



2025 French-American Foundation Translation Prize

**Finalist Interview with Stéphanie Boulard & Timothy Lavenz,
co-translators of *The Answer to Lord Chandos* by Pascal Quignard (Wakefield Press)**

Q: What did you enjoy most about translating *The Answer to Lord Chandos* by Pascal Quignard?

Stéphanie & Timothy: Working together! We enjoyed most of all our process of working together, because it allowed us both to get very close to the text and discover creative solutions to all the difficulties we came across. We would work independently on sections of the draft, then reconvene to verify all our changes and go, one by one, through the outstanding details and questions. We cycled every line of the text at least three times this way, and for the hardest passages often many more times. Landing on formulations in English that were beautiful, accurate to the meaning and yet retaining the play and flow and ambiguity of Quignard's own French, often felt like an epiphany! Truly, for some of those puzzles it took years to see (and hear!) the right translation. We only could have found them and made what we did together.

Q: Your translation of *The Answer to Lord Chandos* is the first available English translation. Can you tell us a bit about the process of translating a work of French literature that has never been translated into English before?

Stéphanie & Timothy: Taking 41 years to complete his response to Hoffmansthal's "Chandos Letter," Quignard condensed so many concerns dear to him about writing, desire, reality, nature and the soul into this short work; it was exciting to bring it into English as an important window into reading his work as a whole. His plea for the value of literature and literary labor also carries an intensity and urgency that, as AI threatens to erase any appreciation of these, has never been more important (and perhaps especially in the American context). It was a great responsibility to make the first English decision about this text, and it was an honor to discharge this duty well, knowing that it is now available for all time to English readers who can cherish the sacred communications of literature.



Q: The French-American Foundation Translation Prize seeks to honor translators and their craft, and recognize the important work they do bringing works of French literature to Anglophone audiences. What does being named a finalist for this prize mean to you, and, in your own words, why does a Prize like this matter?

Stéphanie & Timothy: When AI language generators are able to produce roughly accurate translations in a fraction of the time it takes a human mind to do the same, it is vitally important to continue to recognize translation as a craft that requires human attention, reflection, and creativity. We thank the French-American Foundation for publicly defending and elevating the importance of these human endeavors! A prize like this reminds the world that taking our time with language matters; that the *nuances* which make a thing human are ultimately more energizing and life-giving to us than the flat and false banalities AI pumps out in our ill-fated attempt to save time; and that a much greater pleasure is to be had from patiently learning, thinking, and writing as the ensouled beings we are, in conversation with ourselves and others – with a humanity that really lives and dies.