



## **ANNUAL REPORT 2018**

**Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators**





## *Introduction*

*In 2018 the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators devotedly promoted international writers and translators' residency and continued facilitating the literary and cultural exchange between the countries around the Baltic sea and beyond. BCWT, pursuing its aim to provide authors and translators an opportunity for intercultural encounters, time and space to write, read, translate, study, conduct research, give readings and become part of the vibrant, contemporary and diverse literary context, served as a work and meeting place for a broad international community of 171 writers and translators from 32 countries.*

*Summarizing with the long-term perspective, since 1993 when the BCWT was founded on the initiative of authors and translators in the Baltic and the Nordic region, 5200 literary professionals from all over the world countries have stayed and worked side by side at BCWT during these years. Estimated in books, at least 4000 titles have been worked with within the centre's walls.*

*BCWT was further developing its international, national and local collaborations and networks and actively sought new forms of cooperation and partners. Highlights of the year were in this regard the cooperation with the Lithuanian Embassy and Culture Institute in Vilnius to prepare and realize Lithuanian -Swedish Translation. And working together with literary scientists at Uppsala, Helsinki and Stockholm university to prepare a symposium on multilingualism in literature in the forthcoming year.*

*The quest to convey the centre's narrative out to the world and intensive work to maintain the centre as an active international cultural actor continued.*

*BCWT continued working on making its operations more visible.*

*Many groups and individuals visited the Centre to get closer acquainted with its activity and work conditions.*

*Through the year a number of Open Houses, literary programs, talks with authors, translator, scientists, politicians, school visits were arranged. Film screenings and concerts, receptions, study visits, mingles and excursions around Gotland were recurrent events.*

*BCWT continued its initiatives for children and young people. Secondary school pupils were visiting the centre to meet authors and translators, to listen to how they started writing, how they work and what they write about, and “breath in” the “bookish” ambience of BCWT.*

*The Centre’s programs often become the first introduction of an authorship to the Swedish audience. It was particularly exciting to arrange talks about ongoing writing and translating project, or a recently published book which to some extent had come to life during a residency at the Centre.*

*BCWT continued to act as a hub of languages and literatures, and a vibrant think tank, catching up on suggestions and ideas and assisting with their implementation.*

*Last but not least BCWT’s landlord – Region Gotland – started renovation of the house!, which has been devotedly serving as a home for literary creation, authors’ and translators’ ongoing workshop, an inspiring international environment and a place for significant meetings and learning.*

## *Background*

*Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators was established on the initiative of writers and translators in the Baltic region and Scandinavia. Centre's core activity is to offer writers and translators a workplace and stimulating environment. With residences as a starting point the centre creates links and networks across national borders and helping to strengthen freedom of expression, dissemination of knowledge and building of bridges between different nationalities and cultures. In the same direction, such as seminars, conferences and literary events the centre organizes, both on its own and in collaboration with national and international organizations. Writers and translators have a majority in the centre's board, which has representatives from both Sweden and other countries. Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators is a forum for international cultural exchange and cooperation.*

## *BCWT is a haven for work and a forum for exchange*

### *“Building bridges and breaking barriers”*

### *Highlights of the year*

BCWT is a work place and meeting point for writers and translators, open for applicants from all over the world, though residency priority is given to literary professionals from the countries in the Baltic Sea region and Scandinavia. The main criteria for being granted a residency at BCWT is the professional character of literary work, t. i. a writer/translator's works have been published through established publishing, either in paper or digital form. An applicant is asked to send a CV, list of publications, description of the project to be worked on.

**During 2018 the BCWT hosted 171 residing guests from 32 countries.** They could devote themselves to a literary project of their own, staying in average 2-5 weeks on a residency bursary, t. i. free of charge, with 24-hours full access to all BCWT's facilities. Furthermore, German Translation Fund, Swedish Writers' Fund, Swedish institute, Estonian Writers' Union, Finland Swedish Writers' Association and others granted a number of individual allocated bursaries, meant for a work term at the BCWT. Most of the residing guests were authors and translators of poetry, prose, plays, screenplays, film scripts, libretto, essays, children books, non-fiction within humanities, though occasionally cultural administrators, publishers and other guests working in the literary field stayed in connection to a shorter project or meetings. BCWT actively facilitated dialogue between residents, as well as visibility of Centre's international activity. The Centre extensively served as a place for readings, Open Houses, film-screenings, meetings, talks, receptions, mingles, dinners and study visits.

Serving and promoting the BCWT as an international meeting place the organization has been investing significant efforts into creating good working environment and welcoming conditions to develop professional and personal contacts and networking. Dinners, tea-hours, combined with talks and presentations of work-in-progress contribute to deeper acquaintance with each other's writing, culture, backgrounds, experiences. To inspire the guests by extraordinary historical and natural richness of the island, to create more opportunities for international dialogue-on-road many excursions in Visby and around

Gotland were arranged for residing guests and participants of the projects. A great number of presentations of the BCWT's activity were done for booked and drop-in study visits to BCWT's premises.

## Writers and translators in residence 2018

	Days		Guests	
Sweden	<b>567</b>	19,72%	52	30,41%
Finland	<b>309</b>	10,75%	17	9,94%
Germany	<b>297</b>	10,33%	13	7,60%
Estonia	<b>198</b>	6,89%	10	5,85%
Poland	<b>144</b>	5,01%	7	4,09%
Latvia	<b>137</b>	4,77%	7	4,09%
Lithuania	<b>131</b>	4,56%	11	6,43%
Russia	<b>113</b>	3,93%	7	4,09%
Belarus	<b>94</b>	3,27%	4	2,34%
Norway	<b>85</b>	2,96%	6	3,51%
France	<b>84</b>	2,92%	4	2,34%
USA	<b>74</b>	2,57%	2	1,17%
China	<b>69</b>	2,40%	4	2,34%
Italy	<b>54</b>	1,88%	2	1,17%
Slovenia	<b>47</b>	1,63%	1	0,58%
Ukraine	<b>45</b>	1,57%	2	1,17%
Greece	<b>43</b>	1,50%	2	1,17%
Syria/Sweden	<b>43</b>	1,50%	1	0,58%
Netherlands	<b>41</b>	1,43%	3	1,75%
Iceland	<b>40</b>	1,39%	2	1,17%
Croatia	<b>35</b>	1,22%	1	0,58%
Denmark	<b>34</b>	1,18%	2	1,17%
Bulgaria	<b>31</b>	1,08%	1	0,58%
Argentina	<b>29</b>	1,01%	1	0,58%
Moldova	<b>29</b>	1,01%	1	0,58%
South Korea	<b>25</b>	0,87%	2	1,17%
Spain	<b>25</b>	0,87%	1	0,58%
Romania	<b>21</b>	0,73%	1	0,58%
Iran/Sweden	<b>16</b>	0,56%	1	0,58%
Israel	<b>12</b>	0,42%	1	0,58%
Georgia	<b>3</b>	0,10%	1	0,58%
Mexico	<b>2</b>	0,07%	1	0,58%

**Days** 2877

**Unique guests** 171

**Countries** 32

Profession		Days	
Writers	103	<b>1811</b>	<b>62,99%</b>
Translators	42	<b>851</b>	<b>29,60%</b>
Other *	26	<b>213</b>	<b>7,41%</b>

\*playwrights, film script,publishers,  
cultural administrators, etc.

Gender			
Female	126	73,68%	
Male	45	26,32%	

## From BCWT's "Logbook":

**21-22 April.** Baltic Writers' Council, representing 21 literary organizations, 12 countries and 17 000 members in the Baltic sea region and beyond had its annual general assembly in cooperation with and at the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators in Visby.

21 April. In connection to the GA the public programme – minifestival of three hours literary talks and readings - "Open House in Visby" took place at BCWT.

Keynote by the Ukrainian poet and translators Halyna Kruk. *"Last trends in contemporary Ukrainian literature: art and human experiences of war"*.

Participated in the readings:

Veronika Kivisilla  
(Estonia)

Henning Brüllhoff  
(Sweden)

Sirpa Kähkönen (Finland)

Egīls Venters (Latvia)

Antanas A. Jonynas  
(Lithuania)

Marius Burokas  
(Lithuania)

Kazimiera Astratovienė  
(Lithuania)

Malin Kivelä (Finland)

Halyna Kruk (Ukraine)



**11 Maj,** Almedalsbiblioteket

*Skuggornas Tystnad*

Poetry and contemporary music

(in German with Swedish translations)

**Duo TonSatz with guests**

Composer's & Writer's Residency-Programme

A cooperation between BCWT Visby International Composers' Centre

**23-25 May.** L.P. travels to Sofia for the RECIT /Network for European Translators Centres/ meeting. A new RECIT member - Bulgarian Next Page Foundation - hosting the meeting as well as creating many possibilities to meet Bulgarian writers and translators

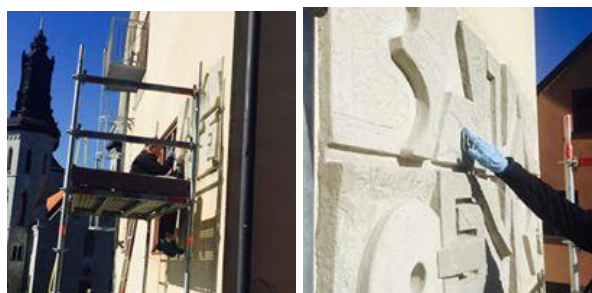
Almedal Week at BCWT

**3 July.** KLYS invites politicians for discussion of **Copyright in the Digital Single Market** and coming EU directive on this issue.

**30 July – 3 August.** BCWT in cooperation with literary science researchers participates in the Nordic Summer University, this year held on Fårö



**September.** The concrete mural relief by Svante Gardek is being restored by the Historical Museum.



**24 – 29 October**

### **Workshop for Translators from Lithuanian into Swedish**

In cooperation with the Lithuanian Embassy in Stockholm and the Culture Institute in Vilnius

The translators Vakarė Smaleckaitė, Viltutė Zarembaitė, Megan Laurencikaite, Virginija Jurgaitytė, Dovilė Gėgžnaitė, Živilė Etevičiūtė under the guidance of Jonas Öhman worked with translation of a novel by Rasa Aškinytė. The publisher and translator Jonas Elleström joined the workshop to edit the translation.

**December.** Major renovation of the House began.

**14 December.** Open House with readings and talks in Christmas Time

## **Grants**

BCWT in cooperation with Belarusian and Swedish Writers Union and with the financial support from Sida hosted four writers from Belarus.

German Translators' Fund awarded bursaries to a number of German translators, and Estonian Writers Union to Estonian writers for a residency at BCWT.

BCWT's chairman Olle Jansson donated, as year before, his chair remuneration of 10000 SEK for a grant which was divided between the Syrian writer Iman Al-Ghafar and the poet from Moldova Angela Nechaeva.

## *How BCWT is being governed and managed*

### *Members and founders*

of the non-profit organization BCWT (Östersjöns författar- och översättarcentrum) are Swedish Writers' Union, Gotland County Administration and Region Gotland. The members appoint three representatives each to the Board of Representatives and nominate Swedish members to the Board of the BCWT.

### *Representatives*

Gotland County: Britt Silfvergren, Hanna Johansson;

Region Gotland: Eleonore Hemström, Annette Glover / Deputies: Bo Björkman, Eva Gahnström, Mats Sundin

Swedish Writers' Union: Lena Karlin, Katarina Kieri, Ing-Britt Björklund

Annual Meeting of the Representatives was held on **8 June**.

### *Board of the BCWT*

is composed of a Chairman and six members and six deputies who are appointed by the Representatives on the annual meeting and the Board internally appoints its Deputy Chairman. Of the Board's six members, two are nominated by the Swedish Writers' Union, two - by the County Administration of Gotland, of whom one represents Uppsala University Campus Gotland, one member is to be nominated by Region Gotland. The Baltic Writers' Council nominate two members representing the foreign Writers' and Translators Unions for a two-year period.

### *Members of the Board*

Olle Jansson, chairman, Campus Gotland Uppsala university

Katarina Krusell, Region Gotland

Thomas N. Persson, Gotland County Administration

Janina Orlov / Stefan Ingvarsson, Swedish Writers' Union.

Baltic Writers' Council:

Yuliya Tsimafoyeva, Belarus Writers' Union;

Mudite Treimane, Latvian Writers Union;

Deputies: Anna Hrdlicka, Region Gotland

Cecilia Hansson, Viveka Sjögren, Swedish Writers' Union  
Baltic Writers' Council:  
Malin Kivelä, Finland's Swedish Writers Association  
Hannu Niklander, Finnish Writers' Union

### *Meetings of the Board*

During the year 2018 the Board held meetings on 22th of January, 8<sup>th</sup> of June and 14 December – all in Visby.

### *Baltic Writers' Council – BWC*

The Baltic Writers' and Translators' Council (BWC) represents 21 literary organizations, 12 countries and approximately 17.000 members around the Baltic region and beyond.

The Council which was founded during the legendary authors and translators' Baltic Sea voyage in 1992 is a multinational, non-profit, non-governmental organization which promotes the freedom of expression, democracy and the free flow of ideas and information between the writers' and translators' organizations. It also aims to support and inspire BCWT activities. The BCWT is the headquarters for BWC, which nominates two members and two deputies to BCWT's Board. The chairperson of Baltic Writers' Council is **Kazimiera Astratoviene** (chair of Lithuanian Translators Organisation)

BWC had its annual General Assembly on 21 - 22 April at BCWT.

### *The Office*

has been open every week-day 8.30 a.m. – 4.30 p.m.

### **Employees:**

Lena Pasternak – director

Patrik Muskos – managing assistant

Amanda Karlsson, Andrea Sevelius, Lina Larsson – household, cleaning, administration

Accountant: Gustav Söderdahl

*BCWT is financed by :*

Swedish Arts Council  
Region Gotland

German Translation Fund, Natur & Kultur, Swedish Institute, Lithuanian Culture Institute  
finacially supported BCWT in connection to projects and residencies.

*In 2018 BCWT, on a daily basis and in connection to projects, cooperated and communicated, with a great number of international, national and local organizations and authorities*

Swedish Arts Council, Swedish Institute, Swedish Writers' Union, Almedalen Library Visby, Übersetzerhaus Looren in Switzerland, Ventspils International Writers nad Translators House, Baltic Writers' Council, County Administration on Gotland, Region Gotland, KLYS, Publishing house *Natur och Kultur*, Baltic Art Center, Visby International Composers Centre, Estonian Writers' Union, Belarus Writers' Association, Campus Gotland Uppsala University, German Translators' Fund, network RECIT – Réseau Européen des Centres Internationaux de Traducteurs littéraires, Anna Lindh Foundation, Network *Kulturskaparna*, Swedish PEN, Film on Gotland, Lithuanian Embassy, The Institute of Culture in Vilnius, researchers at Uppsala, Helsinkin and Stockholm University, Nordic Summer University.

*Thank you from BCWT's Board*

To maintain and develop the activity of BCWT is only possible thanks to support and vital relations with institutions, organizations and private persons in many countries.

Thank you all!

Visby, May 2018

Olle Jansson

Janina Orlov

Katarina Krusell

Stefan Ingvarsson

Thomas Persson

Yuliya Tsimafeyeva

Mudite Treimane

## Interviews with the BCWT residents

### *Cordula Unewisse*

The social life, the exchange of thoughts, the atmosphere of an island, the everywhere present history and the open horizon. These are some of the souvenirs that Cordula Unewisse will bring back home to Bonn in Germany.

– The inner space becomes wider in this place and that has influence on your work, for sure. I think that is the privilege and the advantage of the Centre. Here you have a special setting where you can reflect upon your own work and your identity as a translator, she says.



– Translation is a work and a state of being that makes me happy. Translating is like an expedition that enlarges the world. It also means constantly making decisions, choosing and rejecting words and their possible configuration in sentences, she is telling me about her choice of profession.

When we meet a Thursday in September at the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators in Visby, she will be leaving early next morning. The German translator Cordula Unewisse arrived in Visby in the middle of August and has stayed at the Centre nearly a month. This is her first stay on Gotland, and also her first visit to Sweden.

– I arrived to Visby by the ferryboat. When I came to the Centre at midnight the guests had just had a goodbye party and there were still some people sitting outside welcoming me, she says.

– Next morning when I woke up I saw this amazing view. From my room I can see the cathedral and the sea and that was my first impression of Visby in daylight. I really appreciate this open space and endless view, because that influences the inner space as well, I suppose.

Cordula Unewisse knew of the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators as being a cooperating organization of the German 'Translators' Fund, DÜF. She learnt more about the Centre while staying at a residency in Straelen in Germany, the collegium for European translators, where two colleagues who would stay in Visby for a working residency later that year talked about the Centre. In Berlin, another colleague emphasized how important the residency in Visby was for her latest translation.

– Later, when I had the chance to apply for a working grant from the translator's fund, I first wanted to go to Straelen again, but the house was full. I applied for a working residency in Visby, and now I am so glad that it didn't work with the other residency. The time here has really been enriching in so many ways, she tells me.

During her stay in Visby she has been working with the translation of the French book "Les attentifs" by Marc Mauguin, which is going to be published by the German publishing house Verlag Freies Geistesleben next spring. "Les attentifs" is a collection of twelve short stories, inspired by twelve paintings of the American artist Edward Hopper.

– It is a kind of dialogue between painting and literature. The author has been trying to figure out what stories are hiding behind the paintings, what has happened before he was painting them and what is going to happen after.

Cordula Unewisse studied Romance languages and German Philology and Philosophy at the University of Bonn, and did study visits to France, Italy and Portugal. She has worked as a teacher of German as a foreign language, for DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service, in a research project at the University of Kassel about the culture transfer from France to Germany in the 18th century and has been teaching at the University of Bonn for several years. Since 2005 she has been free lancing as a literary translator and proof reader.

– French was my second foreign language in school, after English. I liked to study languages, but also sciences, and had some difficulties to decide what kind of subjects I would choose at the university, she says and continues:

– At the University of Bonn a teacher in French had a very deep influence on my choice of working career.

She did some translation courses, which weren't obligatory and had no grades, just for practice. Participating in these seminars was essential for the decision to become a translator. She did her first professional translation when she was still a student. Cordula was lucky to have a professor in Philosophy who was also a publisher..

– He asked me to translate a text, which was quite challenging: a book by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, she says.

Since then she has done quite a lot translations of academic articles for art exhibitions catalogues.

– For a long time now I have had the focus on art: history of art but also interpretation of works of art and biographies of artists. When I was a university student I saw a lot of exhibitions. I remember specially the retrospective in Paris of one of my favorite artists Alberto Giacometti.

Paul Cézanne, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Paula Modersohn-Becker and Louise Bourgeois are some other artists whose work she likes and researched in in connection with a translation work. Cordula's latest translation, which she worked with in Charente in France, was a book about the Flemish 14th century painter Jan van Eyck by Jean-Philippe Postel. Art, philosophy and fiction is her field of work and she almost always she translates from French into German.

Here in Visby, she was curious to participate in the local culture life. She visited the historical and the art museum, went to an organ concert in the cathedral and to Almedal library for a concert and a lecture, which a Finnish author translated for her.

– I didn't understand anything, but nevertheless it was a pleasure to listen to the Swedish language. Anyway I had some 'aha!' moments realizing the proximity between the Swedish and the German language.

One of her morning rituals here in Visby was to walk down to the beach and the pier at Norderstrand.

– After a swim in the sea, I was sitting on the beach, doing my meditation and sometimes I tried to write a poem or a little text, just for fun, about this place, she says.

She appreciates the atmosphere of an island.

– I think that it's very rare to have this view from a town: a wide view without any other islands, just the open

horizon. I have seen the ferry boat from my window, leaving and arriving to the harbor, thinking that one day that should be me returning home.

She also likes the Botanical garden, where she has spent some time reading a French author that she would like to translate, Marie-Hélène Lafon.

– She has not yet been translated into German and I have tried to find a publishing house, but until now I haven't find one. I hope I will succeed one day, she says.

During her stay on Gotland she has made excursions, to Fårö in the north and to Hoburgen in the south. For the trip to the island of Fårö a group of four women rented a car: Cordula, a Chinese novel writer, an American poet and a Finnish writer. On their way up north they visited some medieval churches. On Fårö they drove along the west coast covered with sea stacks, characteristic stones on Gotland called "raukar" in Swedish, stopped here and there, walking, talking.

– We have the whole collection of Ingmar Bergman's films here at the Centre and we saw "Persona" before the trip to Fårö, the place where it was shot. We were looking for the beach in the film, but unfortunately we got lost in the forest and didn't find it, she says smiling.

– For me it was a new impression, I didn't know this sort of landscape before, this kind of severe nature. This is a place where you can make decisions or see things more clearly. A kind of serenity in the landscape.

As a break from the translation work at the Centre she has been walking in cobble stone streets.

– I am impressed by the diversity of architecture. Before coming here I didn't know about the German history of Visby, and that the Hanseatic League was very important for the growth of the city.

She also has been walking along the seaside and this very day has done a biking tour to Fridhem, the former summer residence of the princess Eugénie, some kilometers south of Visby. There she finally found fossils at the pebble beach, and enjoyed the calm atmosphere of the early autumn.

– I have been moving to the countryside after many years in the city of Bonn. It is quite isolated, there is no urban setting, so I really appreciate it here – a small town life. You get to know everybody quite quickly at the Centre, because you spend quite some time together. You have the kitchen where you usually meet people preparing their meals, some of us spontaneously organize a movie night in Centre's "Cinema Baltica" or meet for other shared activities, she says.

During her stay at the Centre the guests have organized poetry evenings, reading to each other. Cordula Unewisse chose the poem "You're here, still" by Rose Ausländer, with the final words: "Be what you are/Give what you have".

– Here at the Centre you have the opportunity and the space to be what you are and give what you have. I think it's an important part of staying here: the exchange of our different work and culture, the talks about writing, creativity, language and literature.

**Text and photo: Maria Molin**



## *Selma Ancira*

The Mexican/Spanish translator Selma Ancira first learnt about the Baltic Centre in Visby from colleagues she met at the Translation House Looren in Switzerland. She applied, and was accepted for a three-week residency last spring.

– I had never been to Sweden before and I must confess that I fell deeply in love both with Stockholm and with Gotland. This is a magical island! My stay at the Baltic Centre hadn't even finished yet, when I was already feeling nostalgic for this place and wanting to come back.



Let us start with her first name. Selma Ancira's father, who was a Mexican actor and a devoted reader, was very fond of the novels of the Swedish writer and Nobel laureate, Selma Lagerlöf.

– When I was born, in 1956, my parents decided that my name should be Selma, because they both loved the writer. My name was a wonderful present from my parents.

We are sitting in the library of the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators, the day before Selma will return to Barcelona. This is her second residency at the Centre and she has been here almost a month. It is February and the cobblestone streets are covered with snow and ice.

– To come to Sweden as a translator, to discover this gorgeous island, has been for me a wonderful experience. Somehow, she says, maybe because of my name – I always knew where it came from – I am very fond of Sweden. Every morning, when I open my eyes and see the cathedral, the rooftops, the sea, I feel so grateful. It's so beautiful! This quiet and peaceful place offers golden conditions for work. We work surrounded by beauty! Can you imagine anything better?

Every day in Visby, regardless of the weather, she walks along the seafront, and in the forest and the historical town. She is a keen photographer.

– I enjoy going for long walks with my camera. Translating, walking and taking photos is my entire life here. And after a day with Tolstoy and the sea, or Tolstoy and the forest, meeting my colleagues in the dining room is incredibly enriching. I have learnt a lot from other writers and translators in the house. It's a climate of friendship and creativity.



She is now translating Leo Tolstoy's two-volume book of aphorisms, "The Path of Life", from Russian into Spanish.

– It's a philosophical book of more than 500 pages. It has never been translated into Spanish before. When I arrived here in January, I thought I would be able to translate half of the first volume and, guess what? Yesterday I finished the draft of the whole first volume! It's incredible how much you are able to do here.

In the 1970s, when Selma finished school in Mexico, she moved to Russia (Soviet Union at that time), to study at the State University of Moscow, focusing particularly on the work of the great writers of the 19th century. As her father was a theatre actor, very much in love with Russian literature, she had grown up with Chekhov's plays, Gogol's stories and Dostoevsky's novels.

– I think that was the reason why I decided to go to Russia. It was somehow a logical consequence of the education I had received. I applied for a grant and got it. I spent nine years in Moscow: one year to learn Russian, five years at the University, studying Russian literature and language, and then three years for the PhD (Doctor of Philosophy). She continues:

– It was difficult in many aspects. I was very much attached to my family, and for the first time I found myself far from home. The climate was extremely different from what I was used to. When I arrived in Moscow, I didn't know a word of Russian, so at the beginning it was kind of complicated. But still it remains as one of the most powerful experiences of my life. It taught me a lot. Not only a new language.

At that time Selma played the quena, the traditional flute of the Andes, in a folk music ensemble with other students from Latin America. They travelled to different cities of the Soviet Union, playing their music. That also, she says, was an unforgettable experience.

For many years she thought that after finishing her studies, she would devote her life to teaching Russian literature and language. But something happened to change her plans. She read a book containing the letters that three poets, Rainer Maria Rilke, Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetayeva, wrote to each other during the summer of 1926.

– I started reading those letters and suddenly I felt that I needed to translate that book. I had to share with my people the treasure I was discovering.

"Letters Summer 1926" became the first book that Selma Ancira translated, at the age of twenty-three, with the support of Evgeni Pasternak, the son of the poet.

– That's how it all started. And from that moment on, I have devoted my life to translation. I think it is my mission in life.

During her last year in Moscow she started learning Greek, the language she wanted so much to learn ever since as a child she got a postcard from Athens while her parents were traveling in Europe. The image of the temple of Parthenon on Acropolis stayed with her and she promised herself that she would visit that beautiful place one day.

– In Mexico, she tells me, parents traditionally give a great feast for their daughters when they turn fifteen. I asked my parents to take me to Greece instead, and so they did! We all travelled to Greece. The nature, the culture, the sound of the language, the bewitching sea, the ancient world with all its beauty fascinated me.

The summer of 1982, she went to Mexico to work as a Russian interpreter at the theatre and music Festival Cervantino. During the festival she was given the opportunity to spend time with the Greek troupe and try to learn more of the language.

– The last day when we were having breakfast together at the hotel, a representative from the Greek ministry of culture offered some presents to different people who had worked with the troupe. I couldn't believe it when I heard my name. I was offered a grant for one year at the University of Athens to study Greek language and literature. He said: "During these days we could see how much Greek language means for Selma and we want to encourage her".

Since then, Selma has translated more than a hundred titles from Russian and Greek into Spanish. She has received prizes for her work, including the "National Translation Prize" in Spain, the "Pushkin medal" in Russia and the "Tomás Segovia" award for literary translation in Mexico. She was recently honoured by the prestigious "Read

Russia” award for her anthology “A Whimsical Landscape of Russian Literature” published by Fondo de Cultura Economica in Mexico.

– I am very lucky, she says, because I have been able to translate mainly the books that I like, the plays that I choose and the authors that I am very fond of. Those with whom my soul feels deep empathy.

– For me it’s very important to get to know an author really well, and to let him or her become part of myself. That’s why most of the time I translate the same writers.

She laughs.

– In my literary biography there are few authors, but lots of books.

In 1988 she moved to Barcelona. Since then, she has been working for publishing houses in both Spain and Mexico. Selma Ancira is fascinated by traveling. She makes a point of visiting the places her authors write about. She says that it’s very important to know the spots that she will describe in her mother tongue.

– I’ll give you an example. In “Loxandra”, Maria Iordanidou writes about daily life in Constantinople, today Istanbul, at the beginning of the 20th century. How could I report a dish if I don’t know how it tastes? How could I describe the colours and smells of a city that I haven’t visited? I really needed to go to Turkey and see for myself the places that she describes in the book. In my opinion, my own experience enriches the translation a lot.

Among her most stunning experiences was translating Nikos Kazantzakis’ masterpiece “Zorba the Greek”, a book that brought her to the island of Crete and to the peninsula of Peloponnese.

– I really enjoyed that translation, although it was very hard work. Kazantzakis is a very difficult author. Among the difficulties I had when translating the book was to find the words that have already disappeared from the Greek language. I travelled to Crete, met old people and asked them about the meaning of words that were never in dictionaries, because they were only used in that particular part of the island. To find these lost words was an amazing experience.

Selma Ancira’s photographs have been shown in exhibitions around the world. Her latest exhibition, “The Sea is a Dream”, was selected to officially open the new Hall of Contemporary Art in the State Museum of Fine Arts in Tatarstan, Russia, in 2016. Wherever she travels, she always takes her camera with her. Sometimes her photos have become the covers of the books she has translated. One day she hopes to exhibit her pictures from Gotland.

– Photography is a passion for me, to catch and preserve a moment of beauty. Translation is also a passion. And I could say the same about traveling... I guess it’s the way I have to be in this world.

**Interviews: text and photo by Maria Molin**





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*and* TRANSLATORS