

Interview with Hal H. Rennert, Editor-in-Chief of *Delos* 2015–2021

Sylvie Blum-Reid

SBR: *How did you become the Delos editor? How did you run into Delos?*

HHR: This may seem very odd from today's view of things. In the 1990s Physics professor, Vice Provost for Research and somehow publisher and—in his spare time—editor of *Delos* Harold P. Hanson had inherited the journal from the University of Maryland. At the University of Florida, Harold approached me, along with fellow faculty members in foreign languages, for contributions to *Delos*. I contributed a translation of a short story by Marie Luise Kaschnitz, and then in 1997 I guest-edited the annual issue of *Delos* with focus on source texts in German. I continued assisting Harold with proof-reading until his final issue of *Delos* in 2003.¹

Living in the same neighborhood as Harold in Gainesville, I was aware that he was increasingly frail. Harold's daughter and caretaker persuaded me to take ownership of *Delos*. She and Harold handed over past issues and correspondence, as well as the original art work by UF art professor Hiram Williams, in April 2015. Harold died in Gainesville in April 2016; I dedicated my first issue of *Delos*, in August 2016 (#31), in his memory.

Harold's translation language was Norwegian. His book-length translation of Sigrid Undset's 1910 poem cycle, *Ungdom, Youth* (2010), was part of his *Delos* project and was well-received as a centenary tribute to the Nobel-Prize-winning writer. A copy of this book is now part of the *Delos* archive in room 370 Dauer Hall at the University of Florida.

Noteworthy for historical reasons is the very founding of *Delos* with translation luminaries such as George Steiner and William

1 This issue was officially *Delos*, ser. 2, XII.1–2, for Summer–Winter 1999, but published in July 2003. It also had a sequential number, #29–30, indicating how many issues had been published in the second series.

Arrowsmith at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, in 1968. The project drew on a gigantic \$500,000 grant from the Ford Foundation. At the time Harold, coincidentally, happened to be chairing the physics department at UT, but without any tangible connection to *Delos* whatsoever—merely, no doubt, at the time, as an interested observer!

SBR: *What made you decide to acquire Delos and continue the journal? How long did it take you to develop the first issue, #31 in 2016, and find board members and solicit submissions?*

HHR: It didn't take much art-of-persuasion for Harold's daughter, Beverly Hanson-Herbert, to talk me into taking over ownership of *Delos* in April 2015. I immediately saw the connection between the graduate seminar in translation, part of the curriculum in Comparative Literature at the University of Washington I was taking in 1969, taught by Professor Frank Jones (well known for his publication of his translation of Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*). Simply put, the Frank Jones model was: any graduate student working on a source text translation in any national language—French, German, Korean, Chinese, Russian—what have you—could enroll in the translation seminar with the professor teaching, advising, sometimes even rewriting the target text translation project in idiomatic publishable American English! I, as editor-in-chief, could do the same thing as Frank Jones did with submissions from anyone and anywhere in the world to *Delos*! And the rest is history, so to speak. Well, not quite. I should mention that as a PhD candidate I supported myself as a teaching assistant teaching English composition at the UW. In other words, I had a pretty good command of written American English, besides being a native speaker/reader of German.

It took me the rest of 2015—while, as usual, spending my summer at the German Literature Archive in Marbach, Germany—contacting previous contributors of *Delos* with pleas for help and submissions for the revival of *Delos* after a thirteen-year hiatus. All of this initial contacting (Cynthia Chennault, Diane Arnson Svarlien, Stephen Rojcewicz et al.) I did via the Internet. Back on the UF campus in late 2015 I was successful and grateful to have younger colleagues (UF-based Sidney Wade, Charles Perrone, Dror Abend David, Alexander Burak, Ben Hebblethwaite) join *Delos* as members of the Editorial Board and, in the case of Sasha Burak, even in the

executive position of Review Editor. The most experienced of the UF-based colleagues was Elizabeth Lowe, as past director of the translation program within the UF Center of Latin American Studies (her own specialty is Portuguese): after leaving UF, she had achieved national prominence at the University of Illinois and at NYU, all along physically being located in Gainesville. It was her and Ben Hebblethwaite's close connection to the University Press of Florida (UPF), which contributed to the Press's takeover of *Delos* in 2017—clearly a major step forward in the national and international profile of *Delos*. Most important to that step turning into a leap forward as it were, was Judy Shoaf with her decades-long experience in translation from Medieval French as well as her editing and scholarship on the journal *Exemplaria*; she joined *Delos* as Managing Editor and Co-Editor in 2017.

Special recognition among those former contributors under the late Harold Hanson era should go to Stephen Rojcewicz an essential contributor from his expertise in ancient Greek and classical Latin. I never get tired of repeating, *Delos* without the translations and re-translations from ancient Greek and classical Latin is incomplete! Jumping all the way to current spring of 2021, I am delighted to note that Victoria Pagán is the contact person in UF Classics for the new tri-departmental certificate of translation.

SBR: *Did you have a favorite piece that Delos has published in the past five years, or a moment as editor that was particularly satisfying?*

HHR: My favorite piece is actually the entire issue guest-edited by Ralf Remshardt. Its special theme was Performance. True, the fact that part of Ralf's expertise is in German Studies made his guest editorship additionally attractive, but much much more important is Ralf's scholarship, directorship in drama, stage-production, and theater in the UF College of Fine Arts. Almost all English departments and foreign language/literature departments located in the separate College of Liberal Arts & Sciences in this country are afflicted with an Achilles heel: In their teaching and research of drama and plays they neglect the live performances of university-campus theater stage productions. Ralf Remshardt's guest-edited *Delos* issue (vol. 35, no. 1, Spring 2020) filled an important gap, the neglected branch of literature in translation written for the stage.

SBR: *Can you recall a specific event/moment in your classroom or conference papers, when you worked with a significant and specific work of translation?*

HHR: In the last thirty years of my teaching in German Studies, I almost never had occasion to include analysis of translation, because, in line with prevalent pedagogical practice, teaching concentrates on language acquisition and literary analysis using such methodologies as the so-called communicative method. Therefore, translation is a no-no! After all, you cannot teach students to speak a foreign language by using translations and analysis of translations! But in my research, publications, and conference presentations I did deal with some key examples of translations, including with one of the great classics, Goethe's *Faust*, which I have had occasion to teach in the original German as well as in English translation. On the basis of my reading and interpretation of Goethe's use of the Lutheran translation of the Book of Job in the Bible for a passage in "The Prologue in Heaven" of *Faust*, I have come to make the outrageous claim that if Goethe would have been born in England and therefore grown up with the so-called King James version of the Bible, the famous wager in *Faust* would not have happened and therefore the work *Faust* would not have been written! My claim is based on a small but essential embellishment in the Book of Job by Luther that does not exist in the King James version. In German it is the expression by Satan/Mephistopheles "Was gilt's" ("What is the validity?" or "What is the bet?"). The bet, of course, is whether Job or his incarnation Faust will ultimately align himself with the forces of evil or the forces of good. For the limited context of this interview, I cannot here and now go into further detail; suffice it to say that translators acquire the marvelous additional skill of translation as interpretation as a by-product of an additional deep knowledge through the command of another language.

SBR: *If today you were the chair of a foreign language department at an American university, what would be a change you would make in regard to the teaching and research of translation?*

HHR: As you know, teaching and research of translation in foreign language departments in this country is minimal or non-existent. And yet it is painfully obvious, publishable literary translation requires

an exquisite command of a foreign language and culture. Thus, I would include *translation ability* as part of the curriculum and as an option in requisite skills of college graduates in foreign languages, initially on the graduate studies or post B.A. level. This would mean that the job descriptions in the hiring of at least some new faculty should specify, in addition to “native or near-native ability” in whatever foreign language is to be taught and researched, “native or near-native ability in English.” In other words, foreign-language teachers who are designated or tasked with the extra responsibility of teaching translation should have a command of idiomatic, publishable grasp of English. By the way, although born in Germany but having maintained a nearly perfect command of German, I claim to have native ability in American English. I am as bilingual as Henry A. Kissinger—perhaps even more so!

SBR: *Is there any aspect of Delos that you feel has not been covered or touched upon that you would like to bring up?*

HHR: Yes, there is. One of your specialties, Professor Blum, is French and European film, and undoubtedly films and film scripts are often based on literary masterpieces—not to mention those pesky translated subtitles of foreign-language films. How about doing a guest-edited issue of *Delos* based entirely on the role of translation and literary works for films!? I had hoped that in his guest-edited issue of *Performance*, Ralf Remshardt would include films, but translations of plays for the theatre are a vast area in itself. *Delos* is fortunate, however, to have currently another film-literature-translation scholar, Dror Abend-David, a member of the Editorial Board. He has researched the film versions of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* in Hebrew, Yiddish, and German. No doubt he would make a fine collaborator.

One of my very first publications after coming to UF in 1979 was a short article: “Transformations: Thoughts Regarding Film Title Translations,” in *POST SCRIPT: Essays in Film and the Humanities*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 1981), pages 33–35.

Another possible future *Delos* issue might focus on translations of works in international science fiction.

