

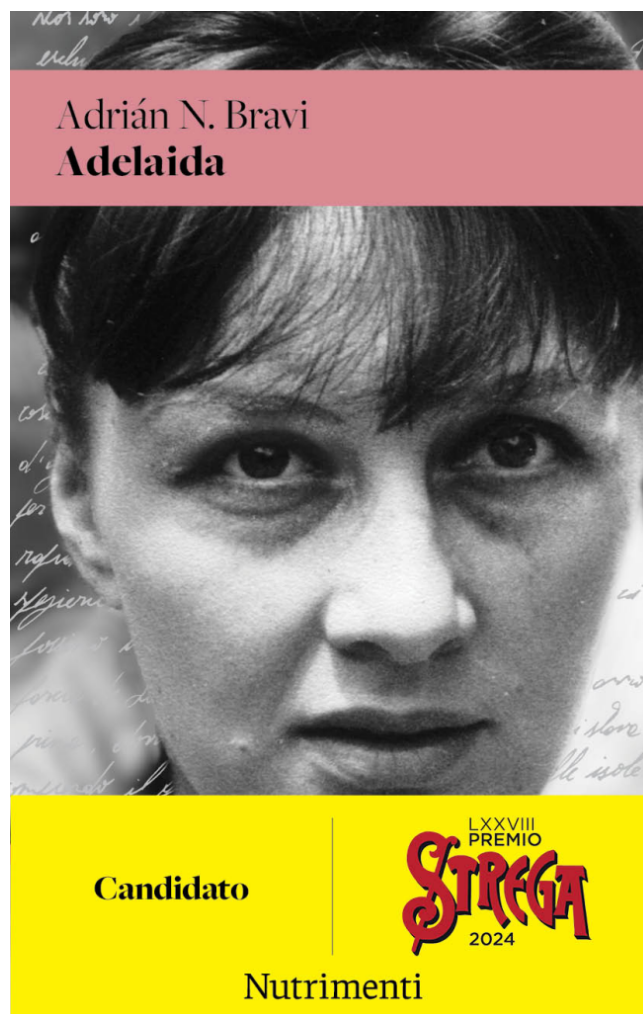


TRANSLATORS ON BOOKS THAT SHOULD BE TRANSLATED: ADRIÁN BRAVI'S "ADELAIDA"



By **smilkova** on August 3, 2026

Reviewed by [Anna Botta](#)



Adelaida is a marvelous book that left me breathless; I intentionally slowed down while reading its last pages, since I didn't want it to end. A slim book of 142 pages, it mixes together many disparate genres: it is at once a diaspora story that portrays the lives of Argentinian political activists living in and out of exile during the late twentieth century, a historical account of the crimes perpetrated by Argentinian dictatorships, a cultural essay about the Buenos Aires literary scene in the

fifties and sixties, a personal history of the friendship between the author and his protagonist, Adelaida, and, finally, a testimony to the role played by women in history and art. Yet, most of all, it is a diasporic memoir “a singhiozzi” (in fits and starts) (139), told by Adelaida to the narrator over a period of twenty years, a story that remains to the end full of holes. In listening to the “candida, generosa, gioviale” (candid, generous, and jovial) Adelaida (140), who recounts her memories in the third space of her colorful apartment in Recanati, the author discovers “un pezzo di storia argentina nascosto dall’altro lato dell’oceano” (a hidden piece of Argentine history on the other side of the ocean) (16); Bravi also reflects on what it means, for himself too, to be a Latin American (*Gelosia delle lingue* 139).

Adrián Bravi was born in Buenos Aires in 1963 in a family of Italian immigrants; he left Argentina in the late eighties, at the age of twenty-five, to study at the university in Italy and has been living in Recanati since then. Beginning in 2014 he has chosen to write in Italian, publishing a dozen novels as well as a book of essays entitled *Gelosia delle lingue* (EUM, 2017) (*My Language is a Jealous Lover*, translated by Giovanna Bellesia Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto and published in 2023 by Rutgers University Press), which offers a series of reflections on exophony and on famous exophonic writers. *Adelaida* won ex-aequo the 2025 Volver-Antonio dal Masetto Prize (a prize given to works written in Italian by writers who have adopted Italian as the language of their artistic expression) and was among the five finalists for the 2024 Strega Prize, the most prestigious of Italian literary prizes. To my knowledge, Bravi’s novel *South 1982* (translated by Richard Dixon, Jetstone, 2022) is his only other work translated in English.

In 1988, Adrián Bravi met Adelaida Gigli, initiating a friendship that would last until her death in 2010. Adelaida was born in Recanati in 1927, as “Adelaide” —when her parents emigrated to Argentina in 1930, her name changed to “Adelaida” (16-17). In Buenos Aires, during the fifties and sixties, Adelaida became a central figure of the Argentine literary scene; she was a co-founder in 1953 of the literary journal *Contorno* and a vocal leftist intellectual. She had two children with the writer David Viñas, Mini and Lorenzo Ismael. During a brief exile in Venezuela with her husband in 1959-60, she visited a community of natives, the Timotocuicas, and became fascinated with their ceramics. Upon her return to Buenos Aires, she decided to dedicate herself fulltime to that art. In the dark years of the military dictatorship, Adelaida lost both of her children as *desaparecidos*, Mini in 1976 and Lorenzo Ismael in

1980. She then fled to Italy, after fifty years in Argentina and she returned to live in the same town, Recanati, that her father had left behind, experiencing what she calls a kind of paradoxical form of rebirth. In her conversations with Adrián, she wonders in dismay, “Quante volte devo nascere ancora?” (How many times do I have to be reborn?).

In her Italian exile, Adelaida returns to writing and to making her ceramics: “la scrittura, come anche la ceramica, era il suo scrigno segreto, la sua continuità semantica” (writing, like ceramics, was her secret treasure chest, her linguistic continuity) (121). Some of the best pages of the book reflect on the role of her hands in shaping both the resistant clay and her sense of reality. She relinquishes neither her sense of lightness or irony; according to Bravi, the clay or dust that clings to her sculptures, tiles, and pages carries traces of her “lievi mani” (light hands), an image used by the “imperdonabile” (unforgivable) poet Cristina Campo (1927-1977) whom Bravi cites at the closing of his book (Campo, *Gli imperdonabili*, 111). For Adelaida too, art and beauty are a matter of lightness and resistance to the weight of history.

I would argue that the same quality, “con lievi mani,” can be attributed to Bravi himself. His style is simple, very matter of fact, in recounting Adelaide’s past, but it becomes increasingly lyrical and emotionally involved as the book progresses.

Sparse lines of poetry written either by the main character Adelaida, Bravi himself or various well-known Latin American writers punctuate the text throughout. This amazingly rich narrative material never feels pretentious or artificially constructed.

Though one wishes it were otherwise, *Adelaida* is also relevant to the contemporary political scene here in the US, in light of the disappearance of people kidnapped by ICE. The book invites reflections on the immense burden that, in times of crisis, history places on individuals, and in particular on the younger generation. If you happen to be in Buenos Aires during the seventies or eighties or, today, a young Iranian demonstrating in the streets, or a Gazan or Ukrainian living under constant bombardment, how much freedom do you have to shape your own destiny? Is the responsibility that you have towards history greater than the need to preserve your own life? If you are a politically militant parent living in such dark times, as Adelaida was, what degree of responsibility do you bear for unintentionally turning your children into martyrs? Such are a few of the questions raised by this timely and compelling book. It deserves to be read outside of the Italian speaking community, though so far, to my knowledge,

it has only been translated in Spanish by Miquel Izquierdo and published in 2014 by the Barcelona-based publisher editorial minúscula. Bravi's work will be an excellent fit for any Anglophone publisher in the North American literary landscape whose aim is to support and amplify voices often excluded from mainstream narratives or to platform new talent within diasporic writers. Without a doubt, Adelaida's voice, in her unique mix of porteño and Italian, risks being forgotten and instead deserves to be amplified. Giovanna Bellesia Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto, who translated Bravi's *Gelosia delle lingue* into English (for which they won the 2024 Massachusetts Book Award for Translated Literature), have completed their English translation of *Adelaida* and are currently in search of an Anglophone publisher. As exophonic writers living in the US, they are well suited to this task, and their work will add a further layer to the complex linguistic stratification of the book.

Anna Botta is an emerita professor of Comparative Literature and Italian Studies Language at Smith College. Together with Michel Moushabeck, in 2014, she has co-edited "Mediterraneans," a special issue of the *Massachusetts Review*. Together with Lucia Re, in 2023, she co-edited a special issue on Calvino for *California Italian Studies*. She participated in the translation of Sami al-Ajrami and Anna Lombardi's *The Keys to My House. A Gaza Diary* (Translated by Jim Hicks with Anna Botta, Interlink: 2026).

