



THE SHELF

2024: The year of literature in translation

Although translated literature surged with unrivalled popularity in 2023, it was not until this year that readers finally opened their arms to possibilities beyond country bounds. In 2024, the market for literature in translation rose to its peak, making pathways for more chance releases in the imminent year.

Hospital
Sanya Rushdi, Arunava Sinha (Translator)
Seagull Books, 2023

Allow us to cheat a little as we include this literary masterpiece from the year before. Originally published in 2023, Sanya Rushdi's *Hospital* gained better footing after the noteworthy nomination for The Stella Prize in 2024. Readers are known to proclaim that *Hospital* has been one of the best translations coming out of Bangladesh in the last few years. In Melbourne, Australia, a woman in her late 30s has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, following her third episode of psychosis. The protagonist, Sanya, a student of psychology herself, questions the credibility of the evaluation and ponders whether there might be a better way to fix this. Fix her. A division of opinion persists, the humane margin between patients and doctors collides. Through

eerily sombre, reflective conversations, she navigates the uncertainty of her illness, haunted by the possibility of another episode. Based on true events and initially written in Bangla, *Hospital* is a raw and intimate exploration of one woman's struggle to reclaim her identity in a world quick to label her.

More Days at the Morisaki Bookshop
Satoshi Yagisawa, Eric Ozawa (Translator)
Harper Perennial, 2024

You can seldom go wrong with a Japanese-translated novel, and thanks to the widespread fanfare gathering around the first book in this series, we now have another instalment to look forward to. The beloved Japanese bookshop and its adjacent coffee shop in the Jimbocho neighborhood of Tokyo are back again, and along with it returns the darling cast of characters—some old, some new. Takako has finally moved out of the shop in search of her lost individuality, her relationship with her uncle, Satoru thriving like never before. In his book about books, Satoshi Yagisawa weaves a heartfelt tale about the bonds people create through a shared love of words. We find an old man wearing the same mouse-coloured sweater day after day and we come across another collecting books solely

for the authors' official stamps, and we have Satoru, with the support of his niece Takako, facing a bittersweet decision about the future of their family bookshop. Working together, their journey leads them back to their roots, stirring memories and emotions once long buried. Stay tuned to trace the budding romance as well!

Kairos
Jenny Erpenbeck, Michael Hoffmann (Translator)
New Directions, 2024

Winner of The International Booker Prize in 2024, *Kairos* by Jenny Erpenbeck is an agonising, discomfiting work of fiction centering around partners destined to be doomed in the failing years of East Germany. A classic love affair of a 19-year-old girl and a much older married writer, the couple traverse the complexities of fervent adoration, growing up and a finite romance through a tumultuous political change, against the backdrop of the crumbling GDR and its dissolution in 1989. In her distinctive style, Erpenbeck captures the sweeping arc of their relationship hauntingly, entwining it with the collapse of an entire mankind, its ideologies fading away as Katharina and her lover try to find their place in a new reality. For fans of Sally Rooney

and Samantha Harvey, *Kairos* would be an appropriate pick.

The Book Censor's Library
Bothayna Al-Essa, Ranya Abdelrahman (Translator)
Restless Books, 2024

A darkly imaginative satire, *The Book Censor's Library* dives into the shadowy world of banned books, secret libraries, and the suffocating grip of an all-seeing government. The new book censor spends his days scrutinising manuscripts for forbidden content—references to queerness, unapproved faiths, or life before the Revolution. At night, he relays vivid, insistent dreams about characters from the very books he marked red. Unbeknownst to his wife and daughter, the hidden corners of his house grow musty in silence, novels he is not permitted to own assembling an army. Luring him in, entangling him in an underground network of rebels, secret booksellers and outlaw librarians, fighting to preserve their culture and history. With piercing insight, Bothayna Al-Essa brings this dystopian sphere to life, blending Orwellian oppression with Carroll-like absurdity and Kafkaesque unease. More than a story, this is a love letter to books and a chilling reminder of what is at stake when freedom of expression is threatened. A time-sensitive treat for sure!

My Heavenly Favourite
Lucas Rijneveld, Michele Hutchison (Translator)
Faber & Faber, 2024

To conclude, ticking this list off is an absolute fan-favourite, a new, exhilarating novel from the highly-acclaimed author of *The Discomfort of Evening*. When the summer of 2005 burns as hot as the inside of a barn, a farmer's 14-year-old daughter forms an implausible alliance with the local veterinarian who tends her family's cows. At 49, the vet is burdened by a past he cannot escape, while the girl yearns to lose herself in a world of stupendous imaginations. Their shared stories, meant to heal and distract, spiral into a dangerous obsession, with a confession at its heart that could shatter their tightly knit Dutch community. Bold and unforgettable, *My Heavenly Favourite* mesmerises with its lyrical prose and unrelenting exploration of human vulnerability.

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FROM PAGES TO PIXELS

Translating magic: Netflix's bold journey to bring Macondo to life

Netflix's adaptation of Márquez stands as a testament to the power of mise-en-scène in evoking magical realism. The series' use of color palettes—vivid yellows, lush greens, and ethereal blues—mirrors the sensory richness of Márquez's descriptions. The interplay of light and shadow, particularly in scenes set in the jungle or the Buendía household, creates an atmosphere that feels both grounded and otherworldly.

NASEEF FARUQUE AMIN

Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (originally published in 1967) has long been heralded as a masterpiece of magical realism and a cornerstone of Latin American literature. With its labyrinthine narrative structure, cyclical temporality, and socio-historical depth, the novel potentially posed unique challenges for adaptation into visual media. Netflix's recent mini-series adaptation has drawn praise for its aesthetic fidelity and creative vision, but a deeper analysis through the theoretical frameworks of narratology, adaptation studies, and film craft reveals the nuanced dynamics at play in translating Márquez's literary cosmos into the language of cinema.

Márquez's novel employs a non-linear, cyclical temporality, reflecting the inescapable patterns of history and the inevitable repetition of familial fate. This intricate narrative architecture—featuring flashbacks, foreshadowing, and fragmented chronology—raises significant challenges for adaptation. Series directors and writers offer us a simplified yet respectful interpretation of the structure. By beginning with José Arcadio Buendía's backstory and opting for a more linear unfolding of events, the adaptation embraces what Linda Hutcheon identifies in her seminal *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) as the "reinterpretive" nature of adaptation. While this choice sacrifices some of the novel's temporal fluidity, it serves a dual purpose: it aligns the narrative with the demands of visual storytelling and enhances accessibility for a global audience unaccustomed to Márquez's literary style. However, this decision also raises questions about the adaptation's fidelity to the novel's thematic essence. The cyclical narrative in Márquez's work is not merely a stylistic device but a reflection of the deterministic



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forces—history, memory, and myth—that govern the lives of the Buendía family. By linearising the narrative, the series risks losing the depth of this thematic resonance. Yet, moments like the rain of yellow flowers and the ethereal ascension of Remedios the Beauty reclaim the novel's temporal magic, using visual motifs to evoke the cyclical interplay of life and death.

Netflix's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* exemplifies this perspective by reframing Márquez's prose through the language of cinema. The series employs what André Bazin describes as the "aesthetic specificity" of film—its ability to manipulate space, light, and movement—to translate Márquez's magical realism into visual terms. The rain of yellow flowers following José Arcadio Buendía's death and the haunting beauty of Macondo's jungle landscapes are not merely acts of replication but

visual reinterpretations of Márquez's imagery. By foregrounding such moments, the series underscores the idea that magical realism in film is not an act of mimicry but of transformation. The surreal is made tangible through cinematography, set design, and visual effects, allowing the viewer to inhabit a world that hovers between the real and the imaginary. Yet, adaptation theory also compels us to question what is lost in this transformation. Márquez's prose relies heavily on the interiority of its characters and the omniscient, impassive voice of its narrator, which lends an almost biblical gravitas to the events of the novel. While the series captures the external drama of the Buendía family's saga, it struggles to fully convey the interior monologues and existential reflections that underpin the novel's emotional and philosophical weight.

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stands as a testament to the power of mise-en-scène in evoking magical realism. The series' use of color palettes—vivid yellows, lush greens, and ethereal blues—mirrors the sensory richness of Márquez's descriptions. The interplay of light and shadow, particularly in scenes set in the jungle or the Buendía household, creates an atmosphere that feels both grounded and otherworldly. The sound design also deserves special attention. The auditory landscape—featuring the hum of insects, the rustle of leaves, and the occasional strains of haunting music—anchors the viewer in Macondo's physical and emotional geography. This multisensory approach aligns with Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "time-image," where cinematic techniques are used to evoke the subjective experience of time, memory, and history.

However, the series occasionally

falters in its pacing and editing. The novel's sprawling narrative, with its myriad characters and subplots, creates challenges for episodic storytelling. Certain characters, such as Colonel Aureliano Buendía, receive expanded arcs that flesh out their motivations and historical contexts, yet others are rendered peripheral, diluting the interconnectedness that defines the novel's family saga.

From a literary perspective, the series honors Márquez's themes of love, loss, and the inexorable pull of history, even as it alters the narrative structure to suit the cinematic medium. From a filmic standpoint, the adaptation exemplifies the creative possibilities of translating magical realism into visual form, using the tools of mise-en-scène, cinematography, and sound to craft an immersive experience. Yet, the adaptation also highlights the tension inherent in adapting a novel so deeply rooted in its medium. While the series captures the external beauty of Márquez's world, it occasionally struggles to convey the internal depth of his characters and the philosophical underpinnings of his narrative. This gap underscores the limitations of cinema as a medium for capturing the full scope of literary complexity, even as it celebrates the unique strengths of visual storytelling.

For me, Netflix's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not merely an adaptation but a reinterpretation, a dialogue between literature and cinema that honors the spirit of Gabriel García Márquez's work while reimagining it for a new audience. It invites viewers and readers alike to reconsider the boundaries of storytelling and the transformative power of adaptation, leaving us to ponder the enduring legacy of Macondo and the Buendía family in a medium Márquez himself approached with cautious reverence.

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