9.4 “That In Between Time:” Fernanda Trías and Heather Cleary (MAT)

Transcript

Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra

Hello, and welcome to *Novel Dialogue*, a podcast that brings together critics and novelists to talk about how novels work and how we work in relation to novels. We're sponsored by the Society for Novel Studies and produced in partnership with *Public Books*, an online magazine of arts, ideas, and scholarship. I'm Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra, one of your hosts for this season. For this episode, we're thrilled to have with us the Uruguayan novelist Fernanda Trías, author of, amongst others, the novel *Mugre Rosa*, or *Pink Slime*, in conversation with the critic and translator Heather Cleary, whose excellent translation of *Pink Slime* into English came out in the U.S. last year. *Pink Slime* is set in a world ravaged by a mysterious plague in which characters eke out increasingly precarious existences as the environment continues to transform and indeed collapse. In this world, and likely not just in this world, the apocalypse is both fast and slow. Uncannily timely when it was first published in 2020, *Pink Slime* continues to resonate with the unfolding present. The novel received several major awards in the Spanish-speaking world, while the English translation was long-listed for the National Book Awards Prize for Translated Literature in 2024. Fernanda is also the author of the recently published *El Monte de las Furias*, which Heather will be translating into English. Born in Uruguay, Fernanda has lived and worked in France, Argentina, Spain, the U.S., and currently teaches in the MFA program at the Universidad Nacional de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. Heather, for her part, is an accomplished translator of contemporary Latin American fiction, whose translations include Luis Felipe Fabre's *Recital of The Dark Verses*, Dahlia de la Cerda’s *Reservoir Bitches*, and the co-edited collection *Tsunami*, to name just a few examples from the past year alone. Heather is also a theorist of translation, and the author of the scholarly monograph *The Translator's Visibility: Scenes from Contemporary Latin American Fiction*, published in 2021. She lives and works in Mexico City. Welcome, Fernanda and Heather. It's very exciting to have you both here.

Fernanda Trías

Thank you, Magalí. I'm so happy to be here with you both.

Heather Cleary

Thank you, Magalí.

MAT

To get the conversation started today, I'm going to ask you, Fernanda, to talk a little bit about the world that you created in *Pink Slime* to get our listeners situated.

FT

Well, as Magalí was saying in the intro, the story takes place in a city where an environmental disaster has happened. There's a wind coming off the river that carries a toxin that affects people's skin and transmits a disease that, for the most part, has no cure. And in this context, the narrator, a 40-year-old woman chooses to stay in the contaminated city because she doesn't want to leave her mother or her ex-husband behind to toxic relationships she just can't break away from. And for me, I think the key thing was deciding when to tell the story, right? I didn't want it to be post-apocalyptic. I'm much more interested in that in-between time when things are still kind of holding together, when people can keep pretending that something—that what's happening isn't as dystopian as it actually is. Sounds familiar? Any resemblance to the current moment is purely coincidental. [laughter]

HC

And I'd like to also return a little bit to these toxic relationships because one of the things that I love the most, when I first read the novel and we were talking about my translating it, one of the things that I felt most excited about was the psychological depth of the characters and the dynamics that you portray, particularly in the relationships between the narrator and these three anchors that keep her in this port city. There's the mother, the ex-husband, Max, and also Mauro, who is the child that she cares for. And so Mauro suffers from a rare syndrome that drives him to consume anything and everything he can get his hands on. And again, speaking of, does anything sound familiar, right? Mauro's condition does feel like a bit of an echo and a commentary, and I was wondering if you might, might speak to that.

FT

I had known about this syndrome for years, back from the times when I used to be a medical translator. And I always knew that at some point I was going to write a character who lived with this syndrome because the idea of a condition that never lets you feel full, that creates constant hunger, completely obsessed me. Why? Well, that's a longer conversation, but I wanted basically to try to understand that kind of pain, that emptiness, that constant need to fill a void or this hunger need. And for me, writing is the only way to process things on a deep emotional level. So when I want to understand something that really intrigues me or obsesses me, I need to write about it. So when I started writing *Pink Slime*, I knew the heart of the story would be the relationship between a woman and a child who has this syndrome. The other layers of meaning came together as I wrote. And some of them I didn't even fully understand until later. I didn't set out to make the child a metaphor. In fact, it was the opposite. I think it's very interesting what disability studies talk about, like, disabled characters often appear in novels to represent things more than represent themselves as whole human beings. And I think that's very interesting and important to think about as writers, right? So in fact, it was the opposite. I wanted to resist

turning the illness into something symbolic. And I wanted to move past the illness itself and see the full human being behind the image of a sick body. But how was I going to do this? I needed the narrator to reflect on this. So she starts out like many of us, that we don't see the person behind the sick body. And then as she gets involved emotionally with the child and develops this relationship with him, moves away from there and realizes that she had been in that same position, let's say. But of course, like all the other layers of meaning you mentioned started coming into play and adding complexity as I kept writing. And I always feel that when I write, it's like weaving senses. I have this feeling that is, uh, that I'm weaving different senses and putting everything together. So I would say like, yes, and this yes, and this yes, like everything at the same time, it adds up.

HC

Absolutely. Absolutely. And the relationship between the two of them is just so beautiful. I mean, when I was working with the text, it was the one relationship that really felt not toxic in this entire world, right? Like it grows and it deepens in just a really beautiful way. Perhaps in contrast, we could talk a little bit about the dynamic with her mother, you know, which is so fraught. I mean, not since Vivian Gornick have I encountered a daughter or mother dynamic that is so precisely and brutally etched on the page. And I wonder, I mean, in some of your other work as well, particularly in this new novel that just came out, *Monte de las Furias*, the relationship between a daughter and a mother is also very prominent and very fraught there. And I'm curious about this dynamic in particular in the context of *Pink Slime*, but also kind of more broadly in the way that you think about characters and why this dynamic is kind of a recurring theme in your work.

FT

Yeah. I mean, I love Vivian Gornick's work. And I don't think there's a better way to describe the complicated relationship between mothers and daughters than *Fierce Attachments*. I use it a lot. And actually when I was writing *Pink Slime*—when I just started writing *Pink Slime*—I was at a residency in Madrid, somebody gave me *Fierce Attachments* that had been translated into Spanish recently. And it really blew my mind. It blew my mind. And we are born physically connected to our mothers by a cord. And that cord has to be cut. I think that's fascinating because that moment defines everything, right? On one hand, the deepest kind of intimacy, having once been part of the same body. And on the other hand, the need to separate. And I've always been fascinated by how the people who love each other the most can also hurt each other the most. And from my first novel, *The Rooftop*, I'm already writing about that. I think literature is the perfect place to explore those complexities. I love character building, and I strive to work the characters to make them as complex as I can. The other day I was reading an interview to Chilean writer, Pino Luna, who has published a novel. And she said something that I loved. She said, the family as an institution is society's greatest fiction. That's why literature draws so much from it. And I think that was brilliant. Yeah. And I told her, you know what, I'm going to start quoting you.

MAT

I absolutely had the experience of finishing reading the novel and having the kind of, well, on the one hand, the feeling of call your mother, and on the other, call your therapist, right? [laughter] The sort of two needs that emerge from really sitting with the intensity of that relationship. I mean, in the novel, and of course, in our lived psychodramas too, right? But I'm curious, given this attention to Mauro and also to the protagonist's relationship with her mother—we haven't gotten to the ex-husband yet, but Max too. At what point in the writing of the novel, as you were building out from the figure of Mauro and the relationship there, did the fact that the world is falling apart in a very real sense enter the kind of plotting of this novel and the building of this world? When did environmental collapse enter the scene?

FT

From the beginning; I knew it from the beginning, because I had like a few—this novel, I kind of thought that this—the building of this novel was very different from the building of *The Rooftop*, which is a shorter novel. And so it has a different structure. It's like a circle. It starts where it ends and just reconstructs what may have happened and how things ended up like this. While, as I was saying that when I was writing *Pink Slime*, I had this feeling that I was weaving different things and putting them together like a patchwork. And it was because at the very beginning, I had like a few elements that felt disconnected, but I knew they were not disconnected, that I just had to understand how they were connected. I knew that I had a child and a woman that was not the biological mother taking care of this child. And that this child had this syndrome, that is based on a real-life syndrome. But I also had the pink slime itself, that is this meat by-product, that I knew people were eating in this novel. And I still didn't know how this hunger and this pink slime and then the toxic wind that I also had, would come together. So from the very beginning, the first images that I had were about the algae covering the river and changing the color of the river. Then the toxic wind and the clouds that would be pink and that the wind would blow away the clouds and bring this disease that would be contagious through the skin and through contact. So I knew from the beginning that I had an environmental disaster and that I would build the conflict from there. And little by little, I started building the connections between each element.

MAT

So I'm going to flip this question a little bit toward Heather, actually. So I asked, at what point the environmental disaster entered the scene, but of course the novel is published in 2020. So your novel arrives in a world where an event that at least echoes the event imagined in the world in the novel is unfolding. And that's one experience of, I don't know, perhaps the uncanny, but Fernanda, I'd be interested in hearing you talk about the experience of the world in which the novel arrived, in which *Pink Slime* arrived when it was published in Spanish. And then Heather, for you as a translator coming to this novel after, or on the tail end of the pandemic, how to translate this novel that resonated so much with that historical moment in the wake of it.

FT

Yeah, something interesting happened. The novel came out, as you said, in Spanish in 2020, in October of 2020. And as time went on, the focus gradually shifted from the novel's parallels with the COVID-19 pandemic to other aspects of the story. At first, I worried that those uncanny similarities to what we had lived and what we were living at the moment would completely take over the conversation. And it did for a little while. Yeah, I was worried that that part of the novel would drown out the things that I actually wanted to talk about, like ecological collapse, ethics of care, motherhood, you know, but little by little that started to fade, luckily. And it really made me think about how much a book is shaped by its historical and real world context when we read that book, because the same book, if it had been published before COVID would have been read in a completely different way. And to start with—well, I wrote this novel before COVID. So when I was writing about people going out with their face masks, for me, it was very—it was supposed to create a very not normal, strange image. Right. And when it came out, we were all walking around in face masks. So what I thought was going to create some kind of strangeness about it, was the new normal. So I think that the novel was read less, uh, I don't know—it felt less like science fiction and more like realism that I had intended. Right.

HC

Sort of to pick up on what Fernanda just said, that all of a sudden it became realistic. I think something I'm always very conscious of when I translate is the distance both spatial and temporal between the time of writing, the time and place of writing, and the time and place of translation. And often that feels like it grows, like a distance that grows over time. And depending on the different cultural contexts of the work that I'm working on, but in this case, it was weird because the context kind of became more immediate because the time of translation in this case was the time of the pandemic. So I started working on this book in late 2020, early 2021. So the scenario that Fernanda described that seemed kind of abstract and imagined was suddenly very real in many ways. So it was just a very interesting kind of inversion of the feeling of distancing that can sometimes come with translation in general. Yeah, I mean, thinking about the timing, I think I probably finished the translation in 2022 because it came out in the UK in ‘23. So it would have been sort of the entire time. And very much like you, Magalí, I was also deeply moved and troubled by the relationship with the mother. So, you know, we were here in lockdown, and I was feeling these words resonate very deeply with me. And it was a very personal translation experience in a very beautiful and disturbing way.

MAT

So one of the things that I've noticed about your writing, and this sort of harkens back to something you said about your interest in character and kind of constructing depth and character and really focusing on that psychological dimension of your fiction. There's a consistent interest in enclosed spaces, very tight confined spaces from *La Azotea*, through *Pink Slime*, and now a bit in this new novel, *Monte de las Furias*, there's sort of a tightness of space. I'm curious if that's a conscious choice or where that came from.

FT

Yeah. I'm thinking just to say something else about *Pink Slime*, we were just talking about the pandemic. I think that what was most interesting for me about the experience that readers would share with me was not so much the coincidences, all those things that were like, “Oh, how did she think about these things?” And then they happened. Right. But more like the feelings that people had during the pandemic that they didn't imagine that they would, you know, feel or go through these things. It was more like the shared feelings of being—like claustrophobia and how, when you're enclosed, time works in a different way. Like you feel time in a different way. What things do you think about when you are sheltering in place and you can't go out? And those things were very interesting for me because many readers told me, “I really felt the same and I really identified with these feelings and I couldn't name them. I had no words to really describe them, and I found that this narrator described them.” And I thought that was the most beautiful part of it. And yeah, I've written a lot about characters in a state of isolation. And many times, it's a self-imposed isolation, not in the case of *Pink Slime*. That is because of the outside world that pushes people inside. But I think of spaces as introspective territories, you know, and closed spaces allow me to focus entirely on character building and all the subtle emotional shifts happening inside them. It's like a theater stage, you know, and I'm also really interested in how time works in confinement. It takes on a different intensity, fills up with memories. What do you do technically when you are writing a scene that happens, like, characters are in an enclosed space and you cannot move them. If they cannot move around, how do you move the plot forward? You have to work a lot with introspection. And if you cannot move outward outwardly, you have to move inwardly and you have to work with memories and a lot of flashbacks, and I'm really interested in those possibilities.

MAT

So I wanted to jump in with, taking the sort of Bakhtinian space-time conjunction as the excuse here, but having talked about space and enclosed spaces, I found the representation of time, but specifically the writerly choice of tense in *Pink Slime*, really interesting. So the novel's mostly narrated in the past tense with a transition into the present and future tenses in the closing pages, but that isn't necessarily optimistic, right? One of the closing lines of the novel in Heather's English translation is, “I cannot stop a future that has already arrived.” But you've talked a little bit about the kind of slowly unfolding or the time in between being a key interest in the writing of *Pink Slime*, but this idea of the slowly unfolding disaster being narrated in the past rather than the present, which would give you or more quickly make available things like highlighting immediacy, heightening suspense, and so on. The choice of the past tense to me seemed both gentler, right? It's not asking us to be kind of in that heightened state as readers, but also actually much darker, in terms of its kind of view of the disasters it's narrating. So Fernanda, I'm curious about how you were thinking about tense and what sort of tense to narrate the novel in, and I think Heather, for you as translator, I mean, to a certain extent, you follow the lead set by Fernanda, but I'm wondering if you had reference points for similar novels in English that you were thinking about as you were trying to think about the tone in English that you wanted for the world that Fernanda had built in Spanish.

FT

I think I've never said this in an interview, but, I started writing in the present tense and then decided to change that and start again in the past tense tense and I was shifting. I couldn't make up my mind. And at some point the reflection was, yeah, I can't make up my mind because I need both. Let's see why. And I started thinking about it, but at some point I was like, I started shifting between past tense and present tense. And I said, why not take it further and bring the future tense as well. Let's try. And I started experimenting with it. And I think this choice was more about reflecting on the nature of memory because memory is one of the key themes I explore, how personal memory intersects with collective memory and personal loss with collective loss, the loss of this world, after an ecological disaster. And I was asking myself, in what tense do we remember? Do we really remember in the past tense or is remembering more like reliving? And neuroscience tells us that the brain doesn't think in verb tenses for the brain. A memory is the same as something happening in the present, it's happening again right now, but at the same time, you already lived it. So you remember what's going to happen, but you are reliving it at the same time. So you know what's going to happen. And there you could shift to the future tense and say like, “oh, and now I'm going to open that door and I'm going to see Mauro and this is going to happen and this is going to happen.” Right. So that's how I started thinking about it. And then also the future tense also helped me create a more ominous feeling and a sense of something looming ahead because I felt like the narrator was like, “I know what's going to happen and I don't want it to happen again, so I'm going to try to not go there,” but at the same time it already happens. So it's unavoidable and you will have to go through it again. So you will open that door and you will see it again. And that's how I worked with the three tenses. I don't know, probably that was challenging for Heather.

HC

No, not at all.

FT

Especially the transitions, right, Heather. Like when the exact paragraph where past tense would turn into present tense.

HC

I mean, kind of not at all in the sense that I love translating your work because you're such a precise writer. You're so careful that it's very easy to let myself be guided by your choices. You know, it's not necessarily true that every writer might be so careful and precise in how to make those shifts in a way that it's clearly intentional and in a way that it drives not only sort of the—that it keeps the movement of the story going, but also that it reveals something about the perspective of the character and everything. But you're very skilled in the way that you make those choices and you make those transitions. So it actually wasn't difficult at all. I allowed

myself to be led with absolute delight. And one of the things that kind of crossed my mind while you were talking about what the future tense does; one of the things that I felt in these shifts into the future was also a feeling of enclosure, that sensation of being enclosed within a story, right. That only has one possible sort of ending.

FT

Like a loop, a little bit like a loop.

HC

Mm-hmm. Exactly. Like this room has no other door. And then we haven't even talked about the interludes, which are outside of time, right. They're in dialogue in which temporality is not signaled in any way. And I think those are really important moments also in the text, that kind of—they're very jarring and they remind the reader precisely about this operation of memory, right, and how you can lose your footing so easily. As in the process of remembering. But the use of the past tense to de-emphasize sort of that idea of suspense was very important also in thinking about tone and thinking about sort of the ways to use lexical choice to kind of focus more on the emotional dimensions and the sort of quiet darkness of this narrative. So even as it was easy for me to know when to translate into the past tense versus the present tense versus the future, those movements signaled other choices that I would have to make in the text.

MAT

So I'd asked about possible reference points for the translation, Heather, if you were thinking about other narratives and other examples.

HC

I completely tried to avoid that question. [laughter] I don't have an English language reference for Fernanda's prose because it's so different from anything that I've read in English. There's this beautiful—I mean, like I said, it's very precise, but at the same time, there's something just slightly strange about it. There's something slightly dark, kind of like playing in a minor key on the piano a little bit. I haven't really found an English—I'm still obviously always reading around and very interested. But I haven't found a voice like that in English.

FT

But as you were just mentioning, precision, I think, is very important. And I try to be as precise as possible. But I've always thought that there's no better reader than a good translator. And my experience was that your comments and questions helped me read my own book more closely. I'm not sure if you remember that sometimes I have my own copy of things that I have in Spanish here and it's underlined with things that Heather pointed out, and then I was like, “Oh, she's right. I'm going to change that in the Spanish version.” I'm not sure if you remember,

Heather, but sometimes you pointed out an image that contradicted something earlier in the book, or an adjective that sounded redundant or something like that, you know, things that I actually ended up correcting in the Spanish when the next edition came out. And I mean, mind you, this had been edited and read by so many people before. And still there were little things that, for example, lingered there because of something that I changed that I had erased, but I forgot to erase that little detail, and Heather spotted those things.

HC

Yeah, no, absolutely. And it's very generous of you to say that we're good readers. I feel like I can also be a very annoying reader for that very reason [laughter], because precisely, I mean, translators are the people who have to make an active choice about every word that's on the page. So even an editor is possibly less likely to catch very small things because they don't have to necessarily reproduce each word. So I do remember those exchanges and I think we've talked about this in other contexts, but the way that we worked together on this translation, it was very close collaboration. So I completed a full draft of the novel and then would send large chunks to Fernanda and we would actually go through them, very much focused on sound. And sometimes we even occasionally would shorten a sentence, because whereas something sort of worked in Spanish, it ended up falling flat in English. In order to keep the rhythm of the paragraph moving, we decided, like, this clause, honestly, like we can live without it, obviously not very often, but there were those moments. We were both very focused on how the text sounded in English and working so closely together gave me more freedom as well, to take those and to propose adjustments along those lines. And it was really a beautiful…

FT

Yeah, it was great. And sometimes I would just say like, I don't know this sentence. I don't know why, you know, I cannot specifically say why it doesn't sound as well as others, and just from that comment, Heather would come out with a completely different rendering. That was amazing. And things like that. Like sometimes, I would read it aloud and there was something that was off, and then I would tell Heather, can you read it? Because I think that I'm not reading it correctly. And that's why it sounded like this. So Heather would read it and I was like, okay, no, actually it sounds well. [laughter] Or not. But I mean, many times it was like this, right? Do you remember how much we discussed the Buddhist joke?

HC

Yes. [laughter]

FT

It was—I'm gonna read it. "'What did the Buddhist monk say to his son?' he asked. 'I don't know, what?' 'One day, my boy, all this nothing will be yours.'" And I was insisting that it should be "all

this nothingness will be yours.” And Heather was trying to convince me that it didn't make sense, that it would be no joke.

HC

It's true. I was like, Fernanda, it's not a joke anymore then. But I mean, but those are the most wonderful conversations because the translators spend so much time with the text, and often, only my translator friends will indulge me in a 30 minute conversation about the placement of a comma or the authors whose books I'm working on. Right. Those are the only avenues I have to have those extremely granular conversations about breath and rhythm and word choice. And so for me, it's a tremendous luxury to be able to work with Fernanda so closely and to be able to delve really deeply into the subtext of what's on the page and the ways in which we can stretch meaning in order to achieve either an emotional effect or an acoustic effect. So it's really fun. I love it. I absolutely love it. Making the choice of word choice is a very specific skill set and not all want to kind of dive into that pool. I guess, thinking about translation, *Pink Slime* has been translated into 17 languages. Well, *Mugre Rosa* was translated into 17 languages. And I'm very curious, Fernanda, what your experience has been like, entering these different contexts. You've also presented the book in some of these different countries, and how has the reception varied from place to place, and what has this been like for you?

FT

I think *Pink Slime* is hard to classify because it sits right on the edge between science fiction and literary realism. And I think it's been an interesting experience for readers. But honestly, the real challenge comes more from the publishing market, because it's the market that needs to put books into neat little categories, not the people actually reading them. So where does this book go in a bookstore, in what section, and what kind of magazine is going to review it? So I've noticed that in some countries there's more resistance to books that don't fit into traditional realism many times because there's no strong tradition of fantasy or science fiction. So books that fall outside those boundaries can be harder to place. And I would see this in Italy, for example, or in Germany, that they're interested more in other kinds of novels that are more historical and that have to do with real life—based on real life characters, or things like that. Then in English—and not all English speaking countries are the same. Actually in the U.S. I think there's a much greater openness to seeing science fiction as literature, whereas in other countries, it's still seen as a lesser genre. And that is very interesting because this has been changing in the Spanish speaking world very fast in the last few years. But until recently it was also, you know, science fiction would be in a different—it was not regarded as literature so much. And something very interesting has been happening in the Spanish speaking world that, let's say some authors that had never explored other genres, suddenly started mixing, and writing books that were not literary realism. And I love this because that means that it's so interesting when you can open up to different things and why not use what you need, you know, not be limited by genres.

MAT

I want to get in one last question, give you both a chance to talk about this. So in hearing you both talk about this sort of collaboration as novelist and translator, I want to point out to our listeners that the collaboration isn't over, right? The collaboration is ongoing, not just because of the appearances you've both been doing often in conversation connected to *Pink Slime*, but because Heather, you're translating Fernanda's new novel, *El Monte de las Furias*. And I know that's still very much in process. So the novel just came out in Spanish, you're working on the translation, hopefully forthcoming in 2026, I think you said with Scribner as well, in English. And I'm curious, we can come at this from any angle you'd like about how the conversation that's currently going, if you're comfortable sharing how the, how the conversation is unfolding now around the novel. So the title of the novel is *El Monte de las Furias*, *The Mountain of the Furies* would be the most direct translation, but Heather and Fernanda, you have the kind of working title, *The Mountain Woman*. So thinking about the sort of shift there and how you came to that creative decision, at least the creative working decision that's guiding the translation conversation.

HC

Yes. Oh my gosh. To start with the title, that was weeks of discussions or something like that. I mean, it was very complicated, because the image of the Furias is very important, in the Spanish title. And I was trying to say like, I don't know, maybe it's me. Maybe I just can't do it, but I can't make this sound compelling. Like *The Mountain of the Furies* or *Fury Mountain* sounds like a roller coaster. [laughter] I don't know what to do with this. And so, you know, one of the things that we often do when we have titles that don't quite convey the emotional heft of the title in the original language is to look elsewhere and look at other essential elements of the book that we might draw on. And one of the things that I really loved about, or love in the present tense, about *The Mountain Woman* is that, I mean, I don't want to give away any spoilers, but the relationship between the woman and the mountain is so important and complex, and so central to the plot that she's sort of seen as this weird mountain woman who's isolated on the side of the mountain. But there's also this other dimension to that sort of identification, that compound noun, right, that comes. So that's, I don't know, do you want to add anything to that process?

FT

I mean, it's funny because it already started. It started from the beginning with a challenge. We were discussing this. I was at the residency at Yaro [unintelligible @ 43:20] when we were talking about this. And again, Heather always ends up convincing me. But I was insisting, no, that we had to keep the Furies and, you know, I know that the mountain word had to be in the title. But I think that is this—we kind of explored a lot of options, right? Mm-hmm. Different options. I don't remember them now, but they were not good. And at some point, I don't know how we came up with this. And I think that the thing that really convinced me was the idea that the mountain woman is not something—you can correct me, Heather, but it's not an expression that is so commonly used because we associate more like mountain men. And that already is

upturning these ideas of the roles for women. And that's something important in the novel in a way. And so I felt that that works. And it also has the word mountain and it has the word woman, the two voices in the novel. But I think it's brilliant, we start brainstorming and at some point something, you know, clicks.

MAT

At the end of each of our interviews on *Novel Dialogue*, we like to ask our novelist, and I think in this case also our critic translator, a signature question, which for this season of the podcast is—and you are both particularly excellent people, I think to be asking this question of—if you could live anywhere in the world for a year, where, or when, or maybe how would it be? Fernanda, would you like to go first?

FT

That's very difficult question. The first thing that comes to mind is not here, not in this world. If I could pick anywhere would be—but not like outside the world, like, you know, Mars or the moon or something, but more like a utopian world. What would that be like? I want to see it. I really don't know how, you know, what the utopian world would look like. It would want to change the world we live in right now. So I would be curious to go there and see how it works and what it's like, maybe bring back some ideas.

HC

It is a very difficult question. I think for me, instead of, instead of thinking about going elsewhere for a year, it's more thinking about how to be more engaged and immersed and more here, in the here that for me right now is sort of a split here because I'm living in Mexico and it would be a year dedicated to sort of deepening community and trying to strengthen sort of those, not only the affective bonds, which are also very important, but also sort of the community political bonds. And also trying to engage with my other here, which is the United States, in crisis, and trying to understand and act on ways of deepening connection to that space as well.

MAT

Yeah. I think the question has built into the idea that one is only in one place at once, but Heather, I mean, you've got at this more explicitly, and I think it's come up in the conversation. We're actually in multiple places at once in most of our experiences, at least in multiple time zones, if not multiple timelines. At the end of another episode of *Novel Dialogue*, we'd like to thank the Society for Novel Studies for its sponsorship, *Public Books* for its partnership, and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Rowan University for its support for the podcast. Beck Daly is our production intern, and Connor Hibbard is our sound engineer. Check out recent episodes of the podcast with Lydia Kiesling and Jamil Jan Kochai, as well as earlier episodes with the writers Alejandro Zambra and Aminatta Forna, as well as the translator Ann Goldstein.

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