

2.14 – Recommending Translated Fiction (featuring special guests!)

Angourie (host)

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this work was developed and is presented. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Hello everyone, and welcome back to The Community Library: a podcast, book club and discussion space. I'm your host, Angourie Rice

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Welcome to May! It's actually my dad's birthday today, so happy birthday to him. Is it just me, or did April go so quickly? I don't know, maybe some people felt like April has been such a slog, but I feel like it went so quickly. I actually read so much in April, um, because I've just been stuck inside doing nothing else. Originally my Goodreads goal for this year was 75. And you know how Goodreads, like, tells you if you're a few books ahead or a few books behind? Right now I am thirteen books ahead of schedule, so I guess that's one good thing about being stuck inside. I hope you guys had a good reading month. From what I can gather on the internet, I feel like some people are either, like, reading lots and lots more, or some people are actually really struggling to read. So, either way, I hope you're doing okay and staying safe and all of that jazz.

Now, on this podcast, every month has a different theme, and all of the episodes within that month pertain to that particular theme. Last month our theme was Fantasy, which was really fun. We talked about *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, and this month, the theme is FICTION IN TRANSLATION. So this month I will be talking all about translated works of fiction, and our discussion pick is, of course, a translated novel. The discussion pick for this month is an absolute classic when it comes to translated fiction, and that is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. And I will be discussing it with my dear friend and former guest of the podcast, Kaliya. If you remember, Kaliya and I discussed *Watch Us Rise* by Renée Watson and Ellen Hagan way back in season one, and we had the best time, and I am so excited to have her back. And I hope you guys are excited for the episode, too.

Today I wanted to talk about my relationship with translated fiction, and some of the translated works that I've read. And so to begin planning for this episode, I went through all of my Goodreads shelves and wrote down every single book I've read that has been translated from another language into English. And to my dismay, I have only read fourteen translated books. I've read one short story by Clarice Lispector, which was translated from Portuguese. I've read one book translated from Swedish, and one translated from Dutch. I've read two books translated from Japanese, one of which, *Norwegian Wood*, I talked about on the podcast. I will link the episode in the show notes if you're interested. I've read four books translated from German and one translated from Swiss-German. Again, one of these books is *The Neverending Story*, which was the very first discussion pick for the podcast, ah so that episode will also be linked. And finally, I've read four books

translated from French. One of these is *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, which I also discussed on the podcast, um so that will also be linked, of course. This selection of translated works that I've read is not very big or diverse. Um, most of the books that I've read that have been translated are very popular young adult books or children's books like the *Inkheart* trilogy by Cornelia Funke and *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende. A lot of these books are also internationally famous. So, books like *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, and *The Little Prince*, and *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri. So, in the grand scheme of things, I haven't read that much translated fiction at all. But, a lot of the translated fiction I have read, I have really, really loved. So, I'd like to recommend two in particular to you today.

I want to talk about *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke first, and this is actually a trilogy of books: *Inkheart*, *Inkspell* and *Inkdeath*. This series was originally written in German and translated by Anthea Bell into English. I read these books for the first time when I was about ten or eleven, and I was living in Germany at the time. At that time, I was almost fluent in German, but I still really liked reading things in English, 'cause, you know, I spoke German all day at school and so it was kind of a relief for me to get home and to read something in English. But it's kind of strange to me that I read a German series in English, while living in Germany, and also when I could speak German. Anyway, this series follows [a] bookbinder, Mo, and his twelve-year-old daughter, Meggie. And Meggie discovers that when her father reads books aloud, he can bring things to life out of the books. And of course, this causes much drama, um, and they set off on this big fantasy adventure. And this book series is perfect for fans of *The Neverending Story* and *Harry Potter*. It's all about stories and imagination, and I think it's, like, just the best escapist fantasy fiction for bookworms. Um, I just finished rereading the series and the last one, *Inkdeath*, is definitely my favourite. So, if you like the first one, I would highly encourage you to just keep going till the end, 'cause the last one is, ah, brilliant. As the series goes on, more mature themes are tackled – things like grief and death. And the books also explore what it means to blur the lines between fiction and reality, like what is real and what is made of words? And that's something that I really love about this series – and again, something I loved about *The Neverending Story*, as well. So, if you're a big bookworm and you love books about books, then this series is for you. That was *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke, translated from German by Anthea Bell.

Next, I want to recommend *Claudine at School* by Colette. Now, this book is also part of a series called the *Claudine* series, which was published in the early 1900s and is translated from French. *Claudine at School* follows, um, Claudine at school. The title is pretty self-explanatory. Um, but when I picked this book up, I did not expect it to be racy, or cheeky, or feature female-female relationships. And yet, it does all of those things. It's kind of a really unexpected, um, cheeky YA novel from early 1900s France. The character Claudine herself is very witty, charming, and also quite mean, but, like, you still love her. She's basically an early 20th Century French version of Blair Waldorf. And Claudine is also very much queer, um, but of course that was not a term or an idea that was tolerated, or accepted, or used in the early 20th Century. And so it's particularly interesting, because I think Colette was able to get away with writing about lesbian relationships at that time, because it was kind of seen as just, like, girls having harmless fun at their boarding school. And also because at that time, her husband, Willy, took all of the credit for her work. He literally published her books under his name. And so maybe because everyone thought that the books were written by a man, it was more accepted. Colette the author had a fascinating life, um, both professionally and personally. And it's understood that the *Claudine* series is semi-autobiographical. I've only read the first two in the series, um, but I would like to read the rest of

them. They're just really cheeky and fun. I forget that it was written over a hundred years ago, because it reads like *The Princess Diaries* by Meg Cabot, or the *Georgia Nicolson* series by Louise Rennison. That was *Claudine at School* by Colette, translated from French by Antonio White.

Now, because I haven't – oh my gosh, the rain! Do you hear that? Wow, loud. Anyway, um, because I haven't read much translated fiction, I decided to ask some of my friends and family if they have any favourite translated fiction. So, here's what they said.

Angourie (host)

So, I'm here with Kalliope, who is my sister. And I asked her to pick a translated book that she read and loved, and talk about it. So, Kalliope, what book have you chosen?

Kalliope (guest)

I've chosen *Ronia the Robber's Daughter* by Astrid Lindgren, and it was translated from Swedish. So, I chose this book because it was one of my favourites growing up. I read it when I was about eight for the first time, I think. And it was one of those books that just read every night because I loved it so much. It's about a young girl who is – it's – it's based in a – a fantasy world, and she lives in the forest with her family in a big castle. And her dad is a robber, and she just spends all day, every day, running around in the forest and the woods by herself.

Angourie

And so why did you love it so much?

Kalliope

Because I just wanted to be her. She spent all day, barefoot, with her bag – she got her lunch at the start of the day, and just ran around by herself in the woods, all day. Swimming, and just running, and just being awesome. And she could – and she could, like, climb things, and she just survived, and she was always, like, you know, in perilous situations. And she was just so cool.

Angourie

And, so, who would you recommend this book to?

Kalliope

Young girls. Or boys. Anyone. Everyone.

Angourie

That was *Ronia the Robber's Daughter* by Astrid Lindgren, translated from Swedish by Patricia Campton.

Angourie (host)

I'm now here with my mum, Kate. And, ah, she reads a lot of translated fiction – more than me, at least. But I've asked her to talk about a few of her favourites today.

Kate (guest)

Well, one of my favourite writers of all time is called Hans Fallada, and he was a German writer who lived in Berlin, and wrote between the wars and during World War II. And he died very shortly afterwards, but his greatest work is called *Alone in Berlin*, or, *Jeder Stirbt für Sich Allein*. He wrote it in the months immediately following World War II, about the experiences of ordinary Germans in Berlin during the period of the war. And it's one of my favourite novels because it's so excellently written, but also because he captures that incredibly tragic moment in history, which we continue to be really interested in, because it's so outrageous and led to so much – so much death and so much destruction and misery. And because it seems so unreasonable and outrageous that this ridiculous regime was in power, and was able to unleash all of this destruction and terrible havoc on the whole of Europe, and the world, I guess. And his novel helps me to understand what it was like – what it was genuinely like. And I trust him because he was there.

Angourie

And the other one that you wanted to talk about it *Suite Française*, right?

Kate

Yes, yes, which was actually written at the same time but by a French woman. She actually was in Paris when the Germans marched in. Well, she – she sort of escaped just before, and escaped to the country, and was in the countryside during the occupation. Once again, the reason I love it so much is because she had that direct experience, and she put it into her fiction. When it comes to reading works in translation, what both Hans Fallada and Irène Némirovsky can offer is that direct experience. So, writing in their own language of something they experienced in their own language, in their own countries.

Angourie

To whom would you recommend these books? Who do you think should read them?

Kate

Anyone who has, you know, watched *Schindler's List*, or, um, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, or *The Book Thief*. Basically, anyone who has ever read anything about that time, I would recommend these two books to them, because there's been so much really, really, successful literature written about that time by writers who weren't there. And it's very interesting to pick up the very, very striking differences about these two works as opposed to stuff that other writers write, coming from a perspective of relative comfort that we have now. So, that's who I really would recommend it for – anyone who has an interest in that period of time, to really find out what it's like.

Angourie

That was *Alone in Berlin* by Hans Fallada, translated from German by Michael Hoffman, and *Suite Française* by Irène Némirovsky, translated from French by Sandra Smith.

Jeremy (guest)

Hello, Angourie, my name is Jeremy Rice. The first novel that I'd like to talk about is one that was written in Russian originally by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. So he's most famous, I guess, really, for *Crime and Punishment*. This novel, I think what's intriguing about it is that its title alone gets translated differently, almost each time it's been published in English. [It] gets translated as *Demons*, or *The Devils*, or *Possessed*. Yeah, I think that's really interesting that English doesn't have the exact word for the title of this novel. It is about political dissidence in Russia in the 1870s – which might sound really boring or heavy, but it's very funny. It's satire about ... on the one hand, um, rich, aristocratic people who have ideas but don't act on them, and poor people who have ideas but act on them without much success. When I first read it – was in the early 90s in Australia, and that that time there was, I guess, an extreme political movement in Australia led by a politician who's still around called Pauline Hanson. And she had a – she established a party called One Nation. It became apparent that around Australia, there were these little pockets of angry people, mostly angry white men who wanted to change Australia, or they felt they wanted to change it back to this, sort of, fantasy idea of what it had been when it was "great". The novel *Demons*, in large parts, is about those type of people. So, I was reading this book that was, you know, a hundred and twenty years old, and – and set in Imperial Russia, and I was reading it thinking: "Wow, this could be about people in urban cities in Australia in the 1990s, who are angry and want to change the world." Like a lot of Dostoyevsky – like all his novels, and a lot of Russian novels, it's quite long. And it does depend a lot on the translation. So, there's a particular translator of Russian literature called Constance Garnett. And, as her name suggests, she lived quite a while ago. I see here that she translated *Demons* in 1916. Her translations are actually really good. I mean, there's a little bit of old-fashioned English in them, but she's just a really good translator. And I discovered this because she translated Chekov's plays. As a student, I was assisting on a production of a Chekov play. We had lots of different translations, and we kept on going back to her translation in the early 1900s. Who should read it? Oh, look, I think people who enjoy a big story, because it is several hundred pages, and it's kind of epic. And I suppose, it helps if you've got – not if – you don't have to know anything about politics, but I guess you – you – it helps if you are interested in – in ideas, and people wanting to change things.

Ah, the other one is a French novel, and it's – in French, it's called *Bonjour Tristesse*. And I guess there's something about our relationship to the French language that I've never seen its title translated into English. The author's name is Françoise Sagan. She wrote the novel when she was a teenager, I think she was about seventeen, or maybe a bit older, when she wrote it. And it's just basically about a teenage girl in France in the 1940s / 50s, um, growing up. The book takes place just over a few days when she goes away on holidays with her father, her father's young fiancée, and her father's ex-girlfriend is hanging around. And she's – she's watching it all. And that, I think, probably would appeal a lot to, um, women of the same age as the title character, but I don't to narrow it to a small number of people. You know, it's a book I would be happy to read again. I remember, it's quite short, and – in the English translation I read – pretty easy. Um, the title actually translates as "Hello Sadness", so it's a – it's a French, early 1950s version of an angst-ridden teenage-girl.

Can I mention one other book? It's actually more mentioning an author, and she's another French author: Marguerite Duras. D-U-R-A-S. And I wanted to mention her just because she was an extraordinary creative person who wrote novels. She also made films, and she made films of her

novels. She's most famous for a film called *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. In film studies, we watched another film of hers called *India Song*, and then I discovered that she made the film based on a novel that she'd published called *The Vice-Consul*, so I read that. And in terms of her novels, she's most famous for just a slim novella called *The Lover*, which is about a French-Vietnamese girl. I think it might have been banned in Australia when it was first published. It's considered a bit risqué, and I think it was published in the – in the 1950s or 60s. I mean, in a way, she goes through multiple translations, because she – she sort of translates her work between novels and films, screenplays and prose, and then other people come to her work and translate it into English. I think she also does some of her own translations as well.

Angourie

That was *The Possessed* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, translated from Russian by Constance Garnett. Also sometimes translated as *Demons* or *The Devils*. Also, *Bonjour Tristesse*, by Françoise Sagan, translated from French by Irene Ash. My dad also mentioned the French novelist, playwright and filmmaker, Marguerite Duras.

Laurence (guest)

Hello, um, my name's Laurence Boxhall. And the stories that I really like are the *Moomin* stories by Tove Jansson. I think I'm saying that name right? Ah, who was a Swedish-speaking Finnish illustrator. And, ah, and the books were originally published in Swedish. The *Moomin* stories mainly revolve around the inhabitants of this place called Moominvalley, specifically a family of Moomin: Moominpappa, Moominmamma, and Moomintroll. Count how many times I say the word Moomin in this. It's a series of books, and each one typically revolves around Moomintroll – the child of Moominmamma and Moominpappa – going on adventures with his friends and neighbours in Moominvalley. My two favourite characters are these two young creatures called Thingamy and Bob, and they travel around with this big top hat, that if you put fruit in it, it turns the fruit into jewels, and it's – it's wild. And they eat lots of cherries and they spit the pips out of these trumpet-like noses that they have. And they used to make me laugh heaps. It's very bizarre to describe, but they're wonderful, trust me on this. Ah, they – it's magical. Ah, I suppose, seeing as we're on Angourie's podcast, it's apt to refer to *Harry Potter* –

Angourie

Wow, Laurence just really called me out there.

Laurence

The Moominhouse, um, is very much like the Weasleys. It's sort of this ramshackle, mishmash house filled with love, and time and space for strangers, no matter where they're from. Very cosy, and, you know, you always have all kinds of strays wandering through, and, um ... As a child I loved the books because they were exciting, and they would make me laugh, and they were so interesting

and out there. And, ah, the Moomin family and the friends [are a] lot like my family and friends. But now, when I look back on it, the stories – I see a family, and a community living without harm to their environment, they live very much a low impact lives. Incredibly accepting of diversity, without – it's – but the books are never preachy. It's not telling you: "This is bad, this is good." The characters just exist, and it's just what they're like. That makes them, I think, very good role models. They take pleasure from simple things like, you know, like lying in the grass watching clouds, and um, or exploring a beach, ah, or sailing, or something like that, in a little boat on the lake. Which is very much how I was raised, ah, which makes sense because my mum was raised on these books, ah, and it was her that introduced them to me. To that extent, I'd recommend them, really, to anyone – particularly adults with children. You can read them and then you can get to know the characters, and then give them to your kids. And I think they'd instil in them such positive messages, and really positive outlook, and positive imagination, 'cause they're so full of hope and love.

Angourie

That was the *Moomin* series by Tove Jansson, translated from Swedish by David McDuff. Thank you to my sister, my mum, my dad, and my mate Laurence all for recommending some wonderful translated fiction. I also asked around on Twitter and Instagram for some recommendations. The Community Library has its own Instagram @the_community_library, and you can also follow me on Twitter, I'm @angourierice. You guys had some great recommendations, and so I want to mention a few here.

On Instagram, @clairefabian recommends *1Q24* by Haruki Murakami, and this is translated from Japanese. As I mentioned before, I read and discussed *Norwegian Wood* by Murakami on the podcast. I didn't really like *Norwegian Wood*, ah, but *1Q24* does sound fascinating, so maybe I'll give it a go. The story follows a woman who finds herself in a parallel universe. But everyone I've heard talk about the book has told me that it's whacky and weird, and it's also best to know as little as possible going into it, so that's all I'm going to say about the plot for now. But, of course, if you want to know more, it's on Goodreads.

On Instagram, @inthecrayon recommends *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas. This is a classic – it was first published in 1844 in French. And it's about a man who has been imprisoned on an island for a crime he didn't commit. And he escapes, and he goes on this journey to enact revenge on the man who put him in jail. This one sounds really fun and exciting, I would really like to read it. And it's also had many film and television adaptations, both in French and in English.

Also on Instagram, @camiserkin recommends *One Thousand and One Nights*, also known as *Arabian Nights*. Now, this is a collection of Middle-Eastern folk tales that were compiled in Arabic during the 8th to the 14th Century, so: a very, very, very long time ago. Because it happened such a long time ago, it's really hard to determine when exactly these tales were first recorded, or which versions are the, quote-unquote "original" versions of the stories, and also which translations are closest to the original text, whichever one that may be. The core story, however, is about a King who imprisons his newest wife, and vows to kill her in the morning. But every night she tells him a new story, so when the morning comes the King wants to hear the next story. Thus, she survives another day. So within this larger story of this King and his wife, we get to hear the stories that the

woman tells to the King. I would really like to read this one. I mean, you know, it's a big compilation of stories, so I feel like I might, like, go and buy myself a really nice bind-up, and just kind of pick and choose which tales I want to read. I've also heard of a graphic novel retelling of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which looks really beautiful. Let me see if I can find it.

[*Girl From Ipanema* plays]

Can't find it. If anyone knows what I'm talking about, it's a new graphic novel retelling of *One Thousand and One Nights*, or *Arabian Nights*. So if anyone knows what I'm talking about, please send me a message on Instagram, or tweet me, I would love to know.

Now, some recommendations from Twitter: @mradolfo_ recommends *Signs Preceding the End of the World* by Yuri Herrera. Now, this is translated from Spanish, and was the winner of the 2016 Best Translated Book Award for Fiction. This is about a young woman who leaves Mexico and crosses the border to the US to search for her brother. This one looks absolutely incredible, and one of my favourite booktubers, BooksandLala, has this on her TBR and has talked about it in some of her videos, so that one looks really interesting.

Also from Twitter, @theladyofdreams recommends *The Letter for the King* by Tonke Dragt. This is a middle-grade book translated from Dutch. It's about a sixteen-year-old boy who must secretly deliver a very important letter to the King. This one looks like it might be in a similar vein to *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*, so if you liked that, or if you're intrigued by that premise, then maybe give this one a go. It also looks like it's for a slightly older audience than *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*.

So, thank you so much for all your great recommendations. There were so many awesome ones that I didn't have time to mention here. Next week, I'm going to be talking with my mum, Kate, about translation. She is bilingual in English and German, and she has also worked as a translator, so she knows a lot about this subject. I am super excited for that episode, my mum is so smart and has so many interesting things to say, so stay tuned! Just another reminder, our discussion pick for this month is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. We'll be discussing that on the 24th of May, which is in three weeks' time. So, please read along, um, so you can join in on the discussion!

[theme music]

Finally, thank you so much for listening. If you enjoyed it, you can subscribe on iTunes so you never miss an episode. You can also rate and review on your podcast platform of choice. You can follow The Community Library on Instagram @the_community_library, and use the hashtag #thecommunitylibrary on Instagram or Twitter. I also have a blog, called angourieslibrary.wordpress.com, and there you can find full transcriptions of the episodes, plus extra links and resources. The podcast artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning. You can look at more of her work at ashleyronning.com, or you can go to helio-press.com, that's dash the symbol. Once again, thank you very much for listening, and I will talk to you next week! Bye!

[theme music]

Angourie

The Community Library – Angourie Rice

Fyodo – Fyodor? How do you say that? [typing on the computer] Pronunciation ... I think every single episode I google how to pronounce someone's name.

Female robot voice

Fee-o-dor Dostoyevksy.

Male robot voice

Fye-o-dor Dostoyevsky.

Angourie

Ooh, I don't trust that.