce qu'il devrait faire c'est m'élaguer. Je touche presque aux fils électriques.

11. Je prends rendez-vous chez différents spécialistes. Désespérément, j'aborde tous les coins sombres du bois, les encavures, les essouchements, les nombreux éboulis et abattis. Chez l'acupuncteur, j'évince les pucerons. Rien n'y fait. La douleur est ailleurs. Voir ne signifie pas toucher à l'essentiel

12. J'ai entendu dire que l'acacia, qui pousse en Afrique du Sud, possède une caractéristique exceptionnelle. Attaqué par les antilopes, il libère de l'éthylène pour prévenir ses voisins. En recevant le message porté par le vent dominant, les arbres situés à proximité enrichissent immédiatement leurs feuilles en tanins afin de les rendre toxiques aux prédateurs.

13. Si seulement j'étais capable de capter les signaux de détresse aux alentours et de pressentir les parties de moi qui risquent d'être dévorées vivantes. Je crains que l'ennemi ne se cache déjà à l'intérieur.

14. Mon prof de yoga me répète inlassablement que je dois apprendre à m'encalmer. Il faut inspirer amplement, permettre à l'air de pénétrer par ses orifices et remplir son corps, couche par couche, d'abord l'écorce, ensuite le phloème et le xylème, jusqu'à la moelle, attendre quelques secondes, puis expirer lentement, sentir enfin le relâchement. Ce qui s'avère plus difficile vient après.

15. Éliminer quelques insectes;

16. Bandager l'écorce;

17. Tordre une branche;

18. Craquer le tronc;

19. Allonger les racines;

20. Me débarrasser du rongeur;

21. Avaler l'arrêt stop;

22. Arracher une gouttière;

23. Rompre un morceau d'asphalte;

24. Enfoncer un bout de fondation;

25. Dresser la liste des tâches qui me redonneraient un sentiment d'échappée.

26. Il paraît que le lierre naît de l'anticipation. Une fois germé, il n'arrête jamais sa course, il grimpe le long des troncs grâce à ses racines aérienne à crampons; il enveloppe et asphyxie les branches inférieures en filtrant le soleil; son poids rend l'arbre plus vulnérable au déracinement cause par le vent, les fortes pluies, la neige ou la glace. Les horticulteurs ont beau dire qu'on l'appelle à tort le bourreau des arbres, car il ne les tue pas, ne vous méprenez pas sur sa verdure et ses feuilles ornementales persistantes: ses baies sont mortelles.

Ironwood

1. If you had told me one day that I was going to metamorphosise into a tree, I would have thrown myself into thoroughly researching every species and their characteristics to find the most hard of heart.

2. It all started a few weeks ago. Blotches, so many of them, spreading from nowhere. Yellows, orange, mauves, reds, scarlets. I'm trying everything I can to get back into my skin, in every sense. Spraying on bleach, soaking in OxiClean, scrubbing all over. The bruises aren't going away. They're actually darkening with my shrink.

3. How to even describe the feeling: extreme fatigue made ten times worse by the presence of invasive parasites. It's a pest, a gypsy moth laying her eggs in one of my crevasses. She's pulling out the coarse hairs from her abdomen to protect her offspring. Touching those downy masses will cause a breakout of hives. To get rid of them, the nests must be destroyed one by one, the bark washed with soap and water, the young drowned before they make any more of their own.

4. I keep going despite it all, I am persisting, I am relentless, I am chopping away the wood until there's nothing left, I am slipping into my most radiant bark, I am staying close to the ground when you're here. It's easy to camouflage my blotches, I divert your attention elsewhere, to the sky, to the squirrels, to the diseased tree beside me, to a flower as it's about to be treaded on. I dread that you will lie me down on the ground, that you will dissect me under the light of a magnifying glass. I've never really understood small talk.

5. Amongst yourselves you call me a lime tree. I am growing much too fast for my commercial potential. My branches are pushing so high and wide, I am at risk of being split in two by one of those furious northerly winds.

6. Hoping to revive myself, I am swallowing all sorts of refined organic blends, vitamins, colourful tablets and colourless tablets. I am cutting out gluten, soya, rice, corn. You are all so preoccupied with keeping me watered. Just give me space, give me some earth, a field, forest, an island for me to take root in.

7. This apperception of asymmetry isn't enjoyable. I am never fully satisfied with my foliage, my rectitude. There's a constant fear of being degraded. A witch's broom sticks up awkwardly behind my neck, the knots make me rigid. My bark is pulling between my shoulder blades and collarbone. Despite making every effort to let go, I am always catching on a surface, your eye, a pool of water, a memory, a window, where my image is reflected, incomplete.

8. I lost my essence. I doubt that you noticed. It's as if my intimate aroma has slipped out through a tiny lesion whose existence was unknown to me. Since then I have been afraid of becoming lost among the local woodland, of not finding my own trace.

9. You dream about putting me in a pot and taking me indoors for the winter. You have probably convinced yourselves that I can purify your inside as much as your outside. You're forgetting something vital: trees also need relief.

10. The anxiety is dense. This suburb is packed full with echoes, silences, static. My body is recoiling, adopting these inextricable positions. My vertebrae are tightening, compressing, shifting. The weather is getting raw. My leaves are retracting. The chiro never finds the knot. He is insisting on swings and bird feeds when all he needs to do is prune me. I am nearly touching the electrical wires.

11. I am going to see different specialists. I am tackling all the dark spots on the wood in desperation, the nicks, the grubbing, all the scree and abatis. I am having acupuncture to get rid of the aphids. Nothing is working. The pain is coming from somewhere else. Seeing doesn't get to the essence of it.

12. I have heard it said that the South African acacia possesses a unique characteristic. When being raided by antelopes, it releases ethylene as a warning to its neighbours. The nearby trees receive the message on the prevailing wind and they instantly enrich their leaves with tannins, making them toxic to predators.

13. If only I could pick up on the signals of distress around me and sense which parts of me might be eaten alive. My fear is that the enemy is already hiding within.

14. My yoga teacher keeps telling me I must find my inner calm. I must inhale fully, allow the air to get in through the openings and fill the body, layer by layer, first the bark, then the phloem and the xylem, right down to the core, hold it for a few seconds. Then exhale slowly. Feel the release. What comes next is the hard part.

15. Eliminating some insects;

16. Bandaging bark;

17. Twisting a branch;

18. Splitting the trunk open;

19. Extending the roots;

20. Clearing out the rodent;

21. Swallowing the stop sign;

22. Ripping out the gutter;

23. Breaking off a piece of asphalt;

24. Knocking the foundation down;

25. Making a to-do list to reclaim a sense of freedom.

26. Ivy seems to grow from anticipation. Once germinated, it never stops its course. It's creeping up the trunks with its aerial tendrils, filtering out the sun, enveloping and asphyxiating the lower branches. The extra weight makes trees more vulnerable to being uprooted by the wind, by strong rains, by snow and ice. Horticulturists can argue that it's

wrongly labelled the executioner of trees because it doesn't kill them, don't be fooled by the greenery and those ornamentally persistent leaves: the berries are fatal.

Context

Bois de Fer (Éditions la Peuplade, Canada, 2022) is a book-length work of poetic prose that examines, with microscopic precision, one woman's metamorphosis into a tree. Are we listening to a woman suffering an emotional crisis, or a tree being subjected to the violent whims of the humans who encounter her? Gagné wrote this text as she became fixated on a tree outside her window during the Covid 19 lockdown, while also reading and responding to Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees* (David Suzuki Institute, 2018). The result is a unique and captivating exploration of the experiences of both women and the natural world, in which the protagonist's emotional and physical hybridity is both a narrative strategy and a critique of contemporary society's attitudes towards the non-human. The theme of the complex emotional landscapes that are shared by both humans and non-humans, a form of zoopoetics, is something that Gagné explores in many of her works. Zoopoetics can broadly be defined as a designation of 'aesthetic and narrative strategies through which literature engages with non-human life – representing, imagining, or even co-creating world' (Angelo, 2020). There has been a surge in literary works challenging anthropocentric perspectives from an ecological standpoint in recent years, both in Anglophone and Francophone publishing. Within a North American Francophone literary context, this theme is prevalent in narratives that 'interrogate the boundaries between species while probing the psychological, ecological, and affective dimensions of human-animal relations' (Angelo, 2020). Many of these texts address the pressing questions of the conservation or exploitation of natural resources, from a colonial-domination perspective or by incorporating Indigenous beliefs that place both flora and fauna at the centre. Although not an overtly postcolonial text, *Bois de fer* follows other Quebecois texts in employing the motif of the tree, both symbolically and as a narrative device (see Coudurier, 2026).

Translator's note

As a translator, I often look for texts which explore ecological themes from a unique literary perspective. *Bois de fer* captured my attention for its hybridity in both form and narrative, as much between species as between genres. Ambiguity is central to the narrative voice, and it was a key focus of my translation. There is a real sparseness to Gagné's prose; her words carry multiple meanings and interpretations relating to both the physical attributes of trees and the human condition, which meant I also had to be attentive to my word choices. An example of this is the line in section 4, 'j'enfile mon écorce la plus scintillante.' In French, the use of *enfiler* (to slip something on) with *écorce* (bark of a tree and/or exterior appearance) and *scintillante* (sparkling/shining/glorious) gives the image of a woman in crisis trying to put on an appearance in front of others, while the double meaning of 'écorce' relates it to her changing arboreal form in a subtle way. This ambiguity is lost in English; however, I decided to keep the word 'bark' and pair it with the adjective 'radiant', which is often used to describe human skin, to preserve that juxtaposition and inadequacy between her two forms. The unique form and structure of the text play with an experience of time that is beyond human; it is never clear whether each page is separated by days, weeks, or years. I played with this sense of time in my

translation, often leaning towards the present continuous tense to convey the immediate and ongoing process of being that I interpret as a tree's experience of time.

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GUIDO CUPANI

translated from the Italian into English by Patrick Williamson

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UNA POSIZIONE IN MERITO ALLA RELIGIONE

è quella della cimice capovolta
che ancora si sbracciava ad acchiappare l'aria
sola sul tuo altare la mattina di Natale

e che ho visto una seconda volta a Santo Stefano
mentre andavo a prendere la comunione

quando già aveva smesso di chiedersi con quante zampe pregarti
avendo trovato appunto
una sua posizione

π

A POSITION ON RELIGION

is that of the bug on its back
its legs grasping at the air
alone on your altar on Christmas morning

and which I saw a second time on Saint Stephen's Day
on my way to communion

when it'd already stopped pondering how many legs to pray to you with
having indeed found
the right position

13.XI.2015

FUORI DELLA FANTASIA DEL TERRORISTA

il concerto ha un'ultima nota nel silenzio
che è continuazione, risalgono le luci gente esulta
Si esce per le porte, non per le finestre
Il vento fa tintinnare due bicchieri
Non infranti sul tavolino all'aperto
Passa inascoltato il telegiornale della sera
e le previsioni del tempo
L'innaffiatore si accende sul campo da gioco deserto
Gente ancora discute a un angolo di strada alzando la voce
come dall'inizio dell'uomo
(vita di problemi complessi e soluzioni più complesse)
Gente si salute gente va a distendersi

nel proprio letto

13.XI.2015

BEYOND THE TERRORIST'S IMAGINATION

the concert's last note rings in the silence
that is a continuation, the lights come up, people cheer
People go out through the doors, not the windows
The wind makes two unbroken glasses
clink on the outside table
Nobody listens to the evening news and
weather forecasts
Sprinklers switch on over the deserted pitch
People still argue on a street corner raising their voices
as happens from the beginning of mankind
(life of complex problems and more complex solutions)
People say goodbye
people go to lie down
in their beds

20XX

LE DIRÒ - TI PORTO A VEDERE I GELSI
e sarà bellezza - Papà mi porta a vedere i gelsi
ma cosa sono i gelsi? - e dovrò inventare
qualcosa che valga la strada
mentre le lego le scarpe, so di loro soltanto
quel cambiare idea sul più bello
come se a metà capissero cos'è la vita
dal tronco ai rami - E tu dirai
non fate tardi, perché andremo da soli
a fare storia nostra e torneremo per cena

In una sera del duemila-e-forse
continuando qualcosa che non sappiamo
nella pace dei campi
vedremo i gelsi.

20XX

I'LL SAY TO HER - I'LL TAKE YOU TO SEE THE MULBERRY TREES
and it will be beautiful - Daddy's taking me to see the mulberries
but what are mulberries? - and I'll have to invent
something worth the trip
while I tie her shoes, I know only their
change of mind at the most beautiful moment
as if they half-grasped what life is

from trunk to branches - And you'll say
don't be late, because we are going alone to
create our story and come back for dinner

One evening in the year two thousand-and-maybe
continuing something we don't know
in the peace of the fields
we'll see the mulberry trees.

...3, 2, 1

PRENDERE IL TRENO ALLE SETTE E QUARANTA PER
bere un secondo caffè sulla strada che sale all'ufficio per
leggere email cestinare appuntarsi rispondere per
fare mente locale correggere ricompilare eseguire per
mettere il riso a scaldare nel micro per
dare un'occhiata oltre i vetri in giardino per
spremere l'ultima goccia di luce strizzando gli spettri per
scrivere un numero aggiungere un punto sul grafico per
scribacchiare soltanto uno iota sul foglio di oggi per
fare la borsa fiondarsi in stazione per
fare il tragitto col cuore un chilometro avanti per
fare le scale girare la chiave infilare la testa per

trovare il tuo sorriso che mi aspetta e

mi chiede di prenderti sulle spalle per
dare alla cena il suo nome chiamare famiglia la tavola per
rimboccare alla fine un lenzuolo di sonno tirare un soffitto di notte per
farti dormire tranquilla e nel mentre puntare la sveglia alle sette per

... 3, 2, 1

TAKE THE TWENTY TO EIGHT TRAIN TO
drink a second coffee on the road up to the office to
read e-mail to trash to concentrate to answer to
reflect to correct to recompile to run to
heat the rice up in the micro to
glance out the windows into the garden to
squeeze the last drop of light squishing the spectra to
write a number to add a point on the graph to
scribble only an iota on today's sheet to
take the bag to rush to the station to
make the trip with a heart a mile ahead to
take the stairs turn the key pop my head in to

find your smile waiting for me and

asking me to give you a piggyback to
give dinner a name to call the table family to
finally tuck in a sheet of sleep draw down a ceiling of night to
make you sleep peacefully while setting the alarm for seven to

Context

These poems are from *Meno Universo* (Dot.Com Press, Milan, 2018), a collection in which Guido Cupani weaves together two dimensions that act synergistically: poetry that draws on Friulian colloquialism, and the theoretical awareness of a physicist who graduated in galaxy cluster dynamics.

Two horizons, two perspectives: the first sees the setting; the second, the storm of photons that illuminates it. In these poems, he questions the meaning of existence with a dual perspective. On the one hand, the vacuous rush of urban society, the strain of relationships, and passing (without leaving a trace). On the other hand, a blossoming, embodied by the miracle of birth, by the newness that his daughter Emma brings to his home: it is a sort of epiphany, a break from the predictable, a time of grace and gift that the poet sings about in numerous poems.

The family is the source of meaning here, even though life is described as a continuous and tiring pilgrimage through time and space. Cupani looks at Western culture from a distance, allowing himself to identify its critical issues and merits: the good fortune of living in a peaceful space. The restlessness in his enquiry is also evident in his stylistic mobility and experimental interjections against a familiar backdrop. He grafts foreign elements onto the prosaic style frequently used by authors from his region, and that is already established in his previous books, deliberately disrupting the process and changing its nature. Thus, the sentence is interrupted, and anaphora, a central figure in this multiple experiment, not only marks the rhythm and meaning, but also defines the field of action of the questioning.

Translator's note

I decided to translate *Meno Universo* because I like how Cupani suggests – in these poems – that our task is to cherish what matters, such as the family gathered around the table, and the hope of being able to protect the people we love. However, he does not shirk the reality we live in, which threatens this world; he takes a perceptive look at how the two aspects interrelate. I think the four poems above fit well with the theme of (personal) crisis: they speak of a constant, somewhat accepted state of crisis. *20XX* isn't quite as "focused", but it can be connected to the others, while the poem ... *3, 2, 1*, shows how much of our time is devoted to work and the need to rush to have a bit of quality time with our families. It reflects the fact that the system itself is in crisis.

I took a somewhat literal approach to translating these poems to recreate the same patterns of life that Cupani evokes in his depiction of this small and intimate universe. I wanted to preserve the apparent lightness of these snapshots of everyday life and, in contrast, Cupani's considerations on outside events, all of which are underscored by his stylistic approach. At first glance, the text appears simple and clear. However, the layers he adds to the poems soon become more apparent, adding to the dynamic of the

unfolding narrative. As is the case with the late English poet Lee Harwood, Cupani likes to tell stories, but he likes them with interruptions; holes for the imagination to fill; twists and turns as if the story makes itself up as it goes along. My approach aimed to reflect this, as in *20XX*, I looked to recreate the natural language of the child's chatter, and the contrasts with the father's musing about his lack of knowledge, as he thinks on his feet: 'ma cosa sono i gelsi? – e dovrò inventare/qualcosa che valga la strada/mentre le lego le scarpe' ('but what are mulberries? - and I'll have to invent/something worth the trip/while I tie her shoes').

Each poem in the collection has its own energy, and I chose words and structural elements accordingly. Transposing effects such as unexpected line breaks, broken/unfinished words, and anaphora into English requires reflection and time. I have been helped in this matter by my back-and-forth exchanges with Cupani, who is fluent in English, to guide me through his thinking. The poem ... 3, 2, 1, is a good example of this. It is a round in which epiphora is added to anaphora to build a fence through which life can unfold safely. Except for the line 'trovare il tuo sorriso che mi aspetta', all other lines end in 'per', creating a sense of ceaseless continuation. Speaking with Cupani helped me better express his intention, namely that this nest is understood as an open system, in a threatened circularity – also implemented formally, with the last verse wanting to start over again – where energy dissipates.

