

# La Nota del Traduttore

## ROMANZO

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◀ [TORNA ALL'ELENCO](#)

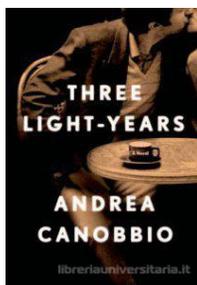
**Tre anni luce / Three Light-Years**  
di: *Andrea Canobbio* / editore: *Feltrinelli*, 2013  
traduttore: Traduzione dall'italiano in inglese di *Anne Milano Appel*

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### Nota del Traduttore - Traduzione dall'italiano in inglese di Anne Milano Appel



#### *Translating Andrea Canobbio's Three Light-Years*

Every reader knows that some novels are plot driven, others character driven. And then there are the ones that are language driven: the ones where you linger over every word, relishing every nuance, often rereading the sentence you've just finished because you want to savor it again. For me Andrea Canobbio's *Three Light-Years* (Farrar Straus & Giroux, July 2014) falls into the latter category. The plot matters, of course, and the characters are substantially drawn, but between style and story, style wins hands down. This is not to say that the author engages in explosive pyrotechnics or stylistic acrobatics. Not at all. Canobbio's language is refined and reserved, always controlled. There is none of the ostentation or extravagance that might appear flamboyant when transported into English. My editor at FSG, who knows Italian, told me that she found translations from the Italian often sounded "over-ripe" in English: "what's expressive in Italian can read as inappropriately florid in English." There was no chance of that happening when translating Canobbio's elegant, restrained prose.

In a sense the language itself, the distanced tone that Canobbio evokes, might be said to be character driven, in that it echoes the reticence and diffidence of the central male figure: Claudio Viberti, the "shy, reserved internist" whose cautious restraint keeps him from revealing his feelings for Cecilia, a doctor at the same hospital. The two physicians are drawn to one another, yet their mutual attraction, though intense, fails to manifest itself, like a constellation whose lines are yet untraced: their reciprocal wariness causes them to keep their distance. Roberto Ferrucci, in a review in *L'Indice dei libri del mese* writes: "Canobbio spans these lives with a prose style that reads as plain, without sudden jolts, that seems adapted to the rhythm that the characters of the book give their own lives. But this is only how it reads—because in fact a great deal of skill is needed to maintain such a constant pace and, above all, to also bind the reader to the text, using nothing but the pure force of language." The beauty and grace of Canobbio's novel depends heavily on his language: on the "lyrical, patient way he has with words, with metaphor," as my editor put it.

There is also a luminous clarity and precision to this prose, a meticulous quality. A reviewer of *Three Light-Years*, Laura Atie writing in *Doppiozero*, sees Canobbio's writing as "always minute, precise, able to define with extraordinary skill places (a city with a river which seems to allude to Turin) and moods that are never immediately and completely decipherable to the conscious mind." Atie further observes that the clarity of the language "intimately recalls the *petit pan de mur jaune*, the *lumen* reflected in the convex mirror of a Dutch master." The reference to Dutch painting is telling: Proust's "little patch of yellow wall" alludes to an area of Vermeer's painting "View of Delft," while the "*lumen* reflected in the convex mirror" suggests a penchant on the part of the Dutch masters for reflected light, *lumen* or luster, rather than *lux*, the natural light and shadow preferred by Renaissance painters. Indeed there has been much debate about whether or not Vermeer used a kind of camera obscura to capture light and detail in his paintings. Canobbio's reviewer seems to be saying that his style has a lucidity and exactitude that recalls that *lumen*.

With language in the forefront, how can the translator's task be anything but a challenge and a delight?

The delight of savoring the richness and suggestiveness of the author's words with their endless possibilities of meaning and the challenge of making them live, transformed, in another language. To borrow Emily Dickinson's words: "A little overflowing word ... As eloquent appears."

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