

Confessions of an Unrepentant Translator: Alice-Catherine Carls Discusses the Practice of Literary Translation and the State of Polish Literature in America

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Wyznania nieskruszonego tłumacza. Alice-Catherine Carls rozmawia o przekładzie literackim i sytuacji literatury polskiej w Ameryce

Abstrakt: Alice-Catherine Carls, tłumaczka między innymi utworów Stuarta Dybka, Charlesa Wrighta, Anny Frajllich, Marilou Awiakty, Zofii Romanowicz, Józefa Wittlina, Wisławy Szymborskiej, Joanny Pollakówny i Jeana Metellusa, omawia zarówno osobiste doświadczenia i poglądy na praktykę przekładu literackiego, jak również komentuje aktualną sytuację literatury polskiej w Ameryce. Carls poddaje refleksji nie tylko metody i tryby pracy przekładowej dotyczące bezpośredniego transferu tekstu źródłowego w wariant docelowy, ale także odnosi się do zagadnień wykorzystania w procesie przekładu języka pośredniczącego, współpracy z autorem oryginału lub innymi tłumaczami oraz wykorzystania wiedzy historyka na potrzeby pracy translatorskiej, uwzględniając również postępujący współcześnie trend do silnej profesjonalizacji działalności tłumaczeniowej, Carls charakteryzuje przekład poezji jako nieuchronne poszukiwanie równowagi między językowymi, kulturowymi, wizualnymi, dźwiękowymi i rytmicznymi wektorami tekstu, gdyż „nie istnieją doskonałe odpowiedzi na pytania, jak bardzo tłumaczenie powinno być tworzeniem wiersza na nowo lub jak bardzo powinno podążać za literą oryginału: jest to zawsze kwestia decyzji dopasowanej do konkretnego przypadku”.

Słowa kluczowe: transfer międzyjęzykowy, przekład poezji, recepcja przekładu, szkolenie tłumacza

Key words: interlinguistic transfer, poetry translation, reception of translation, translator training

Arkadiusz Luboń: *As a translator¹ of poetry, you often experience a thrill of artistic achievement when authors who know the target lan-*

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guage and can compare your translation to their text often tell you that your translation reads better than the original.

Alice-Catherine Carls: There is certainly a thrill of artistic achievement when an author tells me that... I have received such a compliment four times in my life. The first time was for my French translation of Wisława Szymborska's poem *Woda*. The compliment was made by Professor Hanna Dziechcińska who felt that I had captured the spirit, rhythm, and sounds of the poem perfectly. The poet herself agreed in a letter that I have lovingly preserved. That poem was part of a dossier proposed to Actes-Sud in 1988. Actes-Sud having declined to publish the volume, I offered it to another publishing house, but as I was awaiting its decision, Wisława Szymborska won the Nobel Prize. She was advised to grant exclusive translation rights to a single "official" translator. The legal implications of this decision forced the physical destruction of a just-released French edition of selected poems as "unauthorized" – an undeserved and demoralizing punishment that caused quite a stir. The second time, Romanian-French poet, writer, and anthropologist Maria Mailat commented on my French translation of a poem by Pulitzer Prize winner and United States poet laureate Charles Wright. Reading *Opus Posthumous III* in the bilingual edition, Maria, looking at both texts side by side, appreciated that they not only looked, but sounded alike, their images in perfect cadence². The volume, *Les Appalaches/Appalachia* won the 2009 Prix Horace for best translation from the Cénacle européen de Poésie, Arts et Lettres in Paris, France. The third time was a comment from Stuart Dybek, a McArthur Genius Prize winner of Polish descent, about my translation of selected poems of *Streets in Their Own Ink*. Stuart Dybek told me that he almost wished he had written the French version of the poems himself. The fourth time was about my English translation of the "coda" poem of the late Jean Metellus' *When The Pipirite Sings*, an epic poem dedicated to his native Haiti. Metel-

Europe, a literary critic and translator of Polish and American poetry. She has translated into French, among others, Jan Kochanowski, *La Vie qu'il faut choisir* (Paris, France 1992), Józef Wittlin, *Le Sel de la terre* (Paris, France 1999), Anna Frajlich, *Le vent, à nouveau me cherche* (Paris, France 2003, 2012), Aleksander Wat, *Les quatre murs de ma souffrance* (Paris, France 2013), Joanna Pollakówna, *Avare clarté*, pref. Jan Zieliński (Paris 2014). She is a jury member of Cénacle européen de poésie, arts et lettres and serves on several editorial boards and commissions in the United States and abroad.

Arkadiusz Luboń (ORCID: 0000-0002-9539-7973) is assistant professor at the University of Rzeszów. Author of two monographs on translation: *Overcoming Foreignness. Translation in the Poetic Agenda and Literary Output of the New Wave Poets (Przekraczanie obcości Problemy przekładu w programach i twórczości poetów Nowej Fali, Rzeszów 2013)* and *Beyond the Translator's Protocol. Semantic Refractions in Translation Theory and Practice of the „Kontynenty” Poets (Poza protokołem tłumacza. Refrakcje znaczeniowe w teorii i praktyce przekładu poetów kręgu „Kontynentów”, Rzeszów 2019)*.

² Ch. Wright, *Les Appalaches / Appalachia*, transl. A.-C. Carls, Paris: Editinter, 2009.

lus' wife Anne-Marie said that the French original almost sounded like a translation from my English text³. Such compliments are a great morale booster, because I always strive for my translations to be as faithful to the original as possible. When working on these four translations, I felt a state of grace, a brain pause, sheer joy, of having achieved a weightlessness balanced at the crossroads between linguistic, cultural, visual, aural, and rhythmic vectors – the translation perfectly poised vis-à-vis the original text. It is for that feeling that I translate poetry.

A.L.: *Can your translations' success be attributed to any special translation steps such as following the pattern of a theoretical process, or rather, to a unique and unusual affinity with particular source language, images, and thoughts?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: In all my translations I seek that special understanding, that special affinity with a text. I find it not in literary analysis nor in a liking of the text; I achieve it by unlearning limiting patterns of thought and emptying my mind of myself. I don't think that I am different from other translators. Some translations seem to pour out of my brain, ready, such as my translations of the exquisitely crafted poems of Anna Frajlich, or those of Cherokee poet Marilou Awiakta⁴. Other translations require painstaking intellectual effort. I too struggle with the amount of re/creation permissible in translation, although I have now seen enough theories come and go to be philosophical about the whole thing. In my younger days, I was admonished by my translation professors that a good translation starts with "feeling the text." It has taken me a lifetime to allow myself to unlearn their prescriptive patterns and to affirm my own. But my mentors were right about one thing: bonding with the text is essential. It is an intensely personal experience, deeply grounded in one's personal makeup, a word-defying kind of experience. When I relate to a text in this way, I inevitably start translating it in my mind. Then hopefully, with the right permissions and contracts, the translation becomes a published piece, one in which I have been using both sides of my brain, sometimes starting with the creative one, sometimes with the logical-analytical one. The art and the craft, the re/creation and the knowledge, not necessarily in that

³ A.-C. Carls, *Le Nobel à Wisława Szymborska*, seven poems by 1997 Nobel Prize winner, Polish poet Wisława Szymborska, with a translator's introduction („Le Journal des Poètes”, no. 1, January 1997, pp. 10–12. Polish-French); Ch. Wright, *Les Appalaches*, transl. A.-C. Carls, Paris, France: Editinter, 2009; A.-C. Carls, *Five poems by Stuart Dybek: 'La tache', 'Langélu', 'Au croisement', 'Trois nocturnes', 'révélation'* with a translator's presentation of his 2008 McArthur Genius Grant („Le Journal des Poètes”, no. 2, 2008, p. 9); A.-C. Carls, *Transcendence and Exhortation in the Haitian Poetry of Jean Métellus* (June 13, 2009. <https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/blog/book-reviews/transcendence-and-exhortation-haitian-poetry-jean-metellus-alice-catherine-carls>).

⁴ A. Frajlich, *Le vent, à nouveau me cherche / Znów szuka mnie wiatr*, transl. A.-C. Carls, Paris: Editinter, 2003 (2nd printing 2012) ; A.-C. Carls, *La poésie de Awiakta. Recours au Poème* (29 June 2014, <https://www.recoursupoeme.fr/la-poesie-dawiakta/>).

order. There is no perfect recipe for how much “re-creation” a translation should have, or how literal it should be: it is a case-by-case decision.

A. L.: *How do you select texts and authors to translate?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: Most of the time I translate into my native language, French, and I translate mostly from Polish and American English. I have translated from German, but no longer do so for publication purposes. I translated from Latin once – my first book of translation – selected poems by Renaissance giant Jan Kochanowski⁵. I was coaxed into it by the late poet, writer, essayist, and editor Claude-Michel Cluny, under whose guidance I eventually published another book, a selection of poems by Aleksander Wat⁶. How I choose which authors to translate results from a complicated alchemy, part serendipitous encounters, part personal initiative, and part *coup de coeur*, i.e. an instant connection with a particular work that comes as much from the heart as from the brain. I now try my hand at translating poetry from French into English, but always for short passages and with a second reading by a seasoned translator whose native language is English.

A. L.: *In your life you have crossed borders between countries, cultures and languages several times, experienced different education systems, and had an academic career where you teach and publish in an acquired language, English. Moreover, you write, research, and work in two separate fields, history, and languages/literature. In what ways have these experiences influenced your practice of translation?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: I am different from most other translators of Polish literature in that my ancestry is deeply rooted in France, and then I married a Yankee and bolted for the New World. Before that, I took leave from my Sorbonne studies to spend a year-and-a-half in Warsaw as a doctoral student in History. Needless to say, I returned to France a translator. That in itself is a long and wonderful story of many friendships and mentorships. So I became a historian translator and a translator historian. History, casting a sweeping net over the whole of human experience, satisfies my curiosity about the texts I translate, leading to frequent prefaces, introductory essays, and full-fledged literary history essays.⁷ As a historian, I have access to sources in several languages and hopefully write better history. Both fields inform each other and have become inseparable, often leading

⁵ J. Kochanowski, *La Vie qu'il faut choisir*, transl. A.-C. Carls, Paris: Editions De la Différence. Collection Orphée, 1992.

⁶ A. Wat. *Les quatre murs de ma souffrance*, Paris: Editions de la Différence. Collection Orphée, 2013 (preface by Jan Zieliński).

⁷ Two journals to which I contribute frequently have now gathered a link about my essays that can be found online. Carls, A.-C. Recent blogs in „World Literature Today. „ https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/search/results?search_api_views_fulltext=Carls%20blogs.

Carls, A.-C. Recent articles in „Recours au Poème. <https://www.recoursapoeme.fr/?s=Carls+Alice-Catherine>

to lifelong associations with and work on behalf of the writer. Two examples of this are my essays and translations of Zofia Romanowicz and of Józef Wittlin. I met Zofia Romanowicz while finishing my doctoral dissertation (which was in the History of Diplomatic Relations) and started translating her work. Over the years, my translations evolved into book reviews, then full-fledged analyses of her work, the latest in the “Revue de Littérature Comparée”⁸. My association with the work of Józef Wittlin started when Professor Anna Frajlich, whose work I had been translating and reviewing for several years, invited me to write a paper about Wittlin’s association with France for her 1996 Józef Wittlin conference at Columbia University. I jumped at the chance to travel to Maisons-Laffitte, where the bulk of Wittlin’s correspondence with Jerzy Giedroyc was preserved. I was also warmly welcomed by Elizabeth Wittlin-Lipton, the writer’s daughter, who was a great help. The paper I presented was published in the conference’s proceedings⁹. Thereafter, I sought a French publisher for Wittlin’s seminal novel, *Sól ziemi*. Noir sur Blanc published my translation¹⁰ in 2000. My new blog for “World Literature Today” about the multiple translations of *Sól ziemi* has just been published.¹¹ I have been given these great opportunities to do lifelong work on two wonderful novelists and a wonderful poet. Such lasting intellectual friendships are rare.

A. L.: *What is your opinion about the practice of multilingual translators of transferring texts not directly from the original, but via a version rendered in a third language?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: Translating through or with the help of a third language can lead to important discoveries. When I started translating *Sól ziemi* into French in 1999, I had before me the excellent German translation of Izydor Berman, published by Albert de Lange in Amsterdam in 1937, and the French edition of 1939 published by Albin Michel in the translation of Raymond Henry, which was destroyed by the Nazis in June 1940. Having three texts written within the same decade was extremely helpful for the technical military terms. It also made it easier for me to delve more fully into the events of the early part of the twentieth century. Most impor-

⁸ A.-C. Carls, *Zofia Romanowicz: Écrire après Ravensbrück and Entre incarcération et évasion: Les géographies de Zofia Romanowicz*. In: *Zofia Romanowicz, la plus française des écrivains polonaise du X^e siècle*, „Revue de Littérature Comparée” (Paris, France, April-June 2019, No. 370. Pp. 137–150 and 151–167). This is a special issue of the journal dedicated to the first international colloquium of June 2016 on the works of Zofia Romanowicz.

⁹ A.-C. Carls, *Józef Wittlin’s Passage Through France*. In: *Between Lvov, New York, and Ulysses’ Ithaca. Józef Wittlin, Poet, Essayist, Novelist*, ed. by A. Frajlich, Toruń, Poland: Nicolaus Copernicus University Press, 2001 (pp. 157–175).

¹⁰ J. Wittlin, *Le Sel de la terre*, transl. A.-C. Carls, Paris: Noir sur Blanc, 2000.

¹¹ Alice-Catherine Carls, „The Saga of Many Patient Foot Soldiers: Jozef Wittlin’s *Salt of the Earth*.” World Literature Today, November 5, 2019. <https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/blog/book-reviews/saga-many-patient-foot-soldiers-jozef-wittlins-salt-earth-alice-catherine-carls>

tantly, though, I discovered that Izydor Berman was a “dulcimer” translator, while Raymond Henry’s style was more martial, bearing a sober classical imprint. The Appalachian, four-string dulcimer is tuned to modes and must be retuned to adjust to each new melody. It is a deceptively simple, but harmonically rich musical instrument that my friend, Cherokee poet and writer Marilou Awiakta, uses to qualify my French translations of her work – another great compliment. I also used a third language for translating after I met the Japanese poet and artist Shizue Ogawa. At first, I refrained from translating her poems since I do not know Japanese. After getting acquainted with the excellent American English translations penned by her first translator, Donna Tamaki, however, I tried my hand at a few poems and found the work amazingly easy. Was it not in part because I knew her work well? Or because I felt an affinity with it? In any case, I always submitted my translations to Shizue Ogawa, asking questions to get as close to the original meaning as possible¹². This type of translation is possible only with the utmost respect for the original text and the author’s intention, with the translator reining his/her interpretation as much as possible.

A. L.: *As you mentioned, translation of literary work, especially a masterpiece, is almost always a link in the chain of versions already published and those yet to be produced. How do you perceive the role of the translator in the fluctuating context of the reception of literary works?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: Successive translations participate in the oft-unpredictable reception of a work. I used to think of aging translations as straightjackets, but now I see them as witnesses. For almost twenty years, Elizabeth Wittlin Lipton tried to orchestrate a new English translation of *Sól ziemi*. The first one had been published by Sheridan Press in New York in 1941. Translated by Pauline de Chary, the book is still in print, but it is not considered a memorable translation. A new translation was released in 2018, in time for the centenary of the end of World War I. Translated by Patrick John Corness and published by Pushkin Press in Britain, this new version is lively, faithful, and incredibly sensitive to the cultural nuances that make the novel such a rich tapestry of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy prior to World War I. Interest in the book was revived, and several other translations have appeared or are in progress. In early 2019, I received a request from a Dutch editor for a copy of my French translation, which she praised, in order to assist the Dutch translator. So, good or not so good, translations create a cultural palimpsest and add layers of meaning, language, context, and history to the text. Their very quaintness transcends

¹² S. Ogawa, *A Soul at Play. Voices from Three Continents. Une âme qui joue. Voix de Trois Continents*. A CD of selected poems by Japanese poet Shizue Ogawa read in three languages (Japanese, English, French), accompanied by a booklet presenting the poems in the three languages. English translations by Soraya Umekaya and Professor Anna Clark. French translations by Alice-Catherine Carls. Music selected and interpreted by Professor Elaine Harriss. (Produced in Japan, 2018). Also available through <http://shizue-ogawa-poems.net>.

words and makes them interpreters of the target culture, reflections of the spirit of their respective age, and witnesses to the circular nature of literary fashion. The revival of *The Salt of the Earth* owes much to the untiring, loving care and patience of Elizabeth Wittlin Lipton who has been watching over the literary legacy of her father. The same can be said of the revival of interest in the poetry of Aleksander Wat or the novels of Zofia Romanowicz. In both cases, the poets' children took on this responsibility. The translator is merely a link in such a literary journey.

A. L.: *Do you treat consultations with authors, their representatives or other translators as the essential and standard part of translation practice, or just an optional step taken only when necessary?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: I like to work with the poets themselves when possible. Their commentary on a verse can sometimes unlock a meaning, evoke the right word or sound, or explain the full impact of an image. This process is particularly invaluable when the poems are dense and rich of unspoken allusions, as is the case for Charles Wright and D. Nurkse, to cite but them. Our conversations, mostly by email, are my most cherished moments. They create a complete immersion into an author's work without which the translation would not be as well achieved, and the context and subtext might lack razor-sharp definition. The act of translating, which is quintessentially a lonely endeavor, cannot happen without a web of friendly voices surrounding the text. Collaboration is essential here, and it may take manifold ways. The addition of another pair of eyes to sift through one's own idiosyncrasies ranges from simple technical editing to a full-fledged evaluation of translation strategies or linguistic issues. During my work on the beautiful poems of Joanna Pollakówna¹³, I was greatly helped by her husband Wiktor Dłuski, himself an excellent translator. I co-translate rarely, however, for it takes a harmony of attitudes toward poetry and translation. My recent co-translations with Marie Cayol have been a felicitous experience¹⁴. I have also had very interesting exchanges with World Literature Today's Assistant-Director and Editor-in-Chief, who is an excellent translator of French literature and poetry into English, while himself being a poet whom I translated into French.¹⁵

A. L.: *Which of the translation projects undertaken by the new generations of American translators do you consider the most important for the presence of Polish literature in the United States and among English-speaking readers in general?*

¹³ J. Pollakówna, *Avare clarté*, Paris: Editions Editinter, 2014 (preface by Jan Zieliński).

¹⁴ O. Zepeda, *Aligning Our World / Etre au monde*, transl. A.-C. Carls and M. Cayol, illustrations by P. Cayol, Avignon: Archétype à l'orcalquier, 2018; S. Momaday, *Appearances / Apparences*, transl. A.-C. Carls and M. Cayol, illustrations by P. Cayol, Avignon: Archétype à l'orcalquier, 2017.

¹⁵ Carls, A-C. Translations of 18 poems by Daniel Simon, with introduction, in *Le Journal des Poètes*, No. 2, 2019, 31–49.

Alice-Catherine Carls: The world of American translators offers many fascinating developments. Next to the postwar champions of Polish poetry such as Robert Maguire and Magnus Kryński, who co-translated three major collections of Różewicz, Szymborska and Swirszczynska, the next generation saw John and Bogdana Carpenter singlehandedly introduce Zbigniew Herbert to American readers, and Clare Cavanagh become famous for her translations of Wisława Szymborska and Adam Zagajewski. Regina Grol favors female authors and has translated Urszula Koziół and Anna Frajlich. And she published a first anthology¹⁶ of Polish women poets in 1996. Another type of translation has been furnished by acclaimed poets who, like Robert Haas, dedicate themselves to translating Polish poets, in this case Czesław Miłosz. Daniel Bourne attached himself to the Solidarność generation of Bronisław Maj and Tomasz Jastrun. Karen Kovacik devoted her first two major translations to women Polish poets before the just-released *Aperture* by Jacek Dehnel¹⁷. American-educated, Kovacik represents a generation of second or third generation Polish Americans who discovered Polish language and literature in adulthood after receiving degrees in English or, in the case of Karen Kovacik, English and Spanish. Indiana University linguist and Professor of Literature Bill Johnston, the prolific British-born translator of Tomasz Różycki, Wiesław Myśliwski, Andrzej Stasiuk, Jerzy Pilch, Magdalena Tulli, and Julia Fiedorczuk, is another example of this new generation of translators. His rendition of Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* came out in 2018 to great acclaim. This translation seems to fit his definition of the translator's task: "the [metaphor] I feel best captures my own aims in translating is that of performance. I find that I'm looking for the "voice" of the author or narrator much as an actor searches for a character within him- or herself..."¹⁸. This being said, I apologize to all the translators whose names I am not mentioning in this article. There are many excellent British and American translators of Polish literature and the numbers of books translated into English is increasing every year. One only needs to consult the webpage of "Culture.pl" to learn about several of them.¹⁹

A. L.: *Is the situation of translators of Polish literature in America – as far as professional training, language education and book market rules are concerned – significantly different from the one in European countries?*

¹⁶ R. Grol (ed. & transl.), *Ambers Aglow: An Anthology of Polish Women's Poetry, 1981–1995*, Austin, Texas: Host Publications, 1996.

¹⁷ A. Kuciak, *Distant Lands: An Anthology of Poets Who Don't Exist*, transl. K. Kovacik, Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2013; K. Kovacik (ed. & transl.), *Scattering the Dark: An Anthology of Polish Women Poets*, Buffalo: White Pine Press, 2016; J. Dehnel, *Aperture*, Massachusetts: Zephyr Press, 2018.

¹⁸ E. Fishman, *Poetry Review: "Pan Tadeusz: The Last Foray in Lithuania" – A Playful Polish Epic*, "The Arts Fuse" October 17, 2018 (<https://artsfuse.org/174494/poetry-review-pan-tadeusz-the-last-foray-in-lithuania-a-playful-polish-epic>; accessed: August 15, 2019).

¹⁹ Culture.pl publishes a yearly report on the newest translations of Polish literature in English. <https://culture.pl/en/article/polish-books-english-translation-2019>

Alice-Catherine Carls: There are similarities and differences between translators in the United States and Europe. Translators often initiate proposals for the publication of works that they like or whose authors they have befriended, thus becoming a sort of informal agent. Margot Carlier, for example, formed a special relationship with Hanna Krall and her translation²⁰ of *Sublokatorka* appeared in 1998. Starting her translating career in adulthood, the Polish-born Carlier has translated Tadeusz Konwicki, her mentor, Andrzej Stasiuk, Olga Tokarczuk, and Wiesław Myśliwski into French. Isabelle Macor who learned Polish in adult life, has become a leading translator of Polish literature into French. Specializing in poetry, she has translated Ewa Lipska, Krzysztof Siwczyk, Karol Modzelewski, Anna Poświętowska, Tadeusz Różewicz, Justyna Bargielska, Ursula Koziol, and Ryszard Krynicki. The Editions LansKine recently created a new collection called *le domaine polonais* especially for her. In a recent interview, Macor revealed that she inspired a new Polish collection to a French press (which she did not name). As far as training is concerned, ironically, the training of translators lacks definition both in Europe and in North America. It remains eclectic, with translators still coming from all walks of life. Training in linguistics may be a bit more prevalent as the professionalization of translation is increasing. Héléne Włodarczyk, for example, a Russian specialist who learned Polish in adult life, has trained an entire generation of French translators of Polish literature through her numerous studies on semantics and linguistics and her teaching at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Orientales in Paris. But translators' broad training, backgrounds, and experiences, perhaps are just as important, for they save translators from having too technical an approach. "The professional trajectory of a literary translator is rarely conventional," stated ATLAS, the French Association for the Promotion of Literary Translation, adding "The most varied roads lead to this profession which is poised between linguistic craftsmanship and literary creation"²¹. Generally, translators are academics teaching literature or languages. The younger generations seem to have a broader training on issues that perhaps are more timidly considered in Europe. Also different is the professional support offered through translators' workshops and professional translators' associations. The United States is pioneering the inclusion of performance, theater, and lyrics, to name but these, among the traditional literary genres. This liberating yet bewildering breaking of boundaries is caused and compounded by the frenetic pace of the communication revolution and the current deconstructionist approaches to

²⁰ H. Krall, *La Sous-locataire*, transl. M. Carlier, Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 1998. In the early 1990s, Kazimierz Romanowicz of the Editions Libellain Paris took a 6-months translation option on my behalf with the Polish publisher. I had not met Hanna Krall, however, and those were the years when my career was taking a backseat to raising three children. The option lapsed for want of a reply from the author or her publisher.

²¹ *La fabrique des traducteurs / littérature du 22 juillet 2014 au 23 octobre 2014*. <http://www/institutpolonais.fr/objets/scene/2014-la-fabrique-des-traducteurs>

text and discourse. The 2019 conference of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA), for example, is devoted to attending to “the visual, aural, oral, gestural, kinetic, and performative aspects of language and literature that shape translation practice”²². In France, by contrast, the famed Collège International des Traducteurs Littéraires located in Arles has organized since 2010 a “Translators’ Factory” that pairs seasoned translators with French and foreign translators at the beginning of their career, for a series of mentoring workshops that last between two and three weeks. Thus narrowly defined, each workshop focuses on only one foreign language. Polish was the language chosen in 2015.

A. L.: *Which recent changes in our modern – or should I say post-modern – culture do you consider the most challenging for translators?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: Poets who nowadays use multimedia support are changing “poetry evenings” into “performances”. Jacek Dehnel paints, translates, writes poetry and prose, co-writes crime fiction. Marzanna Kielar is closer to music. Words are no longer just containers for meaning. They live in a pluralistic environment that extends from sound to sign language. Thus one should talk about translating an author’s multiple languages, each with its own rationale and rules. What a challenge for the translator who still needs the knowledge and wisdom imparted by traditional training. Bill Johnston addresses these issues by developing new courses on writing and photography, comparing book and movie versions of the same works, and offering a class on linguistics and literature. According to the 2019 ALTA conference, the translator is a performer and a camera, responsible for making heard groups, authors, and cultures that are silenced or do not have the power to be heard on their own. This is where contextual knowledge becomes important, from specific cultural details to reviving forgotten voices. More than anything else, this makes the translator aware that his/her “voice” is but one of many that traverse a text. As Alberto Manguel reminds us, the translator is only a passer among many, a link in the great communication chain in which reading is already interpreting an experience confined to a page into a new experience²³.

A. L.: *Based on your own extensive experience with translation – what advice would you give to new graduates of language, linguistics, or literary studies, and to young translators who are beginning their practice as translators of literature?*

Alice-Catherine Carls: My advice to young translators is to follow their instinct, persevere, adapt, and fully experience the joy of translating. To experience translating as a quintessential labor of love.

²² ALTA42: *Sight and Sound*. Program of the 42nd conference (<https://www.literary-translators.org/conference/alta42-sight-and-sound>; accessed: August 14, 2019).

²³ A. Manguel, *The Library at Night*, New Haven, CT, and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2006, pp. 90–91.

Looking back at my own life experience, I must admit that it has been most unconventional. I have not followed a traditional *cursum honorum*. I prefer small presses to big contracts. I have attended remarkably few translation workshops, learning more from my one-on-one work with the poets whom I translate. Each translation, published or not, is a lifelong friend that gathers a community of like-minded new friends through the years and, sometimes unexpectedly, creates an illuminating synapse. These are not unique experiences. Nor, I am sure, have I had other translation experiences that might have made me into a different translator.

Translating has heightened my sense of the changeability of languages and communication modes, including my native language, which feels oddly alien as I have now spent over half my life in the United States. My daily interactions with at least three languages other than French make me a permanent translator. I live in translation but on the margins of the translating world, on the lookout to rescue great authors from literary purgatory and to see the world anew through young poets' eyes. I favor translating poetry because of the terseness of its language and the added challenge of translating what is unsaid and invisible, yet present in the poem. Translating also encourages me to continue learning; this keeps me alert and away from routine. I wish for my fellow translators to experience the same abundance of joy and excitement. And to keep Polish literature and poetry in translation alive and thriving.

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