

JAN RYBICKI

---

# THE TRANSLATOR'S WIFE'S TRACES: ALMA CARDELL CURTIN AND JEREMIAH CURTIN

---

**Abstract:** Jeremiah Curtin translated most works by Poland's first literary Nobel Prize winner, Henryk Sienkiewicz. He was helped in this life-long task by his wife Alma Cardell Curtin. It was Alma who, after her husband's death, produced the lengthy *Memoirs* she steadfastly ascribed to her husband for his, rather than hers, greater glory. This paper investigates the possible textual influences Alma might have had on other works by her husband, including his travelogues, ethnographic and mythological studies, and the translations themselves. Lacking traditional authorial evidence, this study relies on stylometric methods comparing most frequent word usage by means of cluster analysis of z-scores. There is much in this statistics-based authorial attribution to show how Alma Cardell Curtin affected at least two other original works of her husband and, possibly, at least two of his translations as well.

**Keywords:** Sienkiewicz, Cardell, Curtin, stylometry, authorship attribution, multivariate analysis, cluster analysis, Delta

## The Problem

The paradox of the reception of Henryk Sienkiewicz, Poland's first literary Nobel Prize winner (1905), in the English-speaking world consists neither in the fact that he “never saw a penny” from most of his foreign publishers (Mikoś 1994: 133), nor in his greater popularity in the distant United States than in the United Kingdom. What is strangest about his popularity is that he owed it to the very mediocre if very numerous translations by Jeremiah Curtin (1835–1906), diplomat, lumber trader, ethnographer,

globetrotter, polyglot and generally a very ubiquitous man.<sup>1</sup> Born in Detroit as a son of Irish (hence, obviously, Catholic) immigrants, he grew up on his family's farm at Greenfield (now part of Milwaukee, WI). He studied in a much less Catholic way at Harvard, devoting most of his interest to learning languages one after another, especially Russian, and graduated to join the American embassy in St. Petersburg as Secretary (1864). His knowledge of the tongue of the Tolstoys made him highly popular in the aristocratic and administrative circles of the capital of the Russian Empire, but it was this popularity that might have been the reason for his conflict with Ambassador Cassius Clay, which in turn destroyed the young man's diplomatic career (1869). Curtin then tried to capitalize on his Russian contacts in business; worked as a translator; lectured on Russia in the US. In 1872 he accompanied Great Prince Alexei, the son of Tsar Alexander II, on the goodwill mission to America. He met Alma Cardell in the same year; they married within six months.

Alma Cardell was born in Warren, VT, on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1847, in a much more middle-class family. Her father James was a merchant, city councillor and member of the state's House of Representatives. Her mother, Mary Miranda, sent her to study at the renowned Barre Academy. Before her marriage, Alma worked as a teacher in a Soldiers' Orphans' Home in Madison in her future husband's home state (Collins 2008). Sienkiewicz, a harsh judge of women in general and of American women in particular ("In many respects, American women are inferior to their European sisters (...). American women dress most ostentatiously, [with] little taste but much display. (...) They are such bold, provocative coquettes that truly the roles of the sexes have been reversed and here the woman is the aggressor. (...) The rumours circulating in Europe about the education of American women are much exaggerated." Sienkiewicz 1959: 26), would have been pleased: "women teachers in the United States perform a real mission" (Sienkiewicz 1959: 49).

When Alma became Mrs Curtin, she immediately discontinued her "mission" and since then accompanied her husband in almost all of his travels and ventures. Ostensibly brought up as a typical 19<sup>th</sup>-century "Angel in the House," she had to make do without the house, living in hotels all over the world or with her family during the Curtins' ever-shorter stays

---

<sup>1</sup> I have written more extensively on Curtin in "Sienkiewicz po angielsku" (Sienkiewicz in English) *Przekładaniec* 15 (2/2005) 101–126.

in their country. She acquired her bit of real estate only on her peripatetic husband's death. They first travelled together to the Caucasus, where Jeremiah tried his hand in the lumber trade. The Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) broke out; unlike Wokulski, the protagonist of Bolesław Prus's novel *The Doll* (1889), Curtin failed to make his fortune there and, running out of options, he returned to America, where he eventually found a job as ethnographer at the Smithsonian (1883). Alma Curtin participated in her husband's studies on Native American languages, first on the East Coast and then in California. She helped him collect his material and edited his notes. She performed the function of her husband's amanuensis not only until his death, but also until her own. Naturally, she also played a similar part in her husband's work on translations: Sienkiewicz (most novels, novellas and short stories), Orzeszkowa (*The Argonauts*, 1901), Prus (*The Pharaoh*, 1902), Józef Potocki (*Hunting Sport in Somaliland*, 1900), Gogol (*Taras Bulba*, 1888), Zagoskin (*Tales of Three Centuries*, 1891) and Alexei Tolstoy (*Prince Serebryani*, 1892), as well as on his ethnographic studies: "Indian" (*Creation Myths of Primitive America in Relation to the Religious History and Mental Development of Mankind*, 1898; *Myths of the Modocs*, 1912), "Irish" (*Myths and Folk-lore of Ireland*, 1890; *Hero-Tales of Ireland*, 1894; *Tales of the Fairies and of the Ghost World, Collected from Oral Tradition in South-west Munster*, 1895) and "Slavic" (*Myths and Folk-tales of the Russians, Western Slavs, and Magyars*, 1890). She went on to publish three "Mongolian" items after Jeremiah's death: *The Mongols: A History* (1908), *The Mongols in Russia* (1908), *A Journey in Southern Siberia: The Mongols, Their Religion, and Their Myths* (1909). She also reedited the material her husband had gathered among the Seneca (*Seneca Indian Myths*, 1923), previously published by J.N.B. Hewitt as *Seneca Fiction, Legends, and Myths* (1918). And while Curtin's translations were a much greater success (above all, in financial terms) than his own studies, some of the latter went into several editions and one book, *The Mongols: A History* (with a foreword by the author's friend, Theodore Roosevelt), was even translated into Japanese.

*The Memoirs of Jeremiah Curtin* (1940), published after the death of Alma Cardell Curtin, is the most important source of information about Sienkiewicz's translator – important yet controversial. As has been shown by Michał Jacek Mikoś, the chief authority on the subject, Curtin's widow is the true author. The professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison has proved that virtually all of Curtin's alleged diary is in fact a collection of

fragments – “somewhat elaborated upon” – of her own diaries and letters to her family, recovered much later from the collection of the Milwaukee County Historical Society (Mikoś 1991). Interestingly, Alma’s diaries and letters have been published so far only in Polish, in a splendid annotated selection *W pogoni za Sienkiewiczem* (Chasing Sienkiewicz, Mikoś 1994). The authorship attribution performed by Mikoś is beyond doubt, based on contrastive study of both texts in manuscript.

Mikoś illustrates his attributions with corresponding fragments from *The Memoirs* and from Alma Curtin’s diary. *The Memoirs* (599–600) tells the following story:

My first copy of *Quo Vadis* came Nov. 3rd, a week earlier than I expected. We were very glad to see it. I spent most of that afternoon looking it over. It read, if I may say so, though I shouldn’t, “as easy as slipping off a log.”

Alma Curtin’s entry for the same day, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, Cometan, Guatemala:

Jeremiah brought *Quo Vadis* from the mail this morning, told me to shut my eyes and guess what he had, then said it was our book. We were very glad, it came at least a week earlier than we expected. J. has spent most of the day looking it over and is well satisfied, says it reads “like slipping off a log” (Mikoś 1991: 423).

This is but an example of the way in which Alma Curtin “translated” her own notes into her husband’s book of memoirs. She abbreviates her “original” and eliminates many intimate details, especially those pertaining to herself. In *The Memoirs*, the translator’s wife is always referred to as “Mrs Curtin;” her first name, Alma, only appears once – in the Introduction by the publisher, Joseph Schafer. *The Memoirs* are equally reticent on how the future Mr and Mrs Curtin met. One of the chapters, “Business and Travel,” elaborates at some length on the above-mentioned goodwill visit of the Great Prince Alexei in America. Only the final paragraph tersely announces that “in the month of January I met a young lady who the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the following July became my wife.” Yet this piece of news has to compete with: “in July, too, my sister Joe was married” (Curtin 1940: 219). Alma does not hide her authorship in the final paragraph of *The Memoirs*, the only one written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person:

From the early summer Mr Curtin was not well, but he worked more or less. August 29<sup>th</sup> he began to translate *The Idiot*, a Russian book which he felt Amer-

icans should have in a good translation. He finished *The Mongols in Russia* but he could not work continuously as he had done. October 14<sup>th</sup> following the advice of his physician he gave up work and went to Bristol, where after a few days he became seriously ill. Physicians were summoned from different parts of Vermont, and Dr Kelly, a specialist from Philadelphia. He died December 14, 1906 (Curtin 1940: 901).

Alma Curtin consistently receded into her husband's shadow. It seems that this deception (although Mikoś prefers to refer to it as “yet another act of wifely loyalty,” 1994: 16) was continued by at least one relative of the Curtins. The Introduction by J. Schafer begins with the following statement:

The Curtin *Memoirs* came to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin from the hand of Mr Curtin's niece, Mrs Walter J. Seifert. (...) She brought the box of manuscripts to the library personally and in conversation with the editor explained how it had been produced. The manuscript is not in Curtin's handwriting but in that of his wife, Alma Cardell Curtin, who outlived her husband more than thirty-one years, passing away at Bristol, Vermont, April 14, 1938. But Mrs Seifert assured us that both matter and form are to be credited to Curtin because it was his uniform practice to dictate all of his composition to his wife who wrote it out for him. That fact also comes out clearly in the manuscript itself at various points where he speaks of working on his books and translations. Always Mrs Curtin wrote at his dictation as rapidly as possible and later prepared a fair copy from those notes. Sometimes she rewrote his matter several times. The dictation was evidently made near the end of his life (Curtin 1940: 1).

And it goes on to say:

Much of the manuscript is in a form to suggest the existence of a diary in the background. Curtin gives so many and such minute details of occurrences, sometimes mentioning exact dates, and names of places which are often obscure, that it is certain he does not rely wholly on memory. (...) Inquiry of the custodian of remaining papers of both Curtin and Mrs Curtin elicited the statement that no diaries are now in existence. Mrs Curtin was in the habit of writing frequent letters to her mother. (...) These, also, have been lost (Curtin 1940: 3).

Thanks to Mikoś we know now that they have not been lost; a “box of manuscripts” was found containing both Alma's diary and her correspondence with her family. It is only when *The Memoirs* and her notes (these occasionally do contain more private details) are confronted that one real-

izes the extent to which Alma Cardell Curtin eschewed competing with her husband: each “we translated” in her diary and her letters is transformed into first person singular. And while it is certain that only Jeremiah knew the language of the original,<sup>2</sup> it is quite impossible to rule out the possibility that his wife’s contribution was limited to copying the day’s work in longhand when her husband had gone to sleep, exhausted with dictating throughout the day.

Alma Curtin often erases her own presence completely; this includes moments of some importance in her husband’s career. If one is to believe what *The Memoirs* have to say about Curtin’s first meeting Sienkiewicz (Ragaz, Switzelrand, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1897), she was not even there:

In Ragatz [sic] I [Jeremiah Curtin] met Sienkiewicz for the first time. I arrived at the Quellenhof about the luncheon hour. (...) The manager informed me that he would seat me at the *table d’hôte* next a Polish gentleman named Sienkiewicz, a writer. When Sienkiewicz learned who I was, he expressed much pleasure and also much surprise, for I had appeared at his side unexpectedly, and, as it happened, he was reading just then the American edition of *Quo Vadis* (Curtin 1940: 645–646).

A nice story, perhaps, but not necessarily true. According to Alma Curtin’s diary:

We washed and went to lunch, which was already being served. (...) J. asked the proprietor if Sienkiewicz was here. [The proprietor] conducted us to the table and seated us by the outside man who was S. himself. J. handed him his card and they shook hands, then they began to talk (Mikoś 1991: 425).

The presence of Mrs Curtin during that first encounter is confirmed by Sienkiewicz himself in a hilarious letter, written that very night to his friend Karol Potkański:

Of course Jeremiah Curtin has arrived. He is the most awful and biggest bore that the fantasy of seven poets could imagine. He holds your sleeve talking and repeats one and the same thing ten, twenty, to twenty-five times. There is no other conversation except about *Ogniem i mieczem*, *Potop*, *Pan Wolodyjowski* and *Quo vadis*. Nothing else exists. The world existed only partially until his mission as a translator. At present there exist only two great things and two

---

<sup>2</sup> There is still no certainty about the degree to which translations of Sienkiewicz – especially those at the beginning of Curtin’s career as a translator – were made based on Polish originals rather than on the existing Russian translations.

great matters: my novels and his translation. (...) He sits next to me at the table so it goes on without interruption during breakfasts and dinner. (...) He does not want, knave, to say how long he is going to stay here. His wife is neither young nor pretty enough to compensate for it. Utter desperation (...) (quoted in Mikoś, 1991: 426).

If Sienkiewicz was unimpressed with Alma, so was she with him. As she wrote on the day to her mother:

We have found Sienkiewicz, who, while so outstanding and deemed a first-rate literary celebrity in Europe, has a very mundane appearance and there is nothing that would make him stand out in a crowd. He is very short, of medium weight, with grizzled hair, grey eyes and he's becoming bald at the top and back of his head (Mikoś 1994: 59, trans. J.R.).

Not surprisingly, the description in *The Memoirs* is much more conventionally romantic, and also more colourful:

I shall never forget the first impression made on me by Sienkiewicz (...). He seemed to me to be a man of a very sympathetic and sensitive temperament. (...) Sienkiewicz is a person whose feelings are phenomenally strong. Were he a man of weaker character, they would sweep him away. He has in him the governing power which has conquered, but which has had to fight for mastery. His hair is iron-gray, and he is becoming bald. His eyes are gray; his voice low (Curtin 1940: 646).

Such an embellishment of her own judgment of Sienkiewicz (also concerning his physical appearance) is very characteristic of the reality presented by Alma Curtin in *The Memoirs*, the main task of which is to enhance her husband's legend – a purpose also served by attributing the work to her husband. At the same time, this could also indicate that Alma was a little more than just a secretary faithfully taking Jeremiah's dictation. The perseverance with which she edited and published her husband's travelogues and ethnographic studies might also indicate a greater participation in his life's work. In the most radical view on the subject, Alma, "held hostage by Jeremiah's almost pathological restlessness," is supposed to have been his "full partner" in research, travels and literature (Collins 2008a).

This raises the very natural yet highly risky question: how to determine – if that is indeed possible – the exact contribution by Mrs Curtin to her husband's work, his translations as well as his travel-writing or his ethnography? All that could be done with traditional methods of authorship

attribution – a comparison of manuscripts (including handwriting) with the printed version of *The Memoirs* – has already been done by Mikoś. To venture any further is to enter an attributive nightmare. Even if it has now been established that *The Memoirs* are in their entirety the work of Alma Curtin (from her everyday notes all the way to the final version produced many years later), it is impossible to ascertain beyond a shadow of doubt the exact degree of her contribution without access to the “box of manuscripts” in Wisconsin containing her husband’s notes, the basis for her own edition of the Mongol books. Even that would help little: all the preserved manuscripts for either the translations or the original works signed by Jeremiah are in the hand of his amanuensis – apart from the initial eight-page fragment of *The Memoirs*, describing his childhood. To add further insult to injury, no long texts by Jeremiah written before marrying Alma have survived.

This is also why it is even more difficult to find any traces of the translator’s wife in the English translations of Sienkiewicz and other authors.

## Material and method

The only hope lies in the so-called non-traditional methods of authorship attribution, and, more precisely, in stylometry – the study of measurable elements of style, or language, or lexical choice. More specifically, methods based on multivariate statistical analyses of word frequencies, used successfully at least since the fundamental *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist* (Mosteller, Wallace 1964), have proven their efficacy in detecting authorship and plagiarism (Alma Curtin’s attempts to conceal her contribution to her husband’s work might be called plagiarism *à rebours*). The ever-growing availability of electronic versions of literary texts (all texts used in this study have been downloaded from the Internet) and the exponential increase in computing speed have made processing of huge amounts of data – in this case, word frequencies in all texts analysed – a relatively simple and reliable way of identifying the stylistic (or perhaps lexical) “thumbprints” of authors.

The method used in this study employs a type of multivariate analysis known as cluster analysis to describe the similarities between relative frequencies of the most frequent words; “relative” refers in this case to accounting for (i.e. normalizing) the differences in raw word frequency



in texts which come, obviously, in a variety of sizes. As the now-classic studies by Burrows (1987, 2002), Hoover (2004, 2004a) or Daren-Oskam (2007) demonstrate, such a method is presently the most precise tool of what could be called “stylistic fingerprinting.”

The research described below uses a script by Maciej Eder, written for the R statistical programming environment. The script processes electronic versions of texts to produce a list of all words used in all the texts studied and to obtain raw frequencies for those words in the individual texts in the corpus; it normalizes the raw frequencies as z-scores, following the Delta procedure (Burrows 2002); it selects words for analysis from indicated frequency ranges; it performs additional procedures improving attribution such as pronoun deletion (particularly successful in non-flexive languages e.g. in English) or culling (automatic removal of words too-characteristic for single texts); it compares the results for the individual texts; it proceeds to cluster analysis and presents the similarities/distances between the texts in tree diagrams; finally, it produces a so-called consensus tree, a new plot that is a compromise (or a result of a democratic vote) of numerous cluster analysis tree diagrams obtained for different values of parameters (Baayen 2008: 157–160).

The texts analysed are listed in Table 1 (as can be seen, of all important texts associated with Curtin, only his translations of *Taras Bulba* and *Prince Serebryani* were unavailable).

Table 1.

Text	Original title	Title in diagrams
J. Curtin, <i>Creation Myths of Primitive America in Relation to the Religious History and Mental Development of Mankind</i>		curtin creation
J. Curtin, <i>Tales of the Fairies and of the Ghost World, Collected from Oral Tradition in South-west Munster</i>		curtin fairies
J. Curtin, <i>Hero-Tales of Ireland</i>		curtin ireland
J. Curtin, <i>Myths of the Modocs</i>		curtin modocs
J. Curtin, <i>The Mongols: A History</i>		curtin mongols hist

Text	Original title	Title in diagrams
J. Curtin, <i>The Mongols in Russia</i>		curtin mongols rus
J. Curtin, <i>Seneca Fiction, Legends, and Myths</i> (ed. J.N.B. Hewitt)		curtin seneca
J. Curtin, <i>Seneca Indian Myths</i> (ed. A. Curtin)		curtin sen myths
J. Curtin, <i>A Journey in Southern Siberia: The Mongols, Their Religion, and Their Myths</i>		curtin siberia
J. Curtin, <i>Myths and Folk-tales of the Russians, Western Slavs, and Magyars</i>		curtin slavs
J. Curtin, <i>The Memoirs</i>		curtin memoirs
E. Orzeszkowa, <i>Argonauts</i>	Argonauci	orzeshko argonauts
B. Prus, <i>Pharaoh</i>	Faraon	prus pharaoh
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>Bartek the Victor</i>	Bartek zwycięzca	sienkiewicz bartek
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>For Bread</i>	Za chlebem	sienkiewicz bread
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>On the Bright Shore</i>	Na jasnym brzegu	sienkiewicz shore
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>On a Single Card</i>	Na jedną kartę	sienkiewicz card
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>Charcoal Sketches</i>	Szkice węglem	sienkiewicz charcoal
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>Children of the Soil</i>	Rodzina Połanieckich	sienkiewicz children
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>The Deluge</i>	Potop	sienkiewicz deluge
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>On the Field of Glory</i>	Na polu chwały	sienkiewicz glory
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>With Fire and Sword</i>	Ogniem i mieczem	sienkiewicz fire
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>Hania</i>	Hania	sienkiewicz hania
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>In Vain</i>	Na marne	sienkiewicz vain

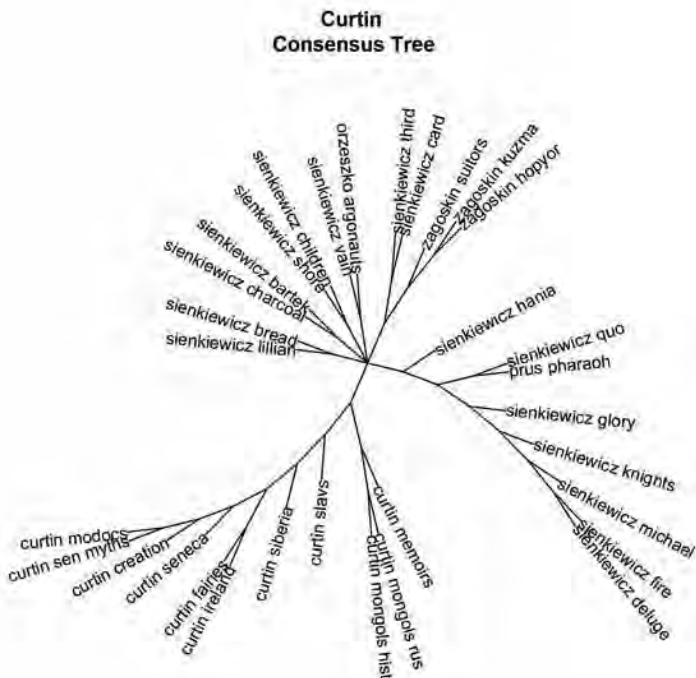
Text	Original title	Title in diagrams
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>The Knights of the Cross</i>	Krzyżacy	sienkiewicz knights
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>Lillian Morris</i>	Przez stepy	sienkiewicz Lillian
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>Pan Michael</i>	Pan Wołodyjowski	sienkiewicz Michael
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>Quo Vadis</i>	Quo vadis	sienkiewicz quo
H. Sienkiewicz, <i>That Third Woman</i>	Та третия	sienkiewicz third
M. Zagoskin, <i>An Evening on the Hoppyor</i>	Вечер на Хопре	zagoskin hoppyor
M. Zagoskin, <i>Kuzma Roschin</i>	Кузьма Рощин	zagoskin kuzma
M. Zagoskin, <i>The Three Suitors</i>	Три жениха	zagoskin suitors

## Results

Figure 1 presents the similarities in frequencies of the most frequent words (MFWs) in all texts listed in Table 1. It is a combined result of cluster analysis tree diagrams in parameter ranges stated in the legend below the plot. Thus, in this case, the first (virtual) cluster analysis tree diagram was made for 5000 MFW with 0% culling (i.e. no words that only appear in a single text were removed); the second for the same MFW value, but at a culling rate of 20% (i.e. the analysis included words that appear in at least 20% of the texts) and so on (40%, 60% and 80%) all the way to 100% (when the analysis only included words appearing in all the texts). The sixth plot was made for 4900 MFWs at 0% culling, and so on. The series of virtual tree diagrams ends in plot 195 for 50 MFWs and a culling of 100%. Thus Figure 1 is a consensus between the 195 tree plots. The less “branches” separate the individual texts, the more similar they are.

The diagram divides Curtin's work into two discrete parts: his translations cluster in the top branches of the plot; his *Memoirs* and his ethnographic studies are grouped in the lower branches. There is a genre division in the upper part of the plot: translations of Sienkiewicz's historical

Figure 1. Consensus tree for all texts



MFWs: 50 to 5000 increment 100

Culling 0 to 100 increment 20

romances form a distinct group. Of some interest (however, not in the context of this study) is the direct proximity of two novels set in Antiquity: Sienkiewicz's *Quo vadis* and Prus's *Pharaoh*. Elsewhere in the plot, cluster analysis seems to successfully recognize the authors of the originals, which is visible in the separate branch of translations of Zagoskin. A much more serious observation flows from the bottom part of the graph: *The Memoirs* are clearly separated from other works attributed to Curtin; Alma Curtin's work lies closest to two other items she completed after her husband's death, *The Mongols: A History* and *The Mongols in Russia*; Curtin's Native American mythologies lie at the other extreme.

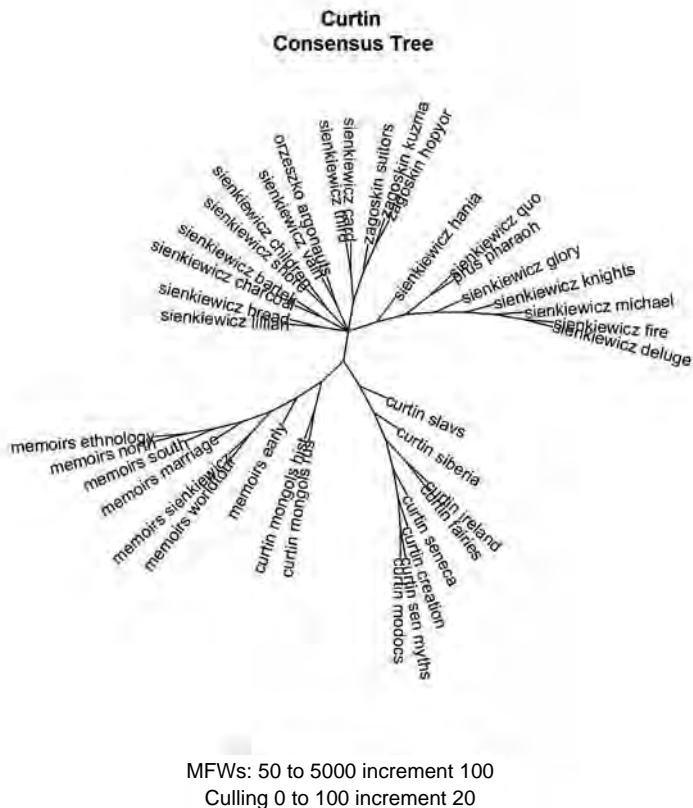
The emerging hypothesis on a significant influence of the translator's wife on the two "Mongolian" works acquires more plausibility when the stylistic uniformity of *The Memoirs* themselves is confirmed. This was achieved by using the same corpus of texts, except that *The Memoirs* were divided into seven segments according to subject-matter and chronology, listed in Table 2. The division into segments instead of chapters was dictated by the chapters' shortness – MFW-based attribution is usually successful for texts exceeding 5000 words (Eder 2011). Therefore, the 8 pages corresponding to the sole fragment of *The Memoirs* in Curtin's hand could not be used as a satisfactory sample of his own work.

Table 2.

Chapters	Description	Title in diagrams
1-10	Childhood and youth. University. Diplomatic career in Russia and in the US	memoirs early
11-16	Early marriage. Return to Russia. Caucasus. London.	memoirs marriage
17-23	Working among West Coast Indians	memoirs ethnology
24-31	Research in Ireland	memoirs north
32-39	Central America	memoirs south
40-47	"Chasing Sienkiewicz"	memoirs sienkiewicz
48-54	The world tour. Numerous matters connected with Sienkiewicz	memoirs worldtour

Figure 2 presents a very similar picture, the only difference being that the single branch for *The Memoirs* is replaced by their 7 segments. However, the individual parts of *The Memoirs* consistently remain in the same area of the consensus tree and continue to remain in close proximity to the two histories of the Mongols. This shows their significant stylistic similarity and allows a greater trust in the hypothesis of a complete work by Alma Curtin. This result is even more significant, as the pre-marital part of *The Memoirs* might have been at least dictated by Jeremiah.

The results presented in Figures 1 and 2 can arouse doubts as to the validity of describing this phenomenon as "stylistic differences." After all,

Figure 2. Consensus tree for all texts, with *The Memoirs* divided into sections

a large part of the vocabulary analysed is quite characteristic of individual texts, especially when partial analyses were run across low values of culling and a broad spectrum of MFW numbers. The differences should probably be termed lexical rather than stylistic; in fact, the list of the most frequent 5000 words surely contains some keywords – even in such a large corpus. The similarities between the texts edited by Alma Curtin seem less surprising when one compares *The Memoirs* with the works dealing with ethnography and travelling, as both bear many features of memories. Thus any possible traces of the translator’s wife must be sought for in a different frequency range: one that would contain fewer content words, i.e. in the top intervals of the frequency list and with maximum culling, to avoid interfer-

ence of differences in the subject matter between, say, the description of the Curtins' trip to Ireland and *With Fire and Sword*.

From this point of view the top fifty MFWs in the Curtin corpus seem a safe choice (the 100% culling rate makes sure all 50 words appear in all texts). The list is presented in Table 3, and it is dominated by function words: modal verbs, articles and prepositions. This list requires but a single cluster analysis tree diagram for the above-mentioned parameters (Figure 3).

Table 3.

1. the	11. for	21. were	31. man	41. out
2. and	12. not	22. will	32. who	42. an
3. to	13. is	23. this	33. by	43. time
4. of	14. but	24. have	34. are	44. go
5. a	15. on	25. be	35. then	45. do
6. in	16. had	26. when	36. what	46. went
7. that	17. at	27. which	37. if	47. now
8. was	18. as	28. one	38. so	48. or
9. with	19. said	29. all	39. would	49. came
10. it	20. from	30. there	40. no	50. after

Figure 3. shows what happens to the structure of reciprocal similarities between the texts used in the analysis, when it is limited to the most “mechanical” aspects of the vocabulary. The texts attributed by Mikoś to Alma Curtin are still close neighbours, but they are now closer to the translations than to Curtin's own writings. Interestingly, *The Memoirs* and (to a lesser degree) the two “Mongolian” books cluster together with two translations: *Lillian Morris* (originally entitled *Przez stepy*) and *For Bread (Za chlebem)*. It should be added that this particular set of parameters is not the only one yielding similar results. This can be seen in Figure 4, produced for a culling of 100% and low MFW values (10–150).

Figure 3. Cluster analysis of all texts (50 MFWs, 100% culling)

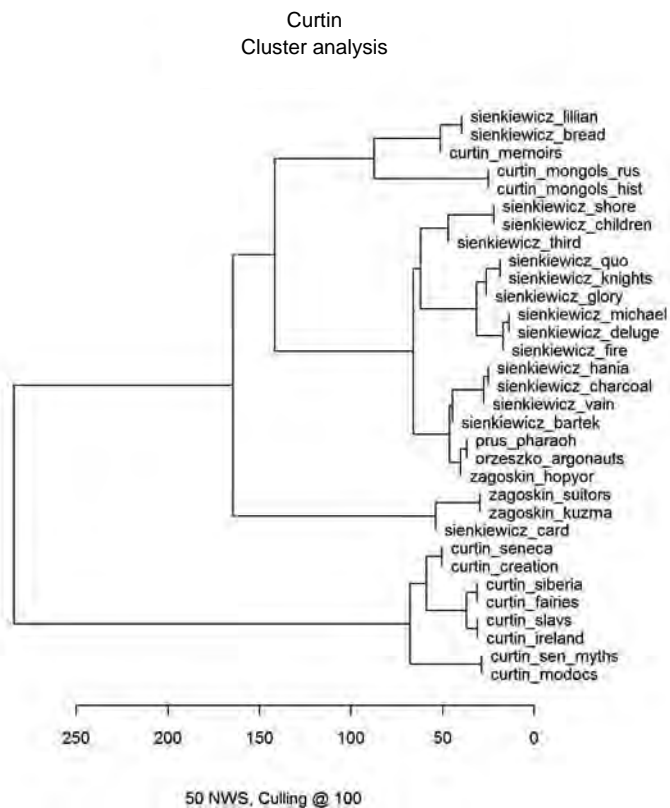
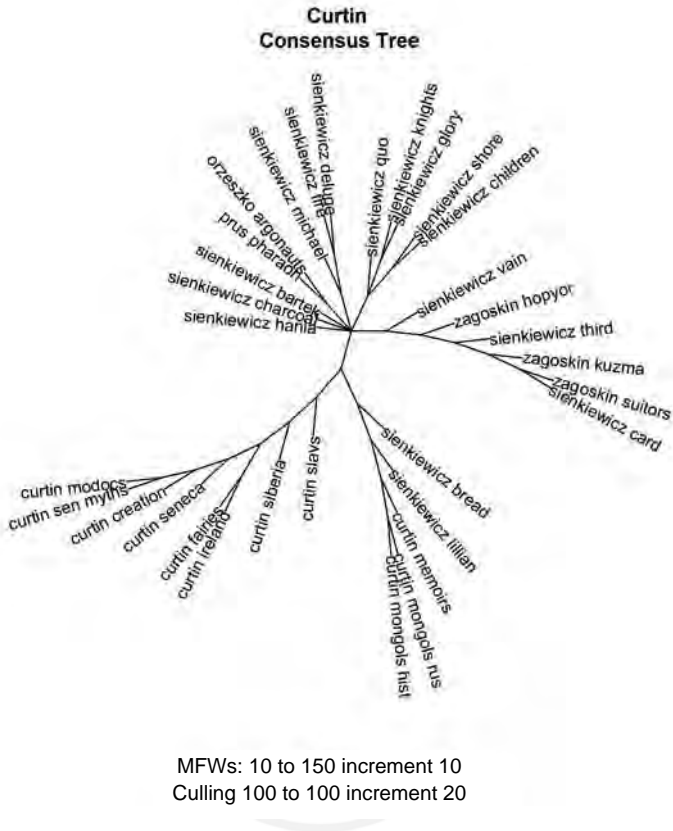




Figure 4. Consensus tree for 100% culling and short lists of MFWs (10-150)



## Conclusions

In authorship attribution, it is a rudimental principle to rely on the most readily available sources. The so-called non-traditional methods of attribution are only a valid choice when everything else (biography, history, graphology, traditional stylistics etc.) has failed – the more so as previous attempts at finding stylometric traces of translators or editors have yielded very few successes. The results obtained thus far show that most-frequent-words-based stylometry of translated texts is usually better at recognizing the author of the original than the translator (Burrows 2002a, Rybicki 2009, 2010, Rybicki, Eder 2011); that traces of the editor of Henry James disappear in the stylistic evolution of author of *The Ambassadors* (Hoover 2007, 2010); that revelations of Joseph Smith cannot be easily divided into those written by the founder of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints himself and those he dictated to his scribes (Jockers 2008).

This time, however, some traces of the translator's wife have been found. Firstly, the placement of *The Memoirs of Jeremiah Curtin* correlates with the attribution performed by Mikoś; secondly, suspicions that Alma Curtin took a significant part in preparing *The Mongols: A History* and *The Mongols in Russia* seem to be confirmed.

Yet the most important observation derived from this study consists in the strong similitude of the most frequent, functional, “mechanical” vocabulary of *The Memoirs* to most Curtin translations and its very strong likeness to two of these. It is quite conceivable that when Alma Curtin went from taking her husband's day-long dictation to producing a longhand copy by night, the corrections she introduced could be quite far-reaching. Not knowing the language of the original, she would not be correcting her husband's choice of meaningful words; it seems quite natural that her part consisted in very general amendments of style, which must have resulted in modifications of the most frequent or “non-meaningful” words.

There only remains the question of the sudden appearance, among texts with a significant contribution by Alma Curtin, of two translations of two very similar works by Sienkiewicz. Is it just a coincidence that *Przez stepy* (1879) and *Za chlebem* (1880) are two of his “American” novellas (written during or under the influence of his stay in the US in 1876–1878), even more similar because of their shared major theme: travels across America and the presence of a strong female protagonist, an exception in Sienkiewicz's *oeuvre*? Could the translations of two works that, for various rea-

sons, might have held a greater appeal for Alma Curtin than *Trilogy* or even *Children of the Soil*, bear her more visible trace, albeit a purely stylistic one? When *Lillian Morris* was being translated during the Curtins' stay in Ireland in the summer of 1893, Jeremiah was busy collecting the material for his Irish mythology, working on several other novellas by Sienkiewicz and, rushed by an impatient publisher, writing his foreword to *Pan Michael*. It is quite possible that he had to give Alma a little more freedom. If that is true, she deserves her membership in the women's section of the American PEN Club (Mikoś 1994: 295) not only as the undisguised editor of her husband's work or a semi-disguised author of his *Memoirs* (as established by Mikoś), but as a partner in translation – even if this contribution has been so far made evident by a non-traditional method of authorship attribution alone.

Non-traditional authorship attribution has exhibited so far a certain aloofness towards the redefinition of the concept of the author that has been going on for at least half a century. It should be remembered that mathematics and statistics are only used in hopeless cases (and to further complicate these with the ideas of Barthes or Foucault seems to render them even more hopeless) or in plagiarism detection (and the law has a very different understanding of the phrase “death of the author”). The situation is now changing because at least this problem itself has been recognized. The fragment of an introduction to one of the most eminent monographs on authorship attribution is quite telling:

[I became interested in authorship attribution] during an era of searching philosophical enquiry into the nature of authorship, a matter famously brought to the forefront of literary studies at the close of the 1960s by Barthes's “The Death of the Author” and Foucault's response in “What is an Author?” and far from concluded by Séan Burke's “The Death and Return of the Author.” It may disappoint some readers that the issues raised in this debate are not, by and large, given much consideration in what follows. This is not because of any lack of interest on my part but because a study of attribution practice had to maintain a precise focus on the question of how personal responsibility for given aspects of given texts might be distributed.... (even if they are as mundane as determining the address to which the royalty or copyright cheques should be sent) (Love 2002: 2–3).

And more: as the above-cited studies by Burrows, Hoover or Jockers show, the concept of an individual and unquestionable person of the author is now questioned by those who continue to seek for that person with

statistical formulae. Tree diagrams drawn by stylometrists yield more than just stylistic similarities; they try to decipher differing influences of editors, secretaries, other writers... With various degrees of success, but still.

What about the impact of translators? Existing studies show that stylistic traces of the translator are not at all easy to find. There is, in translation, still more of the original author than that of his target-language *alter ego*, who seems to fulfil the (in)famous postulate of invisibility. With a single exception: works by a single original author translated by various translators. Then the translator is visible, and so is his wife – even when her partner, her own attitude, social conventions, financial reasons, practices of publishers, copyright reasons try to hide her from our view.

trans. Jan Rybicki

## Bibliography

- Baayen, R.H. 2008. *Analyzing Linguistic Data. A Practical Introduction to Statistics using R*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burrows, J.F. 1987. *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2002. "Delta: A Measure of Stylistic Difference and a Guide to Likely Authorship." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 17, 267–287.
- 2002a. "The Englishing of Juvenal: Computational Stylistics and Translated Texts." *Style* 36, 677–99.
- Collins, C.L. 2008. "Jeremiah Curtin. Alma Cardell Curtin." *American National Biography Online*, <<http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01161.html>>.
- 2008a. "Behind the Curtin." *Milwaukee Magazine* 1.04.2008
- Curtin, J. 1940. *The Memoirs of Jeremiah Curtin*. Madison: State Historical Society.
- Dalen-Oskam, K. van, and Zundert, J. van 2007. "Delta for Middle Dutch—Author and Copyist Distinction in *Walewein*." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 22, 345–362.
- Eder, M. 2011. "Does Size Matter? Authorship Attribution, Small Samples, Big Problem." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* (in print).
- Hoover, D.L. 2004. "Testing Burrows's Delta." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 19, 453–475.
- 2004a. "Delta Prime?." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 19, 477–495
- 2007. "Corpus Stylistics, Stylometry, and the Styles of Henry James." *Style* 41(2): 174–203.
- 2010. "Modes of Composition in Henry James: Dictation, Style, and *What Maisie Knew*." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* (in print).

- Jockers, M.L., Witten, D.M., and Criddle, C.S. 2008. "Reassessing Authorship in the Book of Mormon Using Delta and Nearest Shrunken Centroid Classification." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 22, 465–491.
- Love, H. 2002. *Attributing Authorship: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mikoś, M.J. 1991. "New Light on the Relationship between Henryk Sienkiewicz and Jeremiah Curtin." *Slavic Review* 50/2, 422–432.
- 1994. *W pogoni za Sienkiewiczem* [Chasing Sienkiewicz]. Warszawa: Constans.
- Mosteller, F., and Wallace, D.L. 1964. *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist*. Reading: Addison–Wesley.
- Rybicki, J. 2005. "Sienkiewicz po angielsku" [Sienkiewicz in English] *Przekładaniec* 15, 101–126.
- 2009. "Liczenie krasnoludków. Trochę inaczej o polskich przekładach trylogii Tolkiena" [Counting Dwarves. A Different Story of Polish Translations of Tolkien's Trilogy]. Warszawa: "Ludzie i krasnoludki – powinowactwa z wyboru?" (conference presentation).
- 2010. "Translation and Delta Revisited: When We Read Translations, Is It the Author or the Translator that We Really Read?" *Literary and Linguistic Computing* (in print).
- Rybicki, J., Eder, M. 2011. "Deeper Delta Across Genres and Languages: Do We Really Need the Most Frequent Words?" *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 26 (3), 315–321.
- Sienkiewicz, H. 1959. *Portrait of America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

**Jan Rybicki** works as an adjunct at the Institute of English Philology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków. His research areas include: translation studies, comparative literature, stylometry. He has written studies about Henryk Sienkiewicz in various English-speaking countries (the reception analyses were conducted both by traditional and computer-based methods). He has also translated into Polish over twenty novels by such authors as Coupland, Fitzgerald, Golding, Gordimer, Ishiguro, Oe, Le Carré and Winterson.