



BATH SPA
UNIVERSITY

Final Submission Sheet for Project Portfolio

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PEIRENE

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'A class act'

–Guardian

'The foreign literature specialist'

–The Sunday Times

'Literary cinema for those fatigued by film'

–The TLS



About Peirene (*pie-ree-nee*)

Established in 2008 by novelist and journalist Meike Ziervogel, Peirene Press is a Bath-based independent publishing house celebrated for its commitment to high-quality literary fiction in translation. Originally focused on European novellas, the press has since expanded its scope to include contemporary writing from around the world, embracing literary fiction in all its forms. Peirene is celebrated for introducing English-speaking audiences to bold new voices and fresh perspectives, with a catalogue that consistently garners critical acclaim. Their books frequently receive recognition from major literary and translation awards—including the International Booker Prize—and in 2023, they were awarded the prestigious Dublin Literary Award for Marzahn, Mon Amour by Katja Oskamp, translated by Jo Heinrich. Through its distinctive editorial vision, Peirene continues to champion thought-provoking global narratives and remains a key player in the UK's independent publishing landscape.



WINNER OF THE DUBLIN LITERARY AWARD 2023.

As heard on BBC Radio 4 'Book at Bedtime', August 2022

Shortlisted for The Warwick Prize for Women in Translation and the TA First Translation Prize.

Spiegel bestseller, selected for Berlin Reads One Book 2021. Over 180,000 copies sold worldwide.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

As part of this collaborative publishing research project, my individual focus centred on exploring contemporary Romanian literature for Peirene Press, while my project partner focused on Finnish titles. Together, our aim was to discover compelling, under-represented voices that align with Peirene’s editorial identity—literary works that are emotionally resonant, stylistically distinct, and globally relevant.

Peirene Press is known for its bold commitment to short, powerful fiction in translation. With this in mind, my role involved reading selected titles, identifying trends in Romanian literature, and working closely with James Tookey to understand the press’s unique publishing vision.

The heart of this project lies in bridging cultures through storytelling. By curating a shortlist of Romanian works—each chosen for its emotional depth, narrative innovation, and potential resonance with UK readers—I contributed to Peirene’s mission to amplify international voices and offer their audience stories that linger long after the final page.

Project Aim

To read, evaluate, and short-list Romanian novels and novellas that would make strong candidates for English translation and publication. Selected works were chosen for their emotional depth, cultural resonance, and stylistic clarity—qualities of Peirene’s catalogue.

Core Objective

To identify titles that align with Peirene’s editorial values while offering fresh, original narratives that speak to the press’s loyal subscriber base and the wider UK literary market. The goal was not only to reflect Peirene’s aesthetic, but to find fiction that lingers, challenges, and connects.



THE CONTEXT

Bringing Romanian Literature into the Spotlight: Why Now?

“We are always looking for the next brilliant book that our readers will love, and which might already be making waves months before it reaches the bookshops”

— **Peirene Press**

Peirene Press is a small UK publishing house known for its bold commitment to short, thought-provoking fiction in translation. Since 2008, it has presented significant literary voices, especially from Europe, to English-speaking audiences, and is currently increasing its reach globally. Peirene is most known for its distinctive novellas, but it now also publishes lengthier works that are distinguished by complex, raw emotions and a focus on the human experience. These features have gained it a devoted following among literary subscribers, book clubs, and independent booksellers.

While total fiction sales stagnated, translated titles have showed consistent year-on-year growth (Nielsen, 2023). This trend is being driven by readers' growing need for worldwide perspectives, complex narrative, and cultural diversity (Ladzekpo et al., 2024). Translation is critical for making literary works available to a wider audience and increasing worldwide awareness and appreciation of varied styles of literature (Njonge, 2024).



Romanian literature stands out as a promising, yet underexplored, frontier in this context (Dudău et al., 2025). Despite its post-communist literary vitality and increasing international accolades, Romanian fiction remains largely absent from UK publisher lists. Writers from Romania are producing work that is richly layered—often darkly ironic, politically sensitive, and formally experimental (Drace-Francis et al., 2014). Shaped by a legacy of authoritarianism, a transition into EU modernity, and a hybrid East-West cultural identity, Romanian fiction speaks directly to current global anxieties while offering uniquely personal, localised narratives (Stan, 2025).



This project was launched to identify contemporary Romanian works that align with Peirene's publishing ethos—short, sharp literature with a strong emotional core and cross-cultural significance. It involves the reading, evaluation, and curation of a selection of titles recommended by translators, literary institutions, and cultural bodies such as the Romanian Cultural Institute.

Why now?

Because the market is calling for differentiation. In a saturated literary environment dominated by Anglophone voices and formulaic bestsellers, publishers like Peirene thrive through precision, curation, and risk-taking. Romanian fiction offers a rare and timely opportunity to expand literary horizons and engage readers with bold new narratives.

By introducing these works to the Peirene readership, the goal is to enrich the UK literary landscape, foster cultural dialogue, and bring attention to an overlooked literary tradition that deserves a wider audience. These are not just stories—they are invitations into unfamiliar worlds, told with clarity, courage, and heart.

THE MARKET (1/2)

The Market overview in 2024 for translated fiction in the UK is predicted to grow at a 5.5% annual pace (Vassallo and Wright, 2024). In 2024, the UK translated fiction sector continues to demonstrate potential resilience. According to Nielsen BookScan data, while general fiction sales stagnated, translated fiction has grown year after year, accounting for more than 3.3% of total fiction sales and increasing by 22% in 2022 alone (Nielsen, 2024). This trend shows a growing interest in global perspectives and international narrative. Peirene Press, with its niche focus on translated literature and emotional resonance, is well-positioned in this changing landscape.– Themes such as identity, belonging, and cross-cultural understanding—commonly explored in translated fiction—strongly align with the interests of today’s readers. (Granic et al., 2020).

Key market trends influencing translated fiction include a preference for shorter, high-impact tales, a need for socially relevant topics, and an increase in soft dystopias, climate fiction, romance and feminist coming-of-age stories(Nielsen, 2024; Iryna, 2025). This inspired my own curating process: I looked for Romanian works with empathetic, sensitive tones and layered topics that are consistent with Peirene’s ethos—fiction that is poetic , complex but emotionally accessible.

Competitor analysis highlighted the broader ecosystem of boutique publishers working in this space. Charco Press (Latin American fiction), Fitzcarraldo Editions (philosophical and innovative writing), and Tilted Axis Press (Asian and radical feminist writing) are Peirene’s most relevant peers. Each has established a separate niche, garnering literary credibility and international recognition. Peirene’s distinctive selling point is its brevity-focused curation, with primarily shorter works ideal for single-sitting reading, and its close-knit community of subscribers.

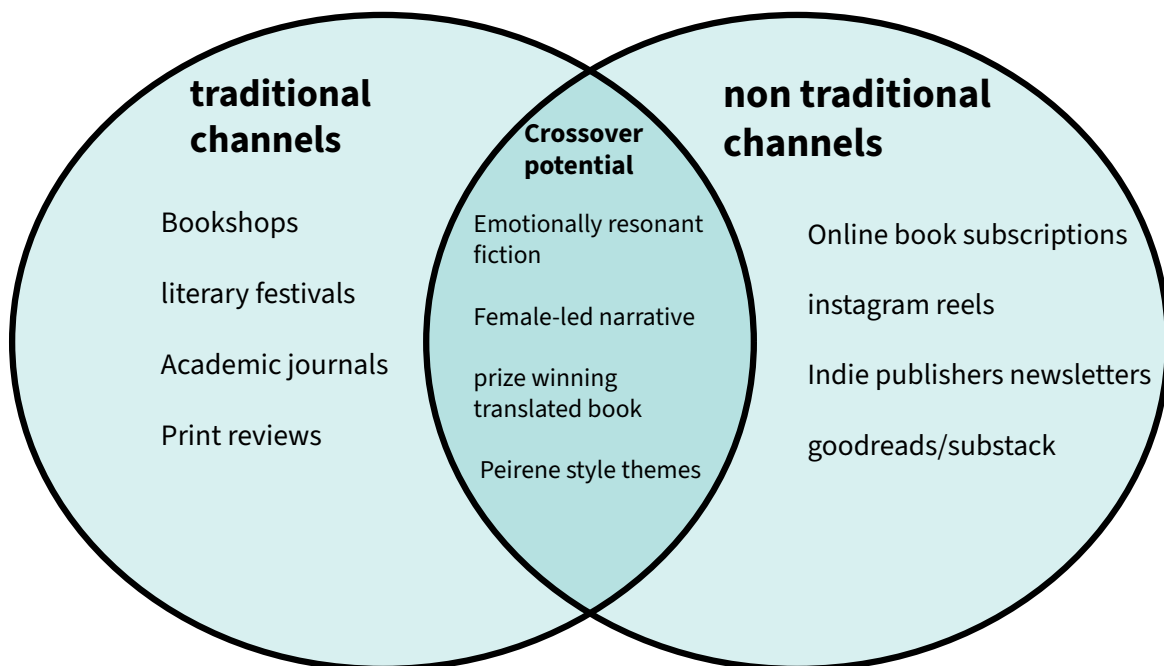
SWOT Analysis of Competitors

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear editorial identities.• Literary prestige and awards visibility.• Small but loyal readerships	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited distribution reach.• Risk of niche appeal limiting market growth.• Dependency on known translator networks.
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rising interest in translated fiction.• New grants and cultural funding (e.g., Romanian Cultural Institute).• Reader interest in diverse, under represented voices.	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Market over saturation in literary fiction.• Financial pressures on small presses.• Shifting reader preferences towards more accessible or hybrid genres.

THE MARKET (2/2)

Recent attention to Eastern European literature—particularly the rising profile of Romanian author Mircea Cărtărescu—has shown that there’s both critical and commercial interest in under-represented literary voices (Mironescu and Mironescu, 2021). This prompted me to reflect on the idea of what it means for a writer or region to be considered “emerging.” Often, it’s not the originality of the work that’s new, but rather the growing willingness of publishers and readers to engage with it (Baverstock and Steinitz, 2019). For Peirene, which thrives on championing the overlooked, this feels like both a timely and natural direction.

Peirene Press serves as a prime example of how translated fiction can move beyond a niche to achieve significant crossover success by strategically leveraging both traditional and non-traditional channels ref. This approach is built on the understanding that traditional avenues primarily engage established literary readers while digital spaces, direct engagement, and community-focused methods, such as Peirene’s subscription platform, effectively reach younger, globally curious, and mainstream audiences (Spjeldnæs and Karlsen, 2024). This dual strategy allows Peirene to effectively position their translated titles to resonate with a wide spectrum of readers, demonstrating how careful selection and multi-channel marketing are key to successfully expanding the market for translated literature ref.



AUDIENCE PROFILES



Maria Militaru, 21

Romanian

Psychology Student

Accidental Publishing Enthusiast

Maria took a psychology degree to understand people—then stumbled into a publishing module and now spends her nights reading esoteric European literature. Every book reminds her of home, even if it's set in post-war Germany.

Maria snaps blurry photos of random shadows, reflections, and wilted flowers. Her Instagram is a moodboard of cryptic messages, leaving her followers thinking: Is this a metaphor? Is she OK? (She is. Mostly.)

She says she likes her coffee black but somehow always ends up with an oat flat white. It pairs better with her Peirene book, anyway.



David Kent, 46

Half Italian, Half English

Architect

Book Club Host

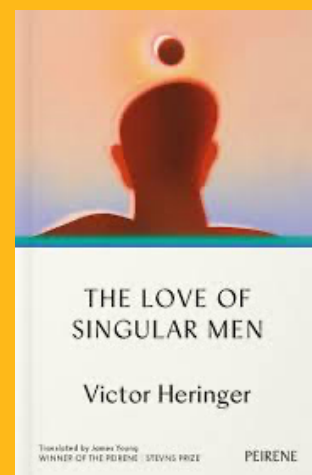
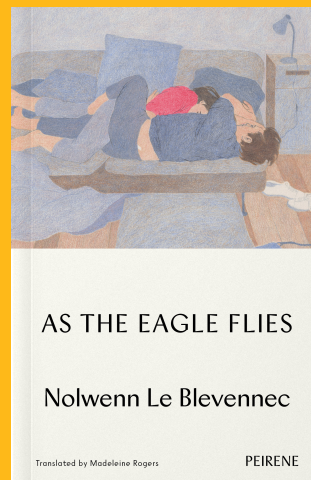
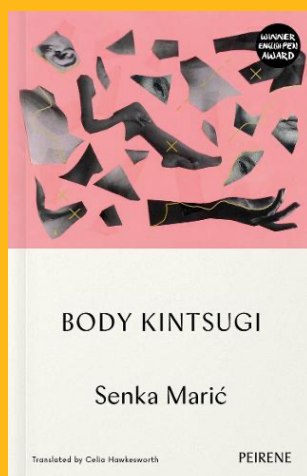
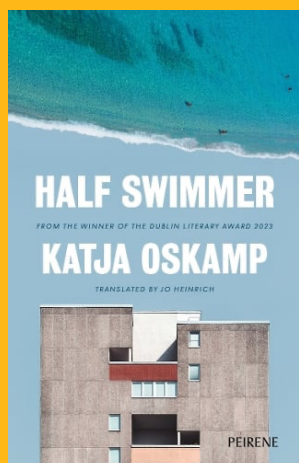
David is a part-time modernist, full-time advocate for “beautiful things done well.” He runs a monthly book club from his converted loft in East London. His reading list is mostly translated fiction, obscure essays, and the occasional poetry collection that “everyone should already know about.”

He discovered Peirene Press through The Mussel Feast, which he originally bought for the cover design. Now, he keeps a row of Peirene novellas on his bookshelf like trophies—small, elegant, devastating. He reads them on train rides to client meetings and annotates in pencil (because ink would be vulgar).

David is a seeker of literary friction. He wants stories that challenge him. On Instagram, he posts minimalist flat-lays of his latest read next to a cortado and a single sprig of rosemary.

THE AUDIENCE

To ensure that my concept resonated with Peirene Press's audience, I started by immersing myself in their catalogue—I became the audience. I read **Body Kintsugi**, **Half a Swimmer**, **As the Eagle Flies**, and **The Love of Singular Men**, all published by Peirene. These publications represented the press's distinct style: strong narrative voices, psychologically daring, and a focus on emotional complexity. From the reflective introspection of *Body Kintsugi* to the grace of *Half a Swimmer*, each piece established a balance between literary innovation and human vulnerability. This reading experience had a direct impact on my selection of Romanian titles, prompting me to seek out works with similar sentimentality, poetic tone, and cultural nuance—stories that appear immersive and emotionally connected to the world they describe.



[Link to book reviews here !](#)

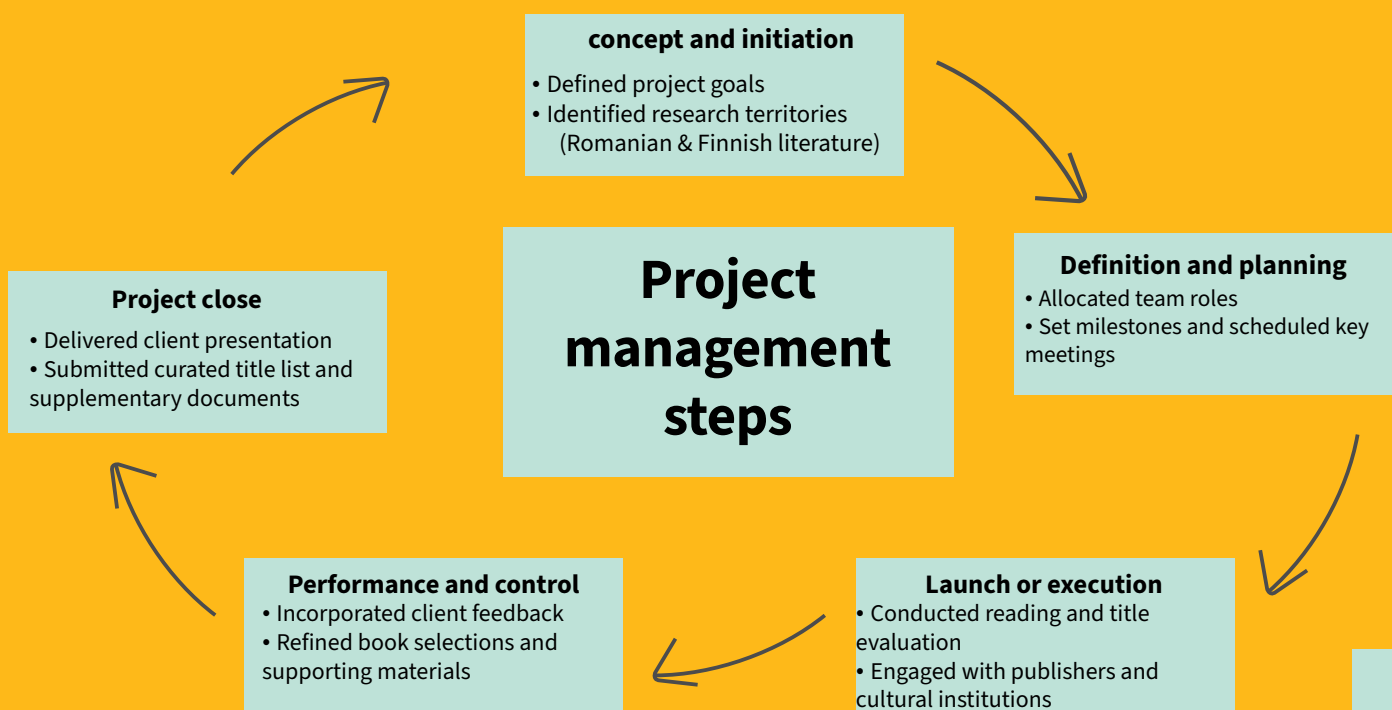
MAKING IT HAPPEN (1/3)

The project followed a structured development cycle, evolving through five key phases: **concept and initiation**, **definition and planning**, **launch or execution**, **performance and control**, and finally, **project close**. From the outset, our aim was clearly defined—to identify a curated list of contemporary literature for Peirene Press, with myself (Maria Militaru) focusing on Romanian titles, and my collaborator Maria E. specialising in Finnish literature.

Responsibility was evenly distributed, with both team members sharing scheduling duties for internal and client-facing sessions. Communication with Peirene’s co-director, James Tookey, and external stakeholders such as the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI), was led by Maria Militaru. Maria E. managed workflow tracking, asset documentation, and contributed in-depth regional knowledge of the Nordic market. Collaborative tools such as Microsoft Teams, Google Sheets, and Adobe Express facilitated remote collaboration and efficient document management.

At the start of the project, I also created a personal research file to log Romanian authors and titles that caught my attention. This working document—compiled through independent reading, publisher catalogues, award shortlists, and translated excerpts—proved invaluable in helping me visualise the emerging literary landscape and understand which works might align with Peirene’s aesthetic. It allowed me to cross-reference stylistic themes, emotional tone, and market relevance early on, long before the shortlist was finalised.

Initial research explored six language areas—Romanian, Finnish, Latvian, Ukrainian, Swedish, and Sámi—and included genres such as autofiction, novellas, and experimental prose. By Week 4, the scope was narrowed in response to early insights and Peirene’s editorial feedback, enabling more in-depth focus and culturally specific analysis.



MAKING IT HAPPEN (2/3)

In addition to client meetings and literary scouting, extensive independent research was conducted to identify critically acclaimed Romanian titles that remain under-translated in English-language markets. This involved a systematic review of key national and European prize lists, including the European Union Prize for Literature, the Romanian Writers' Union Awards, the Observator Cultural Awards, and the Goncourt List: Choice of Romania. These awards served as benchmarks for literary quality and cultural relevance, aligning closely with Peirene's editorial focus on short, emotionally resonant fiction.

To assess rights availability and ensure viable acquisition potential, international translation databases such as LitHub's Translation Database, WorldCat, and Publishers Marketplace were consulted. These platforms enabled cross-checking of translation status and market saturation. In parallel, the rights catalogues of leading Romanian publishers—Humanitas, Polirom, Nemira, and Cartea Românească—were audited to surface fiction by emerging and prize-winning authors whose work had not yet been introduced to English-speaking audiences.

Through this process, Lavinia Braniște emerged as a particularly compelling voice. Her introspective, quietly political narratives resonated strongly with Peirene's values. After reading *Interior Zero* and *Sonia Raises Her Hand*, it became clear that her work—marked by psychological depth, restrained prose, and a distinctly female perspective—would be a natural fit for Peirene's catalogue.

Additionally, Romanian literary journals such as *Observator Cultural*, *Literomania*, and *Revista 22* provided contextual insight into domestic literary trends and critical reception. This further reinforced the credibility and timeliness of the selected authors. Collectively, these research methods ensured that the final shortlist was not only culturally and thematically relevant but also aligned with Peirene's publishing model and strategic growth goals.

MAKING IT HAPPEN (3/3)

Two in-person consultations with Peirene Press were key milestones in the development process, one of which involved a deep-dive editorial session that clarified brand tone, format preferences, and narrative priorities. Further networking at the London Book Fair enabled direct contact with the Romanian Cultural Institute (RCI), resulting in two follow-up meetings. Meetings resulted in a short-list of key titles and confirmed significant RCI funding, covering up to 90% of translation and publication. This financial support strategically addresses a major challenge in translated publishing—the cost and uncertainty of author travel and potential language barriers for events (Tekgül, 2012)—making these Romanian titles highly viable acquisition targets.

Additional outreach to Deep Vellum, the U.S. publisher of FEM by Magda Cârneci, opened dialogue around UK rights. Their Rights Director, Sarah Coolidge, recommended *The Summer My Mother Had Green Eyes* by Tatiana Țîbuleac. Copies were sent directly to both the project lead and Peirene Press, and the title emerged as a strong candidate due to its emotional clarity, literary merit, and unpublished status in the UK market.

The final client presentation, delivered in Week 11, presented three shortlisted Romanian titles and four Finnish titles supported by detailed documentation including author biographies, prize credentials, rights status, and market relevance. Feedback we had received confirmed alignment, with James Tookey indicating *'The Summer My Mother Had Green Eyes'* as a priority read, affirming the value of both the research direction and editorial choices.

While acquisition decisions remain pending, the project concluded with a professional and well-evidenced submission tailored to Peirene's publishing ethos and business model.

Throughout the process, we worked responsively, adapting to tutor and client feedback, and refining our output with careful attention to detail. Though the acquisition process remains ongoing, the project closed with a comprehensive and focused proposal that speaks directly to Peirene's mission and future publishing direction.

THE PROJECT

The **final phase** of the project culminated in a strategic presentation of shortlisted Romanian titles to Peirene Press, aligning with their editorial focus on short, emotionally resonant fiction in translation. My final book recommendations included **Interior Zero** and **Sonia Raises Her Hand** by Lavinia Branîște, and **The Glass Garden** by Tatiana Țîbuleac. Although not featured in the presentation itself, I also separately shared additional materials on **The Summer My Mother Had Green Eyes**—a title previously discussed with James Tookey and later reaffirmed through follow-up correspondence and support from Deep Vellum, its US publisher.

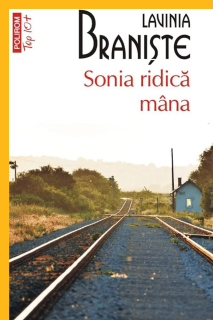
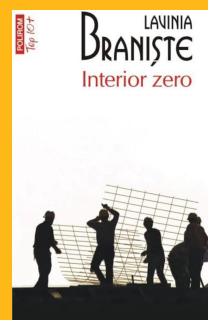
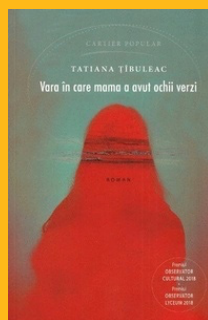
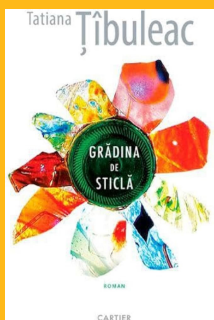
Each of these titles was carefully chosen for their alignment with Peirene’s core themes: strong female perspectives, formal experimentation, and psychological complexity. In particular, Țîbuleac’s novels, which have been translated into 17 languages and widely praised across Europe, offer a blend of lyrical prose and cultural nuance that make them a natural fit for Peirene’s catalogue.

Our final client meeting took place via Microsoft Teams and included a structured presentation covering: Meet the Team, The Brief, Market Research, Audience Strategy, Literary Scene, What Is Being Published, Recommended Titles, and Thank You. The presentation was well received, with James Tookey expressing that the project “was exactly what [he] asked for” .

As a follow-up to our presentation, we sent James a supporting Word document with deeper background on the authors, plot summaries, awards, and contextual market relevance for each book. This allowed him to consider each title from both editorial and commercial perspectives.

The success of this selection process was underpinned by close collaboration with the Romanian Cultural Institute, with whom I held two detailed meetings. Their insight was instrumental in identifying strong emerging voices within the Romanian literary scene. In addition, my outreach to Deep Vellum and independent market research helped refine the list to titles that reflect current micro-trends such as migration, identity, and formal innovation.

Ultimately, the final output reflects a thoughtful and collaborative publishing proposal—one rooted in cultural insight, strong alignment with Peirene’s mission, and a keen eye toward discovering the next impactful voice in translated fiction



DESIGN AND BRANDING

Design choices throughout the project were made with Peirene Press's brand identity firmly in mind. Both the pitch presentation and this portfolio adopted Peirene's signature colour palette of soft yellow, clean white and a pastel mint green reflecting the press's understated, literary aesthetic. The layout was kept minimal and elegant, echoing the tone of Peirene's own covers and digital presence.

For the Pitch Presentation Info graphics and visual book cards were used to present data, plot summaries, and title recommendations in a digestible, stylised format—mirroring the preferences of Peirene's discerning readership and subscriber base. These visuals helped create a cohesive, professional tone while making key information more engaging.

The aim was not just to present findings, but to design a narrative experience that aligned with the values and expectations of the client: quiet impact, clear storytelling, and emotional resonance—visually and verbally.

The logo for Peirene Press, featuring the word "PEIRENE" in a bold, dark blue, serif typeface. The text is centered within a light orange rectangular field, which is itself centered on a larger, solid orange background.

PEIRENE

METRICS OF SUCCESS

The success of this project can be measured through a blend of qualitative feedback, strategic alignment with Peirene Press's publishing goals, and the potential for real-world editorial outcomes.

An immediate indicator of impact was James Tookey's response to our final presentation. His comment that *The Summer My Mother Had Green Eyes* would be his first read underscores direct editorial engagement and signals that the titles short-listed are in close alignment with Peirene's literary direction. This form of client endorsement is a strong success metric in itself.

Depth and quality of research also stand as key performance indicators. The submission included carefully curated reading notes, detailed synopses, author biographies, awards history, and contextual insight from both the Romanian Cultural Institute and US-based Deep Vellum. This helped frame each title not only as a literary proposition but as a commercially considered acquisition.

The project further opened viable rights pathways, a crucial success factor for a small press. Discussions with international publishers and cultural partners included access to translation funding and co-publishing potential, valuable assets when evaluating feasibility for publication.

Internally, the project demonstrated effective time management, adaptability, and a well-coordinated collaborative process. Tasks were delivered to deadline, team roles were fluid but defined, and feedback from the client was fully integrated into the final outputs.

Benchmarking against Peirene's recent success with *Marzahn, Mon Amour*, a short translated novella that went on to win the Dublin Literary Award, highlights the potential trajectory of similarly styled titles. The Romanian books presented, sharing many of the same narrative qualities (Strong female narrative, poetic voice, emotional precision), are positioned for comparable critical and reader resonance.

While long-term success will ultimately be measured by whether any of the shortlisted titles are acquired or published, the project has already delivered tangible value by expanding Peirene's scouting network, spotlighting overlooked voices, and providing a ready-to-activate shortlist that complements their brand identity.

IN SUMMARY

Working on this project has illuminated the intersections between literature, psychology, and cultural exchange. With a background in psychology, exploring the world of translated fiction, especially contemporary Romanian literature offered a fresh perspective through which to understand themes of identity, memory, alienation, and resilience. Titles such as *The Summer My Mother Had Green Eyes* and *Interior Zero* speak not just to narrative craft, but to deeply rooted emotional and psychological truths that transcend borders.

The collaboration with James Tookey at Peirene Press was especially impactful. His clear communication and supportive, relaxed approach created an environment that encouraged creativity and focus. Meetings felt like real conversations rather than formal check-ins, allowing research and editorial ideas to evolve naturally and confidently. His encouragement of bold literary suggestions helped strengthen the strategic direction of the final pitch.

Equally transformative was the opportunity to work with the Romanian Cultural Institute. Through thoughtful discussions and shared expertise, the project provided rare insight into the international publishing ecosystem, how books are scouted, how translation funding works, and how cultural institutions play a role in shaping literary visibility abroad. What began as a course project gradually revealed itself as a professional pathway where personal heritage and academic curiosity align. This publishing course also reconnected me with my Romanian culture by enabling me to engage directly with the Romanian Cultural Institute, leading to meaningful conversations and invitations to more cultural events. It opened the door to a future shaped by both literary passion and a nuanced understanding of the publishing landscape.

Thank you Peirene



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