

## INTO THE BUSH: THE BULGARIAN TRANSLATION OF CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

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The paper offers a detailed discussion of the only Bulgarian translation to date of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, made by Grigor Pavlov in 1971 and subsequently republished. It examines the ways in which Pavlov deals with the challenges of the text, and highlights the major consequences of the translation's flaws (e.g. the substantial differences between Conrad's Marlow and Pavlov's Marlow). Finally, the paper suggests the need for a critical rereading of translations made during a period in the history of Bulgarian translation when the patronage of the socialist state is presumed to have ensured excellent quality standards.

**Key words:** (re)translation, Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Grigor Pavlov

Some months ago I was asked to edit a new Bulgarian translation of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It was a tempting offer – this is a book I love – but working on a translation of the novella when one already existed might, I was afraid, amount to self-indulgence. Indeed, the idea of justification is central to much retranslation theory – according to one succinct formulation, “retranslation needs to be justified; it cannot just be” (Massardier-Kenney 2015: 75).<sup>1</sup> Retranslation, from that perspective, also involves entering a battlefield – because it contests earlier translations, its position is at once “defensive” and “offensive” (ibid.). The prospect of girding up for battle is not necessarily appealing, however, and the battle could well be a losing one. With respect to Bulgarian translations of Conrad in particular, doubts have been voiced about the *raison d'être* of the

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<sup>1</sup> Massardier-Kenney herself does not share this view and chooses to present retranslation in positive terms. Like her and most translation scholars, I use the term *retranslation* to refer to “the act of translating a work that has previously been translated into the same language” (Baker, Saldanha 2009: 233).

retranslations of *Youth*, *Typhoon*, and *The Shadow Line*, where earlier translations prove superior (Asparuhov 2000: 340 – 341).

To make sure that a retranslation would be warranted, I needed to read the existing translation. That is how I came to study Grigor Pavlov's translation, first published in 1971 and subsequently republished in 1985 (within a five-volume selection of Conrad's work) and as recently as 2018.<sup>2</sup> Reading the opening two paragraphs dampened my enthusiasm somewhat. To begin with, the Bulgarian translation contains a physical impossibility – the same scene is set simultaneously at high tide (according to the first paragraph) and low tide (according to the second). In addition, an entire sentence has been omitted: “A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness” (Conrad 1995: 15).<sup>3</sup> That was not an auspicious beginning. Translation blemishes and blunders of various kinds accumulated as I read on, but even so it was a shock to reach, at one point, such a gross mistranslation as the following, in which the meaning of the sentence is reversed:

I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. [...] I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. (91)  
Почти му завиждах, че притежава този скромен и ясен пламък. [...] Аз му завиждах за предаността му към Курц. (347)

Taking the translation as a whole, one must acknowledge that Pavlov makes a number of excellent linguistic choices; that as a rule his Bulgarian is rich, varied and idiomatic; that he successfully recreates the mood of the novella. At the same time, the translation contains far too many signal failures: the “ratio of loss and gain” inherent in all translation (Venuti 2013: 101) is skewed.

Some of the mistakes are elementary – the result, most typically, of a failure to distinguish between the different meanings of the same word and opting for the most common meaning, while disregarding the context. Thus, *external checks* (42) is rendered as *проверка* (304) rather than *външни ограничения*; “kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you” (82) is rendered as „любезни съседни, готови да ви развеселят или ухапят” (339); “she stopped as if her heart had failed her” (99) is rendered

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<sup>2</sup> References will be given to the 1985 edition as the most widely available (and the only one available online), though the examples of mistranslation and omission to be cited are common to all three editions. I will consider the differences between the editions further in the paper.

<sup>3</sup> All references to Conrad's original are made to the same edition.

as „тя се спря, сякаш бе спряло сърцето ѝ” (354) rather than *сякаш бе изгубила смелост*. Pavlov repeatedly disregards the logic of the fictional situation. When, for instance, Marlow compliments the chief accountant on his immaculate *linen* (36), the word clearly refers to the jacket, trousers, etc. the character is wearing – not to his underwear, as Pavlov renders the word (*бельото*: 299). The rendition is absurd: Marlow has just met the accountant, and in any case it is hard to imagine under what circumstances he could gain such intimate knowledge of the state of the accountant’s underwear. Or consider this passage, in which an ironic Marlow describes his aunt’s misguided enthusiasm for the enterprise he is about to join:

It appeared [...] I was also one of the Workers, with a capital – you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. (28)

Стана също ясно, че съм един от работниците с капитал. Разбирате, нали? Нещо като посланик на светлината. Нещо като апостол от по-низша категория. (292)

The mistranslation of the phrase *Workers, with a capital* is hard to explain or condone, considering that *Workers* is capitalized and that *capital* is used as a countable noun. The mistake is even harder to account for when we remember that the translation was made in the 1970s – the dominant ideology in Bulgaria at the time postulated an irreconcilable opposition between workers and capital; Pavlov, no less than anyone else, would have had an excellent grounding in that opposition.

Such mistranslations result in serious deformations. And sometimes Pavlov’s automatic choice to render a word through its most common meaning leads to a complete communication breakdown. When Kurtz, lamenting his thwarted ambitions, says “And now for this stupid scoundrel –” (106), he means that the scoundrel has interfered with his plans (*ако не беше този глупав измамник*); Pavlov, however, renders this as „А сега за този глупав измамник...” (360), which is meaningless.

Another group of mistranslations seem to result from simple carelessness. When Pavlov renders Marlow’s reflections that attacking is “only one way of resisting” (34) as „единственият начин да се съпротивяваш” (297), the reversal of meaning is probably the consequence of misreading the original (*only one way* vs. *the only way*). Numbers, too, can go wrong – this is Marlow describing the long trek to the Central Station:

Day after day, with the stamp and shuffle of sixty pair [*sic*] of bare feet behind me, each pair under a 60-lb. load. (39)

Ден след ден бях следван от тропота на шестдесет чифта боси нозе, всеки чифт превит под тежестта на сто и двадесет килограма. (301)

Clearly, Pavlov multiplied the sixty pounds by two instead of dividing them by two – an easy mistake to make, perhaps, but the result is a gross mistranslation that throws all common sense away: in what world are people able to carry 120 kg as a matter of course?

Another serious flaw of the translation are the numerous omissions. Individual words, phrases, even sentences are routinely omitted – sometimes for no apparent reason and sometimes presumably because they pose a serious challenge to the translator, or because in his judgement they do not have much to contribute. The omissions may result in a complete change of meaning – as when, in a description of the Intended, “the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features” (116 – 117) is translated as „деликатния израз на тези черти” (369). Pavlov’s tendency to trim and prune inevitably diminishes Conrad’s fictional world. In the following sentence, Marlow describes the general manager’s uncle:

I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the creek, the mud, the river [...] (58)

И махна с ръка към гората, заливчето, калта, реката [...] (319)

The translation of *his short flipper of an arm* as *ръка* fails to convey the ridiculousness of the character’s gesture (the contrast between his stubby arm and the immensity of the jungle he means to grasp) and thus blunts Marlow’s criticism of the absurd presumption of white man seeking to make Africa his own – a criticism central to the novella’s ideology.

The omissions also affect the depiction of a major character like Kurtz. Consider the following examples from a single descriptive passage – each of the segments in italics is omitted in Pavlov’s translation:

I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head *that nodded with grotesque jerks*. [...] His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling *as from a winding-sheet*. [...] Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms – two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine – *the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter*. (97 – 98)

The omission of *that nodded with grotesque jerks* diminishes the impression of Kurtz as an “animated image of death”, as he is referred to a little later (97); the omission of *as from a winding-sheet* similarly weakens the recurrent motif of Kurtz as a “disinterred body” (80); and the omission of *the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter* reduces the complexity of his characterization.

One type of omission that deserves special attention is related to the novella’s frequent use of verbal repetition for rhetorical effect. Here, too, Pavlov exhibits a tendency to trim; as often as not, he will eliminate the repetition – for instance:

Anything – anything can be done in this country. (57)

Тук всичко е възможно. (318)

Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. (90)

Очарованието го тласкаше напред, то го предпазваше от удари. (346)

By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears – of tears that would not fall. (121)

В последните отблясъци на здрача видях горящите ѝ очи, пълни със сълзи, които не можеха да се отронят. (373)

Likewise, although Pavlov can render adequately the effects produced through the use of parallelism, asyndeton or polysyndeton, far too often he disregards them altogether. As a result, what in the original is stylistically marked appears in the translation as unmarked:

Instead of rivets there came an invasion, an infliction, a visitation. (54)

Вместо нитове върху нас врѣхлетя наказание, напаст божия. (315)

this strange world of plants, and water, and silence (60)

този странен [...] свят на растения, вода и тишина (320)

The consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent, so quiet – as silent and quiet as the ruined house on the hill – made me uneasy. (93)

Мисълта, че там, в шубраците, се крият хора, тихи и безмълвни като порутената къща на върха на хълма, ме обезпокои. (349)

In all these instances – and the examples can be multiplied – the translation neutralizes the distinctive rhythms of the original and flattens out its emphases and its emotional heightening. Pavlov’s tendency to eliminate

verbal repetition and normalize syntactic patterning reduces a number of passages in the translation to bland summaries of the original – though they convey the text’s propositional content well enough, they fail to recreate its impact.

Though more subtly, the rhythm of the text is also affected by the way Pavlov repeatedly splits the long, labyrinthine sentences in which the novella abounds into two or more shorter sentences. On virtually every page of the translation there is at least one instance of such splitting; often, there will be multiple instances. But the rhythm of a sentence of average length is different from the rhythm of a long sentence (as are its logic and cohesion). Besides, the reduction to average length weakens the original’s contrasts between markedly long and markedly short sentences. A few of these splits seem inevitable – the choice is between splitting the sentence and violating the conventions of Bulgarian syntax. Those, however, are the exception. The majority of the splits could have been avoided, although that would have required a greater effort on the translator’s part. Finally, there are splits that seem completely unwarranted and unmotivated:

He was stand-offish with the other agents, and they on their side said he was the manager’s spy upon them. (45)

С другите агенти се държеше студено. А те от своя страна твърдяха, че е шпионин на управителя. (307)

It is unclear what difficulty – either for the translator or for the reader – is avoided here. Such indiscriminate splitting even of short, uncomplicated sentences suggests that with Pavlov the impulse to split became a sort of translator’s tic.

Another area in which the translation often disappoints is the broad area of character interaction and dialogue. Pavlov’s translation repeatedly misattributes actions and attitudes – the result, probably, of hasty reading and a disregard for the logic of the fictional situation. Thus, for instance, “He declared he would shoot me unless I [...] cleared out of the country” (92; spoken by the Russian) tells us that Kurtz wants to drive the Russian away. In the Bulgarian translation, it is Kurtz who is planning to go away: „Заяви, че ще ме застреля, [...] и след това ще се махне от страната” (348). Such gross mistranslations result in serious deformations. The dialogue in the novella is affected particularly seriously – words spoken by the doctor examining Marlow are misattributed to Marlow; words spoken by the general manager are again misattributed to Marlow; words spoken by Kurtz are misattributed to the general manager; etc. In one instance,

Pavlov's failure to translate a reporting clause signalling that Marlow is talking to the pilgrims ("I expounded": 73), rather than silently reflecting, makes the pilgrims' actions – a response to Marlow's shocking suggestion – incomprehensible. One of the most significant pragmatic distortions of a character's utterance occurs in the following passage:

At this moment I heard Kurtz's deep voice behind the curtain: "Save me! – save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me. Save *me!* Why, I've had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. [...]" (100; italics in the original)

В този миг чух дълбокия глас на Курц зад завесата: „Спасете ме! Искате да кажете слоновата кост? Не казвайте. Спасете *мене!* А трябваше аз да ви спася. Пречите на плановете ми. [...]" (355)

Talking to the general manager, Conrad's Kurtz is clearly echoing a preceding utterance which Marlow does not catch, and he is clearly outraged by the implied suggestion that the pilgrims are there to save him. Pavlov's Kurtz, by contrast, is begging to be saved. An appropriate translation here would be, rather, „Да ме спасите ли? [...] Мене да спасите?". The deformation stems from the translator's failure to consider either the immediate context – the implausibility of someone pleading to be saved and simultaneously complaining about being interrupted – or the character of Kurtz in its totality. As a result, the translation transforms Conrad's proud and fierce Kurtz into a pathetic supplicant.

Marlow's characterization, too, is radically affected by Pavlov's flawed translation. To begin with, the repeated splitting of longer sentences has important consequences not only for the rhythm of the prose and the reader's perception of individual scenes, but also for the rendition of Marlow's mind style, in Roger Fowler's term. The translation alters those "consistent structural options" which "cut[...] the presented world to one pattern or another" and "give rise to an impression of a world-view" (Fowler 1977: 76). Marlow's sinuous, serpentine syntax reflects his tortuous thought processes as he gropes towards understanding; to change the syntax is to change the man and the mind.

Marlow's complex and ambivalent character also falls victim to Pavlov's tendency to trim and prune. Conrad's Marlow often pauses to search for the right word, and tends toward tentative expressions like *seemed to* and *appeared to*; *of some sort* and *a kind of*; *as if* and *so to speak*. In Pavlov's translation, these markers of uncertainty are routinely omitted. As a result, Marlow's thought processes and experience are

simplified; the extent of his ignorance – a leitmotif in his characterization – is diminished; and the contrast between appearance and reality, subjective view and objective fact, is cancelled. A few examples will suffice:

You have no idea how effective such a ... a ... faculty can be. (42)  
Нямате представа колко ефектна може да бъде такава способност.  
(304)

What made this emotion so overpowering was – how shall I define it? – the moral shock I received [...] (104)  
Зашемети ме нравственият удар [...] (358)

We could have fancied ourselves the first of men [...] (62)  
Ние бяхме първите хора [...] (322)

It looked like a high-handed proceeding; but it was really a case of legitimate self-defence. (70)  
Това бе проява на своеволие, но всъщност бе акт на законна самозащита. (328 – 329)

In the last example, with the collapse of the distinction between appearance and reality, the sentence becomes meaningless.

Furthermore, while Conrad's Marlow is often unsure even about his own feelings and perceptions, Pavlov's Marlow appears to have direct access to the feelings and perceptions of others:

Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky [...] (100)  
Внезапно разпери големите [sic] си ръце и ги изправи високо над главата си, овладяна от непреодолимото желание да докосне небето [...] (354 – 355)

He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness. (103)  
Той вярваше, че е отлично екипиран за нова среща с джунглата. (357)

Not only does the Bulgarian Marlow speak authoritatively where the English Marlow registers a tentative impression or the realization of an erroneous judgement – the Bulgarian Marlow acts much more resolutely too:



I strode rapidly with clenched fists. I fancy I had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving him a drubbing. I don't know. (105)

Крчех бързо със свити юмруци. Щях да го намеря и да го пребия. (359)

Pavlov's translation also often diminishes Marlow's interaction with his friends on the *Nellie*. Conrad's Marlow makes his friends privy to his thought processes, to his uncertainty and ignorance; he appeals to them for a recognition of his difficulties, or seeks some common experiential or epistemological ground they share with him. The translation considerably weakens this aspect of the narration. Consider the following passages – each of the segments in italics is omitted in Pavlov's translation:

I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, *you know*, but as discoursing. (79)

And there, *don't you see?* your strength comes in [...] (82)

I did not want to have the throttling of him, *you understand* – and indeed it would have been very little use for any practical purpose. (106)

And I wasn't arguing with a lunatic either. *Believe me or not*, his intelligence was perfectly clear [...] (107)

These omissions make Pavlov's Marlow very different from Conrad's. The English Marlow's repeated addresses to his audience reflect his need to make himself understood and his uncertainty that he *is* making himself understood; they reflect, too, his hope to find validation for his experience. The Bulgarian Marlow is marked by no such uncertainty or vulnerability – he is both a more confident narrator and a more monologic one.

Besides such omissions, the perception that Marlow is addressing an audience is also subtly weakened through the rendition of the personal pronoun *you*. In the translation, that sometimes disappears in a more impersonal construction, or is replaced by the first person singular:

You couldn't imagine a more deadly place for a shipwreck. (72)

А едва ли имаше по-ужасно място за корабкрушение. (330)

[E]ven while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he – the man before your eyes – who had gone through these things. (91)

[Д]ори когато разговаряше с мен, забравях, че той – човекът пред очите ми – бе преживял всичко това. (347)

In the second example, the Bulgarian Marlow presents the experience as exclusively his own, while the English Marlow draws his friends into it and perhaps suggests for it a broader validity (the generic *you*). This verbal gesture is significant – it is a poignant attempt on Marlow’s part to counteract the truth about the human condition he states elsewhere: “We live, as we dream – alone ....” (50). The mistranslation of pronouns like *you* or *one* may have other important consequences, too. Consider the following:

You looked on amazed, and began to suspect yourself of being deaf – then the night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well. (67)

Огледахме се изумени и помислихме, че сме оглушали – след това нощта падна внезапно и ни ослепи. (327)

Pavlov’s choice to render the second person as the first person plural produces two unfortunate effects: not only does it weaken Marlow’s engagement with his audience, but it also blurs the distinction between him and the pilgrims – a distinction maintained throughout the novella. The effect of such false identification between Marlow and the pilgrims is particularly disastrous in the following passage:

[T]his suspicion of their not being inhuman [...] would come slowly to one. [...] [W]hat thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. (62 – 63)

[П]одозрението, че те не са нечовеци [...] се вселяваше в нас бавно. [...] [М]исълта за тяхната човечност – като нашата – ни караше да тръпнем, мисълта за далечното ни родство с тази дива и страстна врява. (322)

In this passage, by *one* Marlow really means himself, and the use of *you* signals his attempt to share his experience with his audience. The pilgrims most certainly do not share the experience – they feel no kinship with the native people. Pavlov thus falsifies the fictional reality of Conrad’s novella. By blurring the distinction between Marlow’s and the pilgrims’ perceptions, Pavlov obscures the difference between their moral compasses – a difference central to the novella’s ideology. Pronouns, this passage reminds

us, must be handled with great sensitivity in translation – their inadequate rendition may destroy communities existing in the fictional world and create spurious ones.

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I have been talking of Pavlov's translation and Pavlov's choices, but of course translation is a joint effort. All the serious flaws of the Bulgarian translation are the responsibility of Pavlov himself, certainly, but also of his editors. The mistranslations and omissions discussed above are, as I said, common to all three editions of the translation. It seems highly unlikely that the editors read the original along with the translation: they seem to have read the translation alone, presumably in order merely to smooth out the rough edges. The editor of the first edition, Bogdana Zidarova, was an author in her own right, with a degree in German. Up to and including 1971, she had written a few books of poetry (two of them for children) and had compiled a volume of modern Scandinavian poetry, translating a portion of the poems and writing the preface. At that point, she had done no translation from English, although she was to do some later in her career.<sup>4</sup> Neither Zidarova's formal education nor her experience suited her to the task of editing Pavlov's translation; her appointment seems to have been determined by extraliterary factors. Even if she did read the English original along with the Bulgarian version, she was perhaps so certain of Pavlov's superior expertise or so awed by his reputation – he was a translator, interpreter for the government, and university lecturer in English and American literature – that she unquestioningly accepted even his most obviously flawed choices. That, of course, defeats the whole purpose of editing. But, again, it is far more likely that she did not compare the translation with the original at all.

Hristo Kanev, the editor of the 1985 edition, presents a different case. By 1985, he had translated several major novels from English, and was to translate even more, becoming a prominent translator of Victorian fiction in particular. Even more importantly, he is Bulgaria's most productive translator of Conrad – in the late 1960s and early 70s he translated *Lord Jim*, *Nostramo*, *The Shadow-Line*, and *Youth*. It is because he was so eminently suited to the task of editing Pavlov's translation that

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<sup>4</sup> A short bio-bibliographical note on Zidarova can be found at <https://literaturesviat.com/?p=131972>. Detailed information about her output as author and translator can be found in COBISS.

his work disappoints so. The differences between the 1985 and the 1971 edition are mostly minimal. Typically, Kanev makes minor alterations in phrasing – e.g. „Бяха се минали повече от тридесет дни” (1971: 34) becomes „Бяха изминали повече от тридесет дни” (1985: 294); „Той спря да говори” (1971: 18) becomes „Той млъкна” (1985: 284). Many of these alterations are slight improvements; substantial improvements – like the change from „този папие-маше Мефистофел” (1971: 58) to „този Мефистофел от папиемаше” (1985: 310) – are few. For the most part, Kanev tinkers with small details without fixing the serious problems; here is a representative example:

He had been absent for several months – getting himself adored, I suppose [...] (93)

Той бе отсъствал няколко месеца, радвайки се на обграждащото го, предполагам [...] (1971: 122)

Той отсъствувал няколко месеца, радвайки се, предполагам, на това, което го обгражда [...] (1985: 349)

The minor alterations are pointless when the phrase *getting himself adored* remains grossly mistranslated. Indeed, not only does Kanev fail to remove the major flaws from Pavlov’s translation – sometimes he actually adds to them. For example, he does some pruning of his own:

[T]he sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever heard [...] (121)

[В] глухия ѝ глас се чува други звуци, изпълнени с тайнственост, пустош и мъка, звуци, които бях чувал [...] (1971: 161)

[В] глухия ѝ глас се чува други звуци, които бях чувал [...] (1985: 373)

While *изпълнени с тайнственост, пустош и мъка* does sound a little awkward, surely an editor’s job is to help polish the offending phrase – instead, Kanev gets rid of it altogether. Or consider the following passage (emphasis has been added):

*Now, as far as I did see, I could go to the right or to the left of this. I didn’t know either channel, of course. The banks looked pretty well alike, the depth appeared the same [...]. (74)*

*Реших да мина отдясно или отляво на тези островчета. Не познавах течението. Бреговете изглеждаха съвсем еднакви, а също и дълбочината [...]. (1971: 94)*

*Реших да мина отдясно или отляво на тези островчета. Бреговете изглеждаха съвсем еднакви, а също и дълбочината [...]. (1985: 332)*

Here, Pavlov neutralizes Marlow's tentativeness through omission, and Kanev, through further omission, eliminates his confession of ignorance as well, perhaps because he regards it as superfluous.

If Kanev, so superbly equipped to edit the Bulgarian translation of *Heart of Darkness*, does not live up to expectations, one can hardly hope for better from the editor of the 2018 edition. Kremena Boynova studied Classics and German and has mostly worked as a proofreader. She has translated two books – one from English and one from German; those are both slim popular romances (64 and 47 pages respectively) published in the early 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Her appointment as editor of the translation is a dubious choice; nor is it clear what the title “editor” stands for in this case – the 2018 edition is an almost exact replica of the 1985 edition, with only a handful of alterations of a proofreading kind (e.g. *Гринвич* is changed to *Гринуич*; *плувахме* is changed to *плавахме*). It seems fairly clear that no editorial work was done here. The publishing house, My Book, founded in 2018, apparently took for granted the quality of a text produced by one of the most renowned publishing houses of the recent past, Georgi Bakalov; or, alternatively, was unwilling to make a financial investment. It is regrettable that a publisher boasting the production of Conrad's work as proof of the refined literary tastes they cater to should have done nothing to offer the reader a text of good quality.<sup>6</sup>

The practice of editing a translation without comparing it with the original is one we tend to associate with the contemporary book industry. In contemporary publishing, translations are often assigned so-called editors for style, who often do not speak the language of the original; this makes the entire publication process quicker, easier, and cheaper – a major consideration when a publisher wants to churn out as many new books as

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<sup>5</sup> Information about Boynova's translations is available in COBISS. Her education background features in her Facebook account; information about the books she has proofread and the occasional book she has edited can be garnered from [biblioman.chitanka.info](http://biblioman.chitanka.info).

<sup>6</sup> See the publisher's website: <http://www.my-book.bg/>. Conrad is the first of several authors cited to support the claim that My Book aims to offer literature of superior value and “the highest quality on the book market” (my translation).

possible (Pipeva 2020: 326 – 327). To judge from the 1971 and 1985 editions of the Bulgarian *Heart of Darkness*, book publishing in socialist Bulgaria – famous for its rigorous control over the entire process of translation and publication, and presumably not driven by ambitions for quick profit – was not above such dubious practices, leading to such shoddy results.<sup>7</sup>

And even if we assume that the editors of Pavlov’s translation were engaged merely as stylistic editors and were not expected to read the original, their work is still remarkably careless. One does not need to read the original in order to see, for instance, the absurdity of the same scene unfolding simultaneously at high and low tide, or of a man carrying a load of 120 kg. There are, in fact, a series of curious mistakes in the Bulgarian *Heart of Darkness* whose origin is hard to pinpoint and for which any combination of translator, possibly copyist, editor, compositor, and proofreader could be responsible. Thus, for example, “[s]trings of dusty niggers” (37) appears as „[г]рупа страшни негри” (299; instead of *прашни*); “This was the station’s mess-room” (42) appears as „Такъв бе стилът на лагера” (304; instead of *столът*); “neither that fireman nor I had any time to peer into our creepy thoughts” (64) appears as „Нито огънят ми, нито аз имахме време да надникнем в страховитите си мисли” (324; instead of *огнярът ми*); etc.<sup>8</sup> The translation even contains what seem to be traces of a first draft, with Pavlov wondering between different lexical and syntactic choices – e.g. the sentence “The Chapman light-house, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly” (17) appears as „Заблестя фарът Чапман – трикрака постройка, издигната върху калния бряг, – засия ярко” (282). Regardless of who was responsible for them, such faults disfigure the text no less than the mistranslations and omissions discussed earlier.

For over fifty years, then, Bulgarian readers have had a deeply flawed version of Conrad’s novella. In such a case, the idea of retranslation as a tribute to the fundamentally open nature of the literary text – as an avenue to diversity (Baker, Saldanha 2009: 233), mobility (Massardier-

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<sup>7</sup> The translation industry of socialist Bulgaria contrasted its principles and practices with those of earlier times – stressing, for example, that the nationalization of publishing houses minimized commercial motives (Zhechev 1977: 40), that translators were now committed to recreating not only the substance but also the style of the text, and that the increased role of editors safeguarded against deviations from the original (Vaseva 1977: 124, 126, 134).

<sup>8</sup> These mistakes, like the anomalous sentence that follows, appear in all three editions; as before, references are given to the 1985 edition.

Kenney 2015: 82), or re-accentuation (Peeters, Van Poucke 2023: 13) – seems like a luxury. Retranslation, this case study shows, can be a matter of a basic need for reliability; and existing translations need to be re-examined and re-evaluated regardless of established reputations – either individual or institutional ones.

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