TWO APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION: YOVKOV IN ENGLISH

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This paper is a modest tribute to a distinguished scholar and academic, a fine poet and translator – Prof. Alexander Shurbanov. He has always been an example which many would like to follow but very few can emulate. His talents and achievements diverge into various, yet related areas and activities, translation being one of them. Not only has he created Bulgarian versions of major works written originally in English but, in a number of articles and interviews, he offers perceptive observations and insightful generalisations, based, as is characteristic of him, on close analysis of concrete linguistic material. In one of those articles Shurbanov reminds us that the translator between English and Bulgarian has to bridge the gap between two fairly distantly related languages and cultures and that the degree of genealogical and contactual relatedness makes a difference in the tasks facing the translator. Thus, for instance, although Bulgaria adopted Christianity relatively early and has always aspired to be part of European civilisation, it has, for long periods of time, been included in the Byzantine and later the Ottoman Empires and in many ways has gravitated more to the East than to Western and Central Europe (Shurbanov 2004, 52–53); this will certainly affect the way and the depth of understanding cultural facts characteristic of the other civilisation.

In this paper I will only touch upon some of the problems and possible solutions on the basis of the limited material of a sample analysis of excerpts from two versions in English of the same short story by Yordan Yovkov (1880–1937). The English-speaking reader can find more on this classic Bulgarian author in a booklength study by Mozejko. G. Tihanov offers an interesting perspective on the reception of Yovkov outside Bulgaria, especially in Germany, during the first half of the 20th century. The reception in Germany of the cycle of stories *Staroplaninski Legendi*, which is relevant to the present article, is analysed by Stanchev, who sees two waves of increased interest in Yovkov's prose, before and after the Second World War respectively.

The two versions to be discussed illustrate two different approaches to translation which will be discussed in due course. The two translators, both of them native speakers of English, are Michael Holman and John Burnip. They are responsible for the translation and the publication in the English speaking world of two important 20th-century works of Bulgarian fiction (both short-story cycles). These are, in the order of their appearance in English, Nikolai Haitov's *Divi Razkazi* (1967), translated by M. Holman and published by Peter Owen in

1979 under the title *Wild Tales*, and J. Burnip's translation of Yordan Yovkov's two cycles of stories *Vecheri v Antomosvskiya Han* (1928) and *Staroplaninski Legendi* (1927), published in one volume by Slavica, Columbus, Ohio, USA in 1990, as *The Inn at Antimovo and Legends of Stara Planina*. These two books are listed in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* among the few "significant prose publications outside Bulgaria" (France 195).

A few brief words on the background of the two translators might be in order. John Burnip had a diplomatic post in Bulgaria with the Allied Control Commission in Sofia immediately after the Second World War. Later he was history master at Dulwich College. After Dr Vivian Pinto, he was probably the Englishman who, at the time, knew most about Bulgarian literature and was very dedicated to all things Bulgarian. Yovkov was his favourite Bulgarian author and he intended to write his biography. J. Burnip took a degree in Bulgarian at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London University, and remained in close contact with the Bulgarian lectors there, Boyan Nikolaev and Radosvet Kolarov, to whom he expressed his indebtedness for help in the process of translating Yovkov. When Burnip published his translations of Yovkov he must have been in his seventies.

Michal Holman, Professor of Russian and Slavic Studies at the University of Leeds, is better known, especially among the older and middle generations of academics and graduates of the English department of Sofia University, because of the close academic contacts and long and fruitful co-operation with the University of Sofia and other cultural and educational institutions. His services to promote the cultural links between Bulgaria and Britain can hardly be overestimated. More on this see in Stamenov 1991, Stamenov and Holman, 1993.

The sample analysis and comparison of the two translations and Yovkov's original will be of the opening of *Koshuta*, one of the stories included in the cycle *Legends of Stara Planina*. The reader may find a synopsis of the story in Mozejko (70–71). I will follow it closely, hoping to refresh the memory of those who have read the story long ago and to provide some background for those who do not know it. The main character, Stephen, is hunting a doe. Rumour has it that there is something special about the animal: its eyes are like the eyes of a human being. Stephen is warned not to kill it but he persists in the hunt. When he finally spots the animal and aims his rifle at it, there suddenly appears beside the doe a woman milking it. This recurs each time Stephen aims at the doe. Stephen is in love with the fair Doina and they are expected to get married. However, just as he is not certain whether he should kill the doe or stop pursuing it, Stephen hesitates between Doina and the dark-haired Gypsy girl Dimana. Finally everything turns out well: the doe is left in peace and Doina elopes with Stephen. This pastoral story is the only one in the cycle which has a happy ending.

Here are the first sentences of the story – the Bulgarian original and the two translations:

Ето там, гдето се спущат белите сипеи откъм Крайница, в дола – беше воденицата на дяда Цона. Стоят върбите, стои вадата, но воденицата я няма. Останали са само едни срутени дувари, обрасли с къпина, и две-три греди, посивели и сплескани като гъба. Защото всичко това беше отколе и днес нито хората, нито местата се такива, каквито бяха едно време.

[JB] Over yonder, where the white scree drops down towards Krainitsa, in the vale, was old Tsono's mill.* The willows are still standing, the mill-stream remains, but the mill is gone. Some ruined walls are all that is left, overgrown with brambles, and a few joists, graying and flattened like mushrooms. Because all this was long ago, and now neither the folk nor the places are as they once were.

[MH] Over there in the valley, where the white screes come down from Krainitsa, that is where Old Tsono's water-mill once stood. The willows are still there, and the mill-stream too, but the mill itself has vanished. All that remains are some crumbling walls overgrown with brambles, and a few wooden beams, grey with age and flattened like fungi. For all this happened long, long ago, and now neither the people nor the places are what they once were.

We shall now take a closer look at each sentence, taking them one by one.

Sentence1 Ето там, (1) гдето се спущат (2) белите сипеи откъм Крайница, (3) в дола – (4) беше (5) воденицата на дяда Цона.

[JB] Over yonder, (1) where the white scree (2) drops down towards Krainitsa, (3) in the vale, (4) was (5) old Tsono's mill*.

[MH] Over (1) there (3) in the valley, (2) where the white screes come down from Krainitsa, (Z) that is where (5) Old Tsono's water-mill (X) once (4) stood.

Syntax: JB is much closer to the original: the word order 12345 is basically preserved, only the necessary change Subject Verb <*Bg* Verb Subject is made (*scree drops down*). MH reshuffles some of the syntactic units to 132Z5X4: a place adverbial (*in the valley*) is shifted and another one X (*once*) is added for emphasis; an emphatic syntactic construction Z (*that is where*) is introduced to render what in the Bulgarian original is suggested by word order and the implied intonation contour.
Morphology: JB changes the plural of *cuneu*, suggesting large size/amount, into the singular *scree*, MH keeps the plural *screes*. Nothing can be done here to render the archaic case forms of *дяд<u>а</u> Цон<u>а</u>*.

Lexis:	JB:	*over yonder*	MH	*over there*
		vale		*valley*
		drops down towards (?)		*come down from*
		mill		*water-mill*
		was [= Bg '*беше*']		*stood*

JB uses two archaic poetic forms (*yonder*, *vale*) against the neutral ones of MH. MH is more specific and closer to the original in choosing *water-mill*. JB's *drops down towards* is less successful and contains a factual error. JB prefers the primary basic counterpart *be* (in the required form *was*) of the Bulgarian verb 'беше', while MH uses another verb expressing position – *stood*.

The asterisk after *old Tsono's mill* in JB's version refers the reader to the Glossary at the end of the book where he/she will learn that there was actually such a mill in Yovkov's native Zheravna, where the author would go as a child to collect walnuts with his friends. JB relies to some extent on the additional explanations and background information outside the text of the story, included in the Forward, the biographical note on Yovkov and the Glossary of the book.

Sentence 2 Стоят върбите, стои вадата, но воденицата я няма.
[JB] The willows are still standing, the mill-stream remains, but the mill is gone.
[MH] The willows are still there, and the mill-stream too, but the mill itself has vanished.

Syntax: Neither JB nor MH keeps the repetition and parallelism *стоят – стои* (JB changes the verb *stand – remain*, while MH uses *too* and ellipts the verb); both eliminate the Subject-Verb inversion; both add *still* (explicitness of meaning other than conceptual); MH also adds emphatic/contrastive *itself*.

Lexis:	*JB*	*stand (= Bg стоят), remain*	*MH*	*are there*
		is gone		*has vanished*

1 2 3 4
Sentence 3 Останали са само едни срутени дувари, обрасли с къпина, и две-
5
три греди, посивели и сплескани като гъба.

2 1 3 4
[JB] Some ruined walls are all that is left, overgrown with brambles, and a few
5
joists, graying and flattened like mushrooms.

1 2 3
[MH] All that remains are some crumbling walls overgrown with brambles, and a

4 5
few wooden beams, grey with age and flattened like fungi.

Syntax: MH keeps the inversion Verb-Subject with the help of the emphatic construction (*All that remains*) which functions as a formal subject; both change the syntactic construction to a kind of cleft sentence to render the emphasis of Bulgarian *само* ["only"]. MH expands the adjective *gray* with the postmodifying prepositional phrase *with age*, which is absent in the original.

Morphology: JB *ing*-form *graying* MH adj. *gray*
JB is only formally closer in choosing a participle; using the adjective *gray,* MH renders more closely the perfective meaning, the end-result of the process.

The Bg generic/mass singulars *къпина, гъба* seem not to work in English and both translations have plural *brambles, mushrooms/fungi.*

Lexis: JB *mushrooms* MH *fungi*
Mushroom is the primary counterpart of *гъба,* but it suggests a specific shape clashing with *flattened.*

JB	*ruined*	MH	*crumbling* [more concrete]
	joists		*beams*

S4 Защото всичко това беше отколе и днес нито хората, нито местата се такива, каквито бяха едно време.

[JB] Because all this was long ago, and now neither the folk nor the places are as they once were.

[MH] For all this happened long, long ago, and now neither the people nor the places are what they once were.

Syntax: MH adds repetition: *long, long ago.*

Lexis:	JB	*because*	MH	*for*
		was (= Bg беше)		*happened*
		folk		*people*

This time MH prefers the more elevated *for* to the neutral *because.* JB again goes for the primary lexical counterpart (*be*). A possible reason for MH's preference of the stylistically neutral *people* vs. *folk* (JB's choice) is the alliteration he achieves (*people-places*).

Let us also consider the rendering of the title of the story and the epigraph immediately after it:

К О Ш У Т А

JB: The Roe-Deer

MH: The Doe in the Forest

Не го повика, както се вика,
ами поблея като кошута...
Народна песен

JB: She did not call him as one calls,
but gave a bleat like a hind [≠ roe-deer]
– Folk song

MH: Not by name did she call him,
For she bleated like a doe ...
(From an ancient chronicle)

As to the title itself, we see different lexical choices made by the two translators, but we shall spare ourselves and the reader the discussion of zoology. More characteristic is MH's decision to allow himself the liberty of expanding the noun phrase with the additional *in the forest*. The source of the quote in the epigraph is correctly pointed out by JB as a folk song, while MH tells us that it comes "from an ancient chronicle". This factual discrepancy is rather puzzling. The only explanation I could offer here is that MH is trying to suggest the general atmosphere of the whole cycle. Some of the other "legends" in the cycle do have epigraphs coming from ancient chronicles. So MH's decision may be seen as a kind of compensation, especially in view of the fact that his translation of the story was published separately, not as an integral part of the cycle. (The publication of the stories separately, out of the context of the whole cycle is a problem in itself, various aspects of which are discussed in Stanchev 71–72.) JB's translation of the epigraph is literal; he substitutes another word for the name of the animal (*hind*), thus losing the parallelism with the title. MH tries to recreate the poetic archaic flavour of the original quote.

The translation of the cycle's title also poses some problems. Burnip transliterates the name of the mountain – *Legends of Stara Planina*. Holman argues in an article that in this case a translation of the name would be preferable – *Legends of the Old Mountains* (1985: 57–58). We find yet another version in Mozejko – *Balkan Legends*. This keeps the syntactic structure of the original title, substituting the name *Balkan,* Turkish in origin, for the Slavic Bulgarian *Stara Planina*. *Balkan* is indeed a familiar alternative name of the same mountain, the one that appears in the name of the Balkan Peninsula. The problem with it are the undesirable connotations the word may have for some of the English-speaking readers (cf. for instance, *balkanise*, *balkanisation*). Yet another possibility is the ancient name of the mountain in its Latin form *Haemus*. Once again the translator is faced with many choices but he has to select only one of them.

From these and from many other examples that can be adduced from the entire text, one can establish that on the whole the syntactic constructions chosen by John Burnip are much closer to those of the Bulgarian original in comparison with the choices made by Michael Holman. This includes the same sentence divisions, same syntactic construction of complex sentences, same word order even, whenever this is grammatically possible. As to the lexical choice, J. Burnip often prefers the primary lexical counterpart of the individual word, while Holman is prepared to choose something else. These two (syntactic pattern, including word order, and lexical choice) are among the most obvious parameters that determine whether a translation will be described as literal or free. M. Holman also allows himself greater freedom to expand, elaborate and substitute. We seem to be dealing with a case where the two translators have obvious preferences as to the method of translation. Of our two translators, Burnip much more often, almost always, prefers the solution which is closer to a literal (or word-for-word) rendering of the original, while Holman allows himself much greater freedom. JB's translations of Yovkov are described in France (195) as "rigorously faithful".

The distinction between these two approaches (free interpretation vs. radically literal rendering of the text) and the argument which of them is to be preferred, goes at least as far back as Cicero and Horace (1st c. BC). It was elaborated a few centuries later by St. Jerome, who introduced the notion of sense-for-sense translation in an attempt to formulate a position in-between the two extremes. St. Jerome also believed that the method is conditioned by the function of the translation, thus showing profound understanding of the complexity of the problems. At least some of the pros and cons of each approach have been recognised all along. (On the historical perspective of these discussions see Malmkjaer (1–15), among others.)

Word-for-word translation in the strict sense, as we all know, is often impossible, so if we have to choose one of the two extreme positions, literal translation will have to be rejected, except for some very special and limited cases. Here is some argumentation coming from a modern linguist:

> So-called literal, faithful translations are notoriously unsatisfactory as translations; the Italian slogan, 'Traduttore, traditore' ("The translator is a betrayer"), which itself can hardly be translated satisfactorily into English, is relevant in more ways than one to the whole question of faithful translation . . . The translator may be unfaithful to his own language, as well as to the text whose content and style he is attempting to reproduce. (Lyons 257–258)

J. Lyons aptly reminds us that the concept of faithfulness raises the question: faithful to what, and translators are painfully aware that the various fidelities are more often than not in conflict with one another. The same author elaborates on the topic:

> There is, however, a theoretically more interesting reason why what is loosely called word-for-word translation is generally unsatisfactory and frequently impossible and this is that the boundaries between the meanings of what at first sight appear to be semantically equivalent words in different languages may be, and very often are incongruent. (236)

This is a subtle point which has to be added to the more obvious fact that some languages lexicalise certain meanings/concepts (i.e. they have a word for them) while others do not.

In contrastive linguistics, too, experts recognise the, at times, inevitable interlingual level-shifts and rank-shifts (James 30). What in one language is expressed on one level or with a unit of a given size/rank has to be expressed on a different level or with a different type of unit in another.

Of the two labels "word-for-word" and "faithful", the second has positive connotations in contrast to the first. As a matter of fact, faithfulness could be claimed by the adherents of either of the two approaches. What is important, let's repeat it, is faithful in what respect? There are many levels of faithfulness both within each of the two languages involved (SL and TL) and, even more importantly, in the correspondences between the two texts (original and translation). It is clear that word-for-word, literal translation on the one hand, and faithful translation on the other, cannot be taken to be synonymous.

The problem of faithfulness can be related to that of the unit of translation: i.e. within the limits of what chunk of the text we are trying to be faithful, to achieve equivalence, to be successful. The very term "word-for-word" suggests the link between the two: literal translation tries to achieve success at word level. (Poetic/literary translation may at times aim at even smaller size-levels: those of the morpheme or sound). Free translation, on the other hand, relies on larger parts of the text (ultimately the whole text).

Fidelity (or faithfulness, loyalty) is said to exhibit the following features: 1) transferred cultural words; 2) no unnecessary deviation from the grammatical and lexical ST structures; 3) loyalty to the ST author's textual objectives (Munday 2009). Observing these requirements is quite a task, especially point three. Point one, on the other hand, reminds us of yet another possible relationship, that with the opposition foreignisation/domestication, most obvious in the case of *realia*, but transcending this to include other levels as well. (For a discussion of the opposition native/foreign in relation to translation as interpreted by A. Popovič see Zlateva 113, 115).

There is no doubt that translation is a situation which creates most favorable conditions for transfer from the source to the target text/language and provokes this process. (On the closeness of the two and the relationship between them as theoretical concepts, see Danchev's article "Transfer and Translation" (1982)). At least some translators are aware of this and at times they have to make conscious decisions whether to transfer (i.e. stick as close as possible to the form of the

original) or not. This seems to be the case with our two translators. We are lucky to have their own comments on this, contained in Holman (2003), an article which also tells the story of a failed attempt on the part of the two translators to co-operate in preparing an English version of *Staroplaninski Legendi*. Burnip and Holman got to know each other in the late 70s and they discovered their common admiration for Yovkov. Holman had been teaching Yovkov to his students at the University of Leeds since the late 60s and had already translated some of the Legends (*Koshuta* among them). John Burnip too had done some work in this direction. They both wanted to see Yovkov's stories published in England or America. For a time they thought they might do this together, dividing the stories among themselves. This didn't work out for various reasons, not least, perhaps, because they discovered that they had different approaches to the task of translating Yovkov. In his notes prepared for Holman, in the stage when the two of them exchange ideas and bits of the texts they had already translated, John Burnip writes:

> I have tried to stay with the original as far as possible. This includes the retention of word order, clause structure, figures of speech, assonances and other musical devices, the avoidance of changes brought in because they seem attractive or clever.
>
> (Holman 2003: 145)

In this we see not only an explicit statement of the translator's principles but also, at the end of the quote, an implied criticism of the alternative approach. Michael Holman describes his own position, in contrast to John Burnip's *author-oriented approach*, as follows:

> My own approach . . . was more *oriented towards the reader* and the receiving culture. It made for greater freedom from the syntax of the original and sought to assist compreshension sometimes by explanation and expansion, embroidery and embellishment, John [Burnip] would have called it! Both approaches had their advantages and disadvantages, but were not easy to reconcile.
>
> (Holman 2003: 145. Holman's English version of this and previous quote. Emphasis added, C.S.)

Burnip focuses almost exclusively on the source text, which seems to fascinate and mesmerise him, while Holman's primary concern is to make sure that at least some of the qualities of the original will get across to a reader with a different, fairly distant linguistic and cultural background.

Author-oriented/reader-oriented, the terms used by Holman, correlate in important ways with literal/free, and also with foreignisation/domestication, each of the pairs, however, foregrounding different aspects of the process and results of the translation. Holman's terminology is more pragmatically oriented and involves the participants/agents in the writing/translation and reading process.

For a discussion of Holman's views on translation, see also Stamenov and Rashidi (235–237).

Yovkov was very conscious of and at times self-reflexive about the importance of the linguistic form of the literary text and its artistic effect. Before S. Kazandzhiev he shares his dissatisfaction with the quality of the contemporary literary language:

> There is in the literary language we use when writing a logic of reasoning, a grammatical correctness which robs the language of life. We almost always start with the subject, then comes the verb and then the other complementing words. Think of the living spoken word: what freedom, what dynamism! The word you start with, the line of movement and its whims and caprices, the pauses, the speedings-up, the eruptions, the modulations of the voice – that's what makes the spoken word alive. I have often thought about the difference between living speech and written language and have always come to the conclusion that our written literary language is by far poorer and more deprived of life than the spoken word . . .

Yovkov believed that in *Staroplaninski legendi* and especially in *Koshuta* and *Shibil* he had achieved some success with respect to the language form. He further elaborates:

> . . . This requires a radical shift from the plane of reasoning to the plane of emotions. The logic of emotions is quite a different matter. There we can introduce more lyricism and dramatic quality into the language. As a matter of fact, we can bring into language all the artistic qualities – richness of rhythm, variation of tempo, music, colour, shape, etc.
>
> (Йовков, 1956, 404–405. My translation, C.S.)

One of the Bulgarian critics of Yovkov, Ivan Sarandev, points out the specific slow and solemn, mythically epic rhythm of the descriptive opening paragraph of *Koshuta* (107). It seems doubtful that an effect similar to that of the original can be achieved by sticking as close as possible to the word order of the source text. Bulgarian and English may be both SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) languages, but word order in Bulgarian is considerably more flexible than in English. Each of these languages has different rhythmic principles, different length of the words, a large number of different specific syntactic constructions. All this complicates matters considerably.

It may be a bit simplistic to label and categorise the approaches of the two translators as I have done in this discussion. It is not impossible to find counterexamples from the two target texts to the tendencies outlined above. Nevertheless these tendencies are fairly noticeable in the texts and, what is more, they are self-confessed by the two translators. The important thing is that we have two published English versions of Yovkov's story, executed by two translators approaching their task with a sense of responsibility and appreciation of the original.

The fact that the two translated versions are different is only too natural and it is up to the reading public to judge their merits and success.

In a short poem entitled "Translation" Shurbanov („Отражения" 205) describes his reaction on reading his own poetry translated into another language. These are not my poems, he says, these are your poems pretending to be mine. And because you like my poems, you try to present them in the best possible light. My poems are carefully (can we also add, suspiciously) observing from a distance your versions, which are trying to become like mine and, in this way, displace them.

Although the translated version is not the original, there is no other way for a literary text to perform its peregrination across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The wider the gap to bridge and the greater the distance/difference to overcome, the more challenging the task before the translator.

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