

**NAMING TROPES AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS
OF THE DREAMING:
EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING
NEIL GAIMAN’S “THE SANDMAN”**

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Since its debut in 1989, Neil Gaiman’s seminal work “The Sandman” has been widely regarded as one of the most important comics ever published, with issue #19, winning the “World Fantasy Award” for original short story in 1991. Originally published by “DC Comics”, the series saw its first publication in Bulgarian in 2022, courtesy of “Artline Studios”, with issues #1-20 appearing in three collected editions. As the translator of the aforementioned three books and with the field of comics being of particular interest to this writer, it is the goal of the current paper to bring to light the cultural and literary aspects of “The Sandman” and the difficulties of transferring them to Bulgarian.

Key words: The Sandman, Comics, Translation, Neil Gaiman, Cultural Adaptation

THE BASICS

For the purposes of this paper being accessible to a broader audience, it should be noted that while important elements of how comics generally work will be addressed, they are not the main point of the current text and are not explored in great detail. As such, the writer would like to point interested readers to Scott McCloud’s “Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art” (1993, Tundra Publishing). Instead, the main focus of the text is to provide examples of intertextuality, allusions, genre tropes featured throughout volumes 1 and 2 of “The Sandman”, along with proper argumentation of their translation and analysis of how said translation was dictated not merely by the target language, but also the limitations and requirements of comic books as a medium. For the sake of this analysis, we shall define translation as a method for carrying over verbal, written and, in

on the other hand, will cover all aspects that are familiar to most of the target audience – this includes elements of national, cultural heritage e.g. customs, references to everyday activities and pastimes – books, TV programs, etc. According to previous research, “In the first 8 issues of the comic, 181 intertextual references were found, the largest proportion of which were references to literature, religion and mythology. Comic book references were second highest in number, followed by music and finally references to films series and theatrical pieces which were the least common ones.” (Dakić, 2023: 63). Key among these will be analyzed.

PART 1: THE NAMES IN “THE SANDMAN”

One of the great difficulties when it comes to translating comics is how character names should be interpreted, as often, especially in the superhero genre, names often relate to each particular character’s physical appearance, backstory, special powers and even purpose. As Mackova points out “...in some literary genres, for example in comedies, fairytales etc., connotations of the respective names have to be taken into consideration and the needs to be translated according to that (Newmark, A Textbook 214). The exact, generally applicable rules on translating, transferring and naturalization of names do not exist and the choice on this matter is usually the translator’s choice. [...] Some names have different functions in comics – comical effect, characterizing function, referential function, metaphoric function etc. Some names appear only in short, one-shot stories, and some re-appear throughout one or more long-running series.” (2012: 49-50)

One must also consider that such characters, currently, are often considered as merchandising opportunities, with them being adapted for movies and television, video-games, toys and collectibles, and any other form of marketable product imaginable. Thus, with multiple factors being present, there is no single approach to translating the name of each character.

The techniques most commonly adopted include: direct translation (“Iron Man” – „Железния човек“), transcription (“Spider-Man” – „Спайдърмен“), transliteration (“Batman” – „Батман“) or reinterpretation/adaptation (“Wolverine” – „Върколак“).

The title character of The Sandman presented a curious case, as he shares a name with several completely different characters, appearing in publications of both “DC Comics” and competitors such as “Marvel Comics”, as well as a mythological figure of folklore (the connection with which will be analyzed more thoroughly later in this paper).

The first issue arises with the common association of names ending in „ман“ or „мен“, with an emphasis on the „man“ (not to be confused with the stress of more common last names such as “Goldman”, “Silverman”, etc.) with the superhero naming trope. As the character does not have a superhero persona (unlike most of his namesakes), presenting him as „Сандман“ or „Сандмен“ respectively would have potentially alienated audiences, who are not interested in the superhero genre and thus limit the broader appeal of the author, whose name is attached to the work. Thus, transcription or transliteration were almost immediately rejected as viable options.

We then turn to a potential direct translation, that being „Пясъчния човек“. Returning to the concept of alienating an audience, such a translation would have likely been rejected by the comic’s pre-established fan-base in Bulgaria, who, due to an official translation not existing, would most commonly simply refer to the character using his original name. Furthermore, a direct translation could easily become a target of criticism from readers, who are familiar with the concept of The Sandman of folklore, his connection to the plot of the book and his Bulgarian equivalent, Suncho (Сънчо). Yet another reason for wanting to avoid the direct translation is that „Пясъчния човек“ had long since been established in various media as the name of the villainous Sandman (Flint Marko) featured heavily in books by “Marvel Comics”.

In conjunction with the Bulgarian publisher, it was therefore decided that, for marketing purposes, the title of “The Sandman” shall remain in English on the cover of the books and any mentions of it throughout the plot of the book will be substituted in various ways (such as using the character’s in-universe name, Dream, or other descriptive titles). In an attempt to give insight on what the story is about to newcomers, a sub-heading – „Господаря на сънищата“, was then added. It was deemed that the addition of this translated interpretation of the title character could also be supported by the fact that during their original English-language publication, issues #1-8 featured the very same sub-heading – “Master of Dreams”. „Господаря на сънищата“ respectively became the main form for interpreting “The Sandman” as a sobriquet throughout the story.

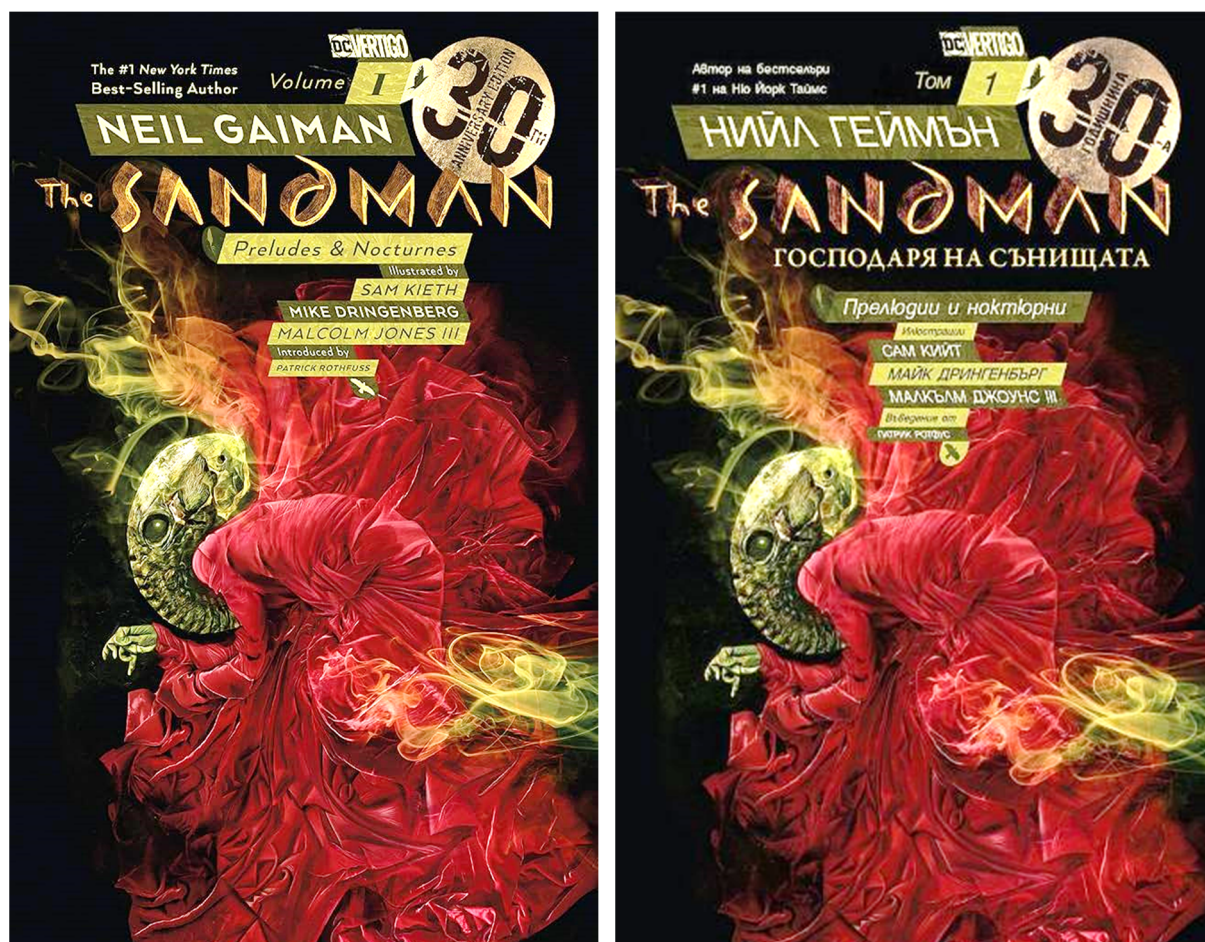


Fig. 1. Original (left) and Bulgarian (right) covers to “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition)

This, however, does not completely resolve the problematic nature of the name. A huge part of the initial storyline involves The Sandman trying to reacquire his tools of the trade, one of which is a pouch of magical sand, with his quest for it being the main plot point of issue #3 – “Dream a Little Dream of Me”. In a sequence from that story, the characters of John Constantine and Mad Hettie discuss the re-emergence of The Sandman after his long absence. In the translation process, I took advantage of their dialogue and used it as a way to gradually introduce the various concepts and potential translations for The Sandman, with him being referred to as “оня с пясъка“, „пясъчния човек“ and even being compared to „Сънчо“ in an additional short sentence, not present in the original story. This helped establish „Пясъчния човек“ as a valid translation where particular story sequences require it due to unavoidable plot threads or visual cues. A more detailed analysis of this scene is featured later in the paper.

With his more formal title now decided upon, it was time to focus on The Sandman’s “true” identity – that of Dream of the Endless. The Endless

are a family of seven anthropomorphic personifications of mythological and metaphysical entities, the names of which all start with the letter “D” – Dream, Destiny, Death, Desire, Despair, Delirium (formerly known as Delight) and Destruction. Despite only Dream and Death appearing in significant roles throughout volume 1, long-term plans for the series required all of the Endless’ names be considered carefully from the outset, so that the concept of the matching starting letters be preserved in the Bulgarian translation. Fortunate circumstances, that being that the Bulgarian words for both “dream” and “death” – „сън“ and „смърт“ respectively share the same starting letter, meant that “D” would be substituted with „C“. It was then a matter of trying to find words which both start with said letter and encapsulate to as close a degree as possible, the main concept of the characters. The list of The Endless’ names therefore turned out as follows:

Dream – Сън

Death – Смърт

Destiny – Съдба

Desire – Стрaст

Despair – Слабост

Delirium – Смут

Delight – Сладост

The name of the final Endless – Destruction – is still in development, as the character has not yet been mentioned within the first two volumes of the series. Options being currently considered include „Сеч“, „Съкрушение“ and „Страдание“.

In a paper focusing on the translation of volume 1, Jula Dakić points out that an identical approach, right down to the letter chosen, was also adopted for the Croatian translation by Tatjana Jambrišak (2023: 22)

Another alteration that was dictated by the changing of the letter was the quotation by character John Dee, included in the beginning of volume 1. While the original book features the line “D is for a lot of things”, the Bulgarian edition substitutes it with „Сънищата са истински“ – a line uttered by the same character, which fits the main concept of the book just as well.

Of particular interest in volumes 1 and 2, despite only being mentioned briefly, is Destiny, as the introduction to volume 2 puts an emphasis on the distinct connection between him and the “DC Comics” character Dr. Destiny (featured throughout volume 1). Naturally, as „Съдба“ had already been decided as the translation of Destiny, it would only make sense for the same word to be used for Dr. Destiny. However, a different character from the DC Universe – Dr. Fate – had already been established as „Д-р Съдба“ in Bulgarian throughout different media, such as the “Batman: The Brave and

the Bold” television series or the “Black Adam” theatrical feature. Thus, an alternate take was needed and Dr. Destiny was translated as „Д-р Участ“ instead. In an attempt to preserve the connection between Destiny of the Endless and Dr. Destiny, during the recap of events in the foreword to volume 2, the following sentence underwent slight alterations:

„John Dee, the self-styled Doctor Destiny (but shouldn't that name belong to another? To someone like our neighbor, with his robe and his book?)“

„Джон Дий, дал си прозвището Доктор Участ (Участ... Съдба...дали това име не принадлежи на някой друг? Някой като нашия събеседник, с неговата роба и тази книга?)“

Other characters of interest include incarnations of mythological figures such as The Norns of Norse mythology, introduced as “The Three-In-One” in the original book and established as „Тройната норна“ in their original appearance. It should be noted that, just like Dream, as the series progresses, they are also addressed as their equivalents from other cultures, such as the “The Moirai” or “The Fates”.

Mentions of the Erinyes or Eumenidies of Greek mythology as “The Kindly Ones” are adapted as „Благосклонните евмениди“ respectively.

Last but not least, we have Fiddler’s Green – a “place of perpetual mirth, where a fiddle never stops playing” from 19th-century English folklore, featured in volume 2 of “The Sandman” as an anthropomorphic personification, who, by the end of the story, has returned to its original physical form. In an attempt to have a more pleasing-to-read phrase as the character’s name, „Полето на покоя“ was chosen, as it also features alliteration – a common trope in naming comic-book characters. A more detailed meaning of the concept of “Fiddler’s Green” was included as a footnote during the introduction to volume 2.

The final element to be included in this section is a list of names of other characters, most of which with relatively minor roles, whose names underwent reinterpretation or adaptation, as opposed to direct translations:

Brute – Грамадата

Glob – Буцата

Squatterbloat – Разплутин

Colonel Knowledge – Полковник Познание

Of the examples above, of most interest would probably be „Полковник Познание“, as, in its translated form, it once again falls under the comic trope of alliterative names.

Further examples include:

Dog Soup – Дроб сарма

Candyman – Дон Бонбон

Eye Guy – Вади очи

The Shades – Цайса

Boogeyman – Торбалан

Flay-by-night – Среднощния кожодер

This second group of names belong to serial killers featured in the final issues of “The Sandman” vol.2. We, as readers, are not given too much insight into their specific methods and, as such, they are more open to interpretation. „Дроб сарма“, for example, is a multi-layered adaptation of the name, as it is once again a meal (although not soup) and it incorporates the Bulgarian colloquial phrase „направих се на дроб сарма“ – being in a good-for-nothing state (thus addressing what happens to the killer’s victims). And although not immediately noticeable to readers who might not be fluent in the foreign language, it also includes the notion of “chopped liver” used in English as a phrase signifying being ignored and left out (thus giving the character a notion of being a social misfit). “Candyman”, on the other hand, was much simpler, as the main goal here was simply to avoid potential confusion with the Clive Barker character of the same name, who debuted in 1985.

PART 2: CONFINING DREAMS

With comics being a predominantly visual medium, naturally, there are cases where the translation is dictated not only by the written words, but also the visuals – an integral part of any form of comic-book translation. This section will also explore several examples of such occurrences. Speech bubbles and caption boxes, which are used to provide narration, character dialogue and internal monologues also limit the translator in terms of the number of characters they can use to carry over a particular phrase. As such, proper translation may sometimes need to be sacrificed for the sake of fitting the translation in the allotted space.

The title of issue #1 – “Sleep of the Just” is presented in a rigid grid, consisting of two groups of boxes, each box containing a single letter. Thus, the Bulgarian title of the issue was dictated by the fact that it needs to consist of at least 2 words, the first being 5 letters and the final – 4 letters, respectively. This ultimately led to the title „СЪНЯТ ТЪЙ БЛАГ“.

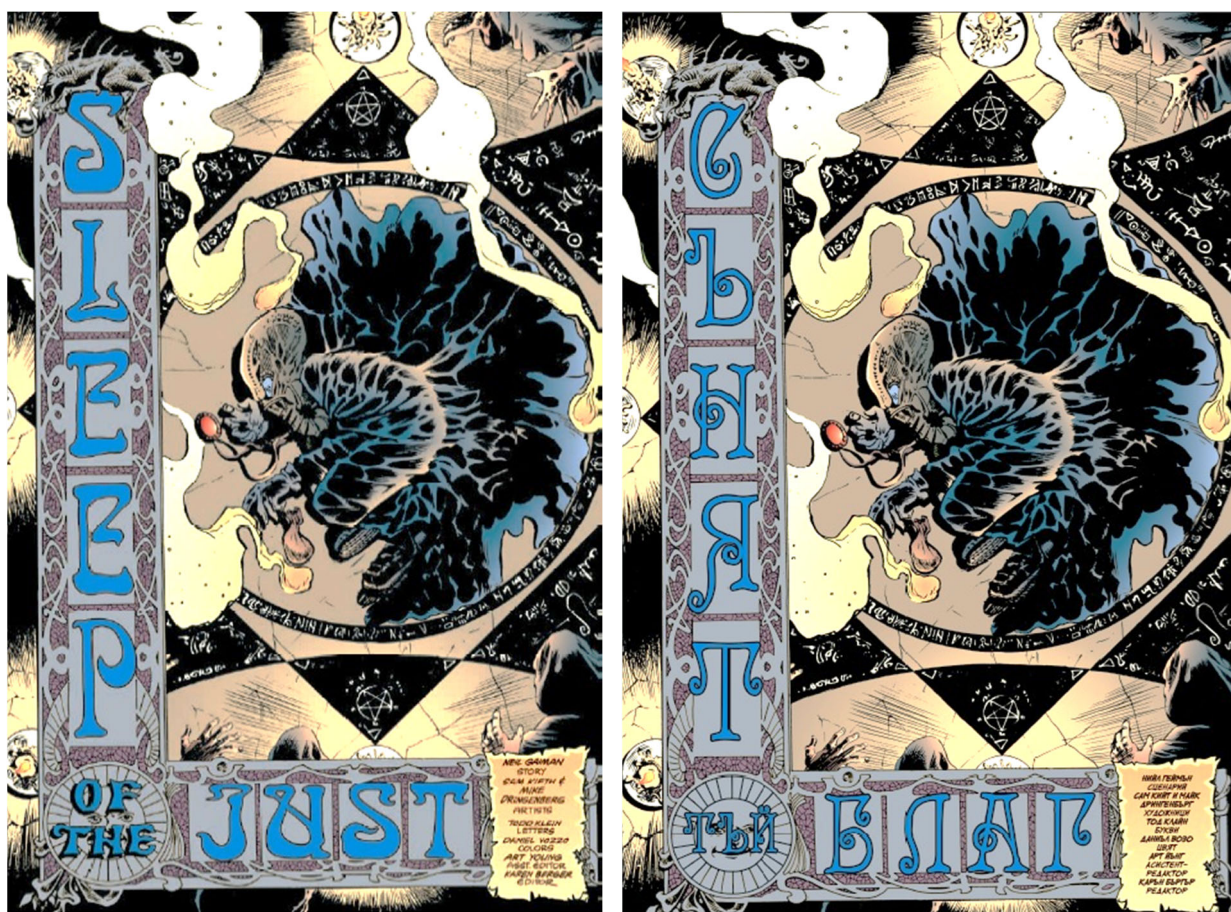
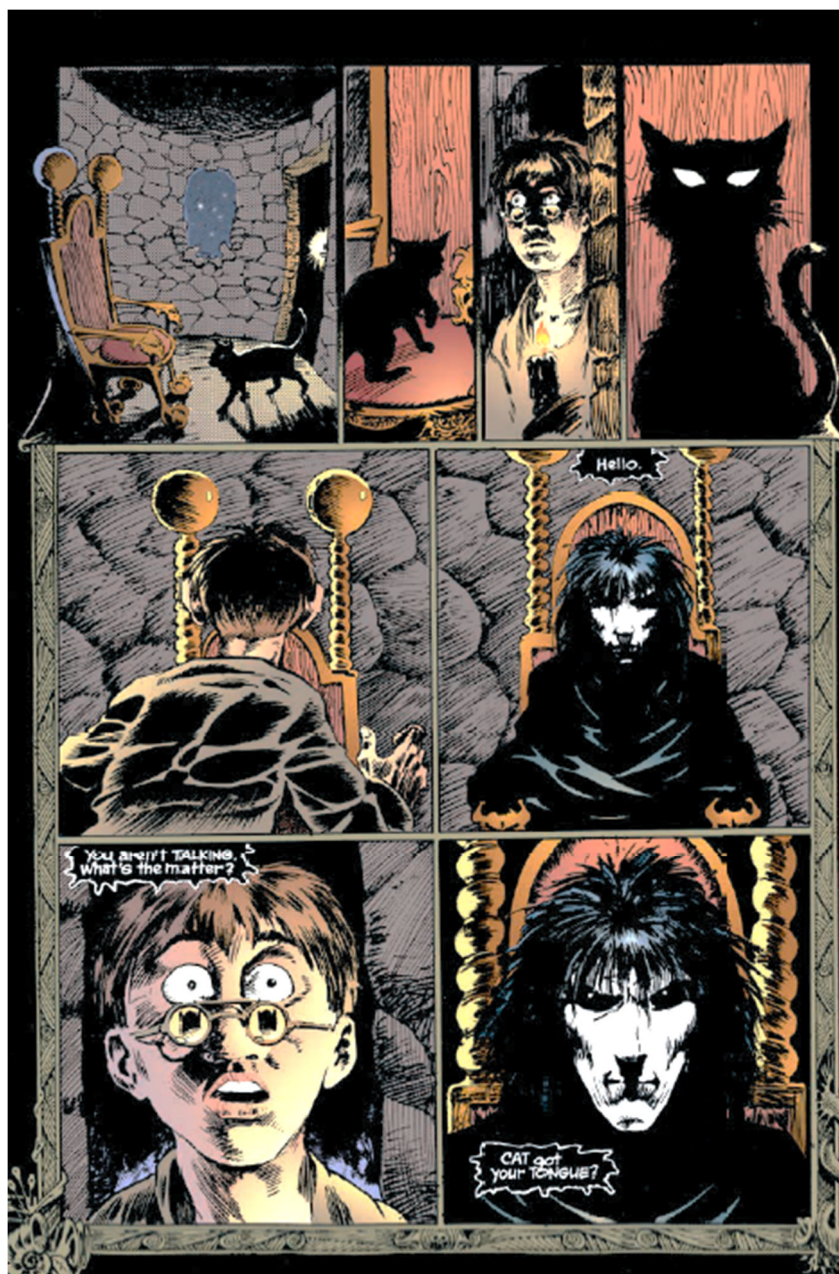


Fig. 2. “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 20 – Original (left) and Bulgarian (right)

Issue #1 also features a scene in which Morpheus has taken the form of a cat and, once he once again assumes anthropomorphic appearance, he turns to a man with the phrase “Cat got your tongue?”. The Bulgarian equivalent of this phrase, however, does not incorporate cats in any way. Therefore, the proper translation of “Cat got your tongue” was moved in an earlier speech bubble, which allowed for more letters to be fit (by replacing the sentence “You aren’t talking.” with the single word „мълчиш“), and an additional line involving cats was inserted, in order to preserve the connection to the visuals:



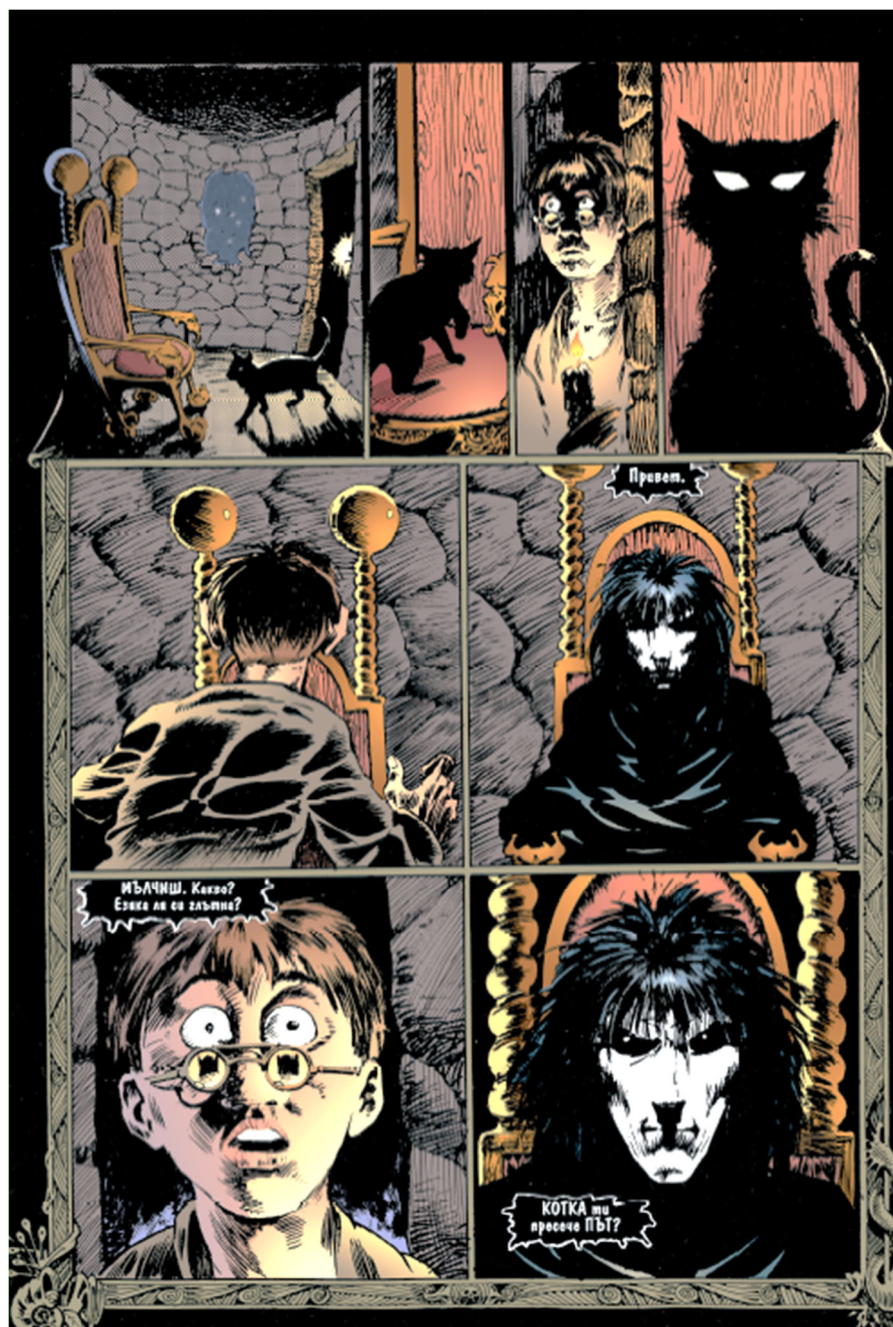


Fig. 3. “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 48,
Original (top) and Bulgarian (bottom)

PART 3: CULTURAL CONJURING

While a lot of comics generally rely on allusions, this is especially true regarding Neil Gaiman’s work, where references to folklore, literature, pop-culture, etc, are abundant in nearly every issue of “The Sandman”. As Mackova points out, “...the translator often needs to trace these allusions to their source, which can be a demanding job. In addition, the translator may often encounter allusions to works which were not translated in his/her target

language and then s/he is confronted with a decision whether to translate such allusion (and how), substitute it with a different allusion, explain the original allusion somehow or leave it out” (2012: 52). Part 3 of the paper will explore but a few examples of this, encountered in the first two volumes of “The Sandman”.

3.1 A DREAM BY ANY OTHER NAME

One of the most captivating aspects throughout “The Sandman” is that it crafts its own universe by incorporating characters, plot threads and various other elements from mythologies from all over the world. Within volume 1 alone, for example, the reader encounters Cain, Abel and Lucifer of Christian religion, the Norns of Norse mythology. This acceptance of world culture extends heavily to the title character himself, as Morpheus appears to everyone encountered in accordance with their beliefs. To Nada, queen of a distant African kingdom, he is Kai’ckul, whereas to J’onn J’onzz of Mars, he is Lord L’zoril. This storytelling decision enabled the Bulgarian edition to feature a reference to our own equivalent of The Sandman, namely Suncho (СЪНЧО), as well as elaborate, albeit briefly, on the “sand” aspect of The Sandman for an audience that might not be thoroughly familiar with the concept. In a 2015 paper, Nieminen refers to this approach as being one of the modifying strategies which “Ruokonen places [in] four classes (2010:149–154). The first one (number 4 on the overall list), adding guidance, essentially involves allusions, where translator has added something to the original ST allusion. These additions include some brief contextual guidance, for example introductory phrases, and footnotes, but also different stylistic or formal markers, which deviate from those of the original ST.” (35)

This usage of a modifying strategy appears in issue #3, “Dream a Little Dream of Me” which features an interaction between John Constantine (a character well-versed into multicultural mythology) and a homeless lady by the name of Mad Hettie. Mad Hettie refers to the title character as “Morpheus”, the “Oneiromancer” and “The Sandman”, to which Constantine responds with the following statement:

“Look, The Sandman’s a fairy story you tell kids to get them off to sleep. Sprinkles magic dust in your eyes and brings you sweet dreams.”

For the Bulgarian translation, this line was slightly altered:

„Виж, това с Пясъчния човек е приказка за лека нощ. Като Сънчо. Вместо перце има вълшебен прах, поръсва те и ти носи сладки сънища.“

A proverbial “Have your cake and eat it too” solution aimed at pleasing every reader, this change dictated another line alteration which, ultimately, was abandoned, but will be explored in the next section.



Fig. 4. Panels from “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 85, Original (left) and Bulgarian (right)

3.2 LULLABIES

As previously established, in order to bring a sense of familiarity to the reader, it is not uncommon for fiction to incorporate elements of real-world culture and pop-culture. In the current case, that is the usage of songs. And whereas in other types of media, e.g. a novel, titles and lyrics might remain as they were originally and a translation be provided in a footnote, so that the reader can grasp the significance of the reference, elaborate explanations are a luxury in the comic-book world and therefore, most of the time, translations become a necessity. Certain stories and characters may allow more room for improvisation. For example, books featuring Deadpool, a character known for his fourth-wall-breaking antics, would usually include references entirely for comedic purposes. Therefore, in order to bring about the same reaction in a Bulgarian reader, instead of translation proper, we can provide an equivalent that the target audience might be more familiar with. As such, in “Deadpool Kills Deadpool” („Дедпул убива Дедпул“, Студио Артлайн, 2018 г.) instead of saying “Holla at your boy” (a song by Nigerian singer Wizkid), he now says „Я елате пиленца при батко“, referencing the song „Къде си батко?“ by Milko Kalaydzhiev. Many examples of this variety exist in a multitude of titles translated from various languages to Bulgarian over the years, such as “Asterix” or “Tom & Jerry”.

An approach of this sort, however, would not be suitable for “The Sandman”, as it would ruin the suspension of disbelief and the serious nature of the story.

In regards to translation of songs, Osoblivaia makes the following observations:

Semantics, syntax, language register, metrics, rhyme, rhythm, and choreography are combined in the writing, even the translation of an entire text. Here it is important to understand the process of creation of the songs, then analyze the overall meaning of the texts in question to apply this process in their translation.

Here are the factors that come into play when translating the lyrics of a song:

Rhythm

[...] the lyrics must be in accordance with the rhythm of the song, except that many languages use more words than English to express the same idea. Therefore, if the word-for-word translated song is intended to be sung, it would be impossible to set certain lyrics to the rhythm. [...]

References

Many songs are written about events, except that these references are not always known by the audience for which they are translated. You have to try to translate these references so that they are understandable, but there is always a word limit because of the rhythm.

Style

Some song lyrics have a very particular style, with puns or alliterations, for example. This style is difficult to transcribe in a translation because of the number of words imposed by the rhythm. However, if this style is not respected, the song loses all its charm, and the presence of the author disappears.

(2021)

Issue #3, which we previously explored, relies heavily on quotations from various songs, the lyrics of which include the word “dream”. The very title itself, “Dream a Little Dream of Me” is lifted straight out of the eponymous 1931 song, written by Fabian Andre, Wilbur Schwandt (music) and Gus Kahn (lyrics). While the loss of the potentially easily recognizable reference is unfortunate, an additional problem arises from the fact that we are provided with a lead-in to the title within the page itself, by using the lyrics of the song, as can be seen on pages 81 and 82 (though it should be noted that, in order to emphasize the transition between the pages Gaiman not only combines parts of the first two verses, but also alters “Say ‘nighty-night’” to “count ninety-nine” as one of the characters is in the middle of counting to a hundred):

„Count ninety-nine and kiss me. Just hold me tight and tell me you’ll miss me. Birds singin’ in the sycamore trees. Dream a little dream of me.“

*„До деветдесет и девет брой и целуни ме. С тъжен поглед здраво прегърни ме. Поваят на вятъра мислите ти ми шепти...
...сън за мен сънувай ти.*

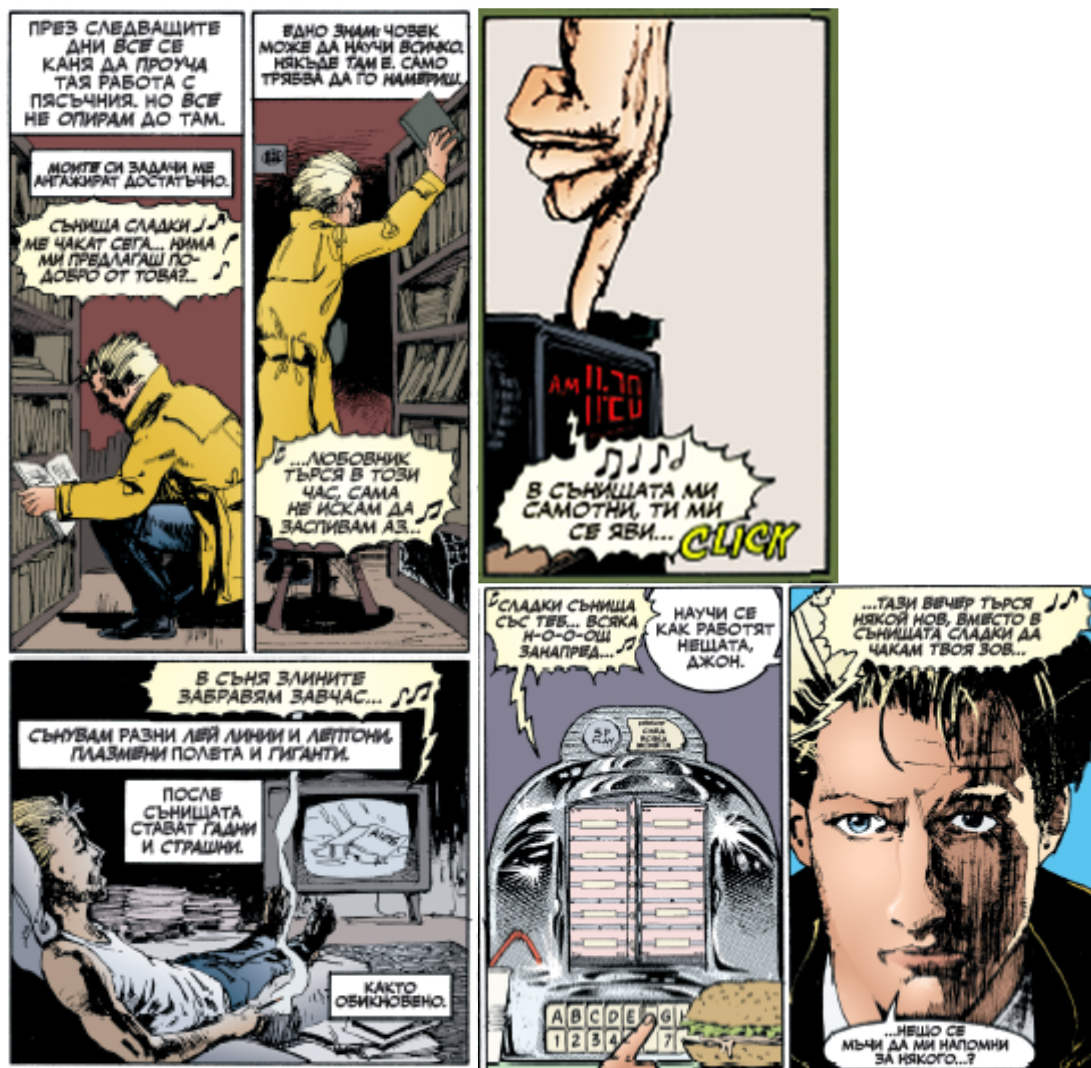


Fig. 6. Panels from “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), pages 84 and 85, Bulgarian

Issue #3 wraps up with the character of John Constantine singing “Mr. Sandman” by The Chordettes in the final two panels of the page, as he wanders off into the night:

„Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream... make her the cutest that I’ve ever seen... Give her the word that I’m not a rover... then tell me that my lonesome life is over... “

Originally, as an additional reference, this was intended to be replaced with:

„Сънчо иде от горица да ви каже лека нощ, дечица. Че е тъмно вече вън. Време е за сън... “

Late in the adaptation process, a change was decided upon by the publisher and therefore a translation of the original lyrics was provided, however, one done by the editor, not the translator:

*„Мистър Сандмен, със сън ме дари. Нея най-хубавата направи.
Че скитник не съм кажи ѝ, а на мен – че самотата приключи...“*

Later in the book, page 173 has a scene where “The Addams Family” TV series is playing in the background, with its iconic theme-song being audible to the characters, as shown through the use of speech bubbles:

*„Their house is a mu-se-um. When people come to see ‘em, they really
are a scree-um. The Addams Family.“*

Originally, it was intended for the pre-existing translation, used in the TV dub of the 1991 animated series to be used:

*„Домът им на музей прилича и всеки той привлича. Но види ли
ги, с крясък тича. Те са Семейство Адамс.“*

Sadly, due to space limitation, the translation needed to be altered and therefore a new one was made, lowering the number of characters with spaces used from 94 to 81.

*„Музей е цял домът им. Към тях щом се запътим, със страх ще
се изпълним. Такива Адамс са.“*

This new translation also follows the original melody’s rhythm, unlike the pre-existing translation, which is simply recited and not sung in the dubbed version of the series.

3.3 COMIC CONCEPTS

While bearing a significant importance as a piece of literature, “The Sandman” is also naturally dependent on various tropes of the comic-book medium, its early issues even more so, as they involve elements, characters and events from the broader DC Comics universe such as the aforementioned Dr. Destiny, John Constantine, Martian Manhunter, Batman, The Scarecrow. The featured versions of Cain and Abel are also pre-established in this universe, having first appeared in the late 1960s. As

such, personality traits, as minor as they may be, needed to be preserved. These include:

– Speech patterns:

John Constantine's cockney accent – while an accent cannot be easily interpreted in written form, let alone in a different language, Constantine's dialogue does not necessarily follow grammatical and spelling norms both in the source and target versions of the text. This is also in line with how his speech patterns had already been presented in the Bulgarian edition of "Batman: Damned" („Батман: Прокълнат“ книги 1-3, Artline Studios)

Etrigan's rhymes – Issue #4, "A Hope in Hell", features an appearance by popular DC character Etrigan (also known as The Demon), well-known for his rhymed speech (with even Morpheus pointing out that he's "a rhymers now", indicating his rise in Hell's hierarchy). Thus, his rhyming dialogue needed to be preserved.

– References to other stories:

Page 90 features a panel of Constantine going through a series of books, all carrying the titles of other comic stories he has appeared in. Their translations needed to match the respective plots of said stories.

Pages 137-140 are based on Jack Kirby's "Fourth World" series, which in itself required adherence to previously established translations of its terminology, although such exists in Bulgarian only within other media, e.g. television series.

– Naming tropes

A common trope in comic books, especially in the superhero genre, is the heavy use of alliteration, not only in speech, but also in naming characters and places. Volume 1 features appearances by Mister Miracle and Martian Manhunter. Due to pre-existing translations that needed to be adhered to for consistency's sake, their translations – „Мистър Чудо“ and „Марсианския ловец“ respectively, do not follow this formula (although the translation „Мистър Маг“ was considered for Mister Miracle). The focus on the trope is a bit heavier in volume 2 of the series – "The Doll's House" („Куклена къща“, Artline Studios, 2022). Part 3 – "Playing House" (Issue #12 of the series) revolves around a superhero referring to himself as "The Sandman", whose roots run deep into the history of "DC Comics". The man in question is named Hector Hall. His wife's name, on the other hand, is Hippolyta Hall (although she is mostly referred to as "Lyta") and their home – The Dream

Dome – also preserves the alliterative naming scheme. By doing this, Neil Gaiman shows clear understanding of the specifics of the genre, while managing to completely subvert expectations of what a comic featuring a superhero could be about. It also enables him to feature a connection between the previous characters who have carried the “Sandman” monicker (with the original Sandman, Wesley Dodds, having a cameo in volume 1) and his own radical re-interpretation. Thus, while the names of Hector and Lyta did not require alteration to preserve the trope, the aforementioned “Dream Dome” was adapted as „СЪННИЯ СВОД“, as opposed to „купол“.

PART 4: MAKING A KILLING

Issue #12 also features the first mentioning of a “Cereal Convention” (volume 2, page 100) which plays a significant role, as it is the scene for several important confrontations later on. What the reader does not know at this point in the story is that the naming actually features wordplay, as the convention in question is, in fact, a gathering for serial killers. Many options were considered here, such as wordplay between „палач“ and „палачинки“ or „трупа“ and „труп“ respectively. A simpler option revolved around using „сериен“ in a phrase like „сериини събирачи“, but that too failed to carry the joke across.

What makes wordplay particularly challenging for a translator is the fact that it employs particular structural characteristics of the source language for its meaning and effect. For these structural characteristics, it is often impossible to find a counterpart in the target language.

(Koochacki 2016: 1)

Ultimately, “Cereal Convention” became „Семинар – Колене и пи-щяли“, where by simply shifting the stress of the words, in Bulgarian, one could get the phrase either as “Knees and shins” or “Stabbing and screaming”.



Fig. 7. Panels from “The Sandman” vol.2 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 140, Original (top) and Bulgarian (bottom)

This, according to Gottlieb (1997: 210), falls under the category of “Adaptation – to local setting, maintaining humorous effect”.

This change, however, provided a necessity for further alterations of some lines – the participants in the convention are, at one point, referred to as “Cereal growers. Or Eaters.” which in the Bulgarian translation was changed to „ортопедите или каквито са там“. Two panels further we have the following line:

“So what do you think cereal fans are into, huh? Maybe they collect those little plastic figurines and old Captain Crunch whistles...”

This was again altered to not address *cereal* in Bulgarian:

„За какво ли ще си приказват на семинара? Сигурно за контузии, артрит и ревматизъм...”

The convention is once more brought to light in issue #15, which opens with the convention attendees making various murder-related puns. They are presented below, alongside their translated versions:

*„The journey was a real killer“ – „Направо ми се видя сметката“
„I wouldn’t be seen dead here“ – „Убий ме, ама не бих стъпил тук“
„I could murder a stake“ – „Бих пречукал някого за една хубавичка
пържола“*

*„I could’a died“ – „Щях да пукна“
„They do this chocolate fudge whip that is just to die for“ – „Правят
убийствен шоколадов кекс.“*

*„He slays me“ – „Направо ме утрена.“
„I thought the whole issue was dead and buried“ – „Мислех, че са се
затрили“*

*„The TV version butchered it!“ – „Телевизионната версия? Осака-
тили са филма!“*

The main purpose of the translation in this case was, once again, to not merely be a direct representation of the lines (as they are, ultimately, inconsequential to the plot), but also preserve the pattern they are all phrased in.

CONCLUSION

While the paper, by no means, covers all aspects of the problematic nature of comic-book translation and that of “The Sandman” in particular, it nevertheless serves as an insight into a field, rarely explored by Bulgarian translators and scholars. Based on the examples provided, certain conclusions on commonly adopted translation strategies and procedures, and potential limitations of the medium can be drawn. The focus on more extensive adaptation, adherence to visual context and stylistic patterns such as puns, literary and pop-cultural references can also serve as a basic guide for other translators in their own endeavours. Further research will be aimed towards addressing the literary connections and references within the remaining volumes that have been translated in Bulgarian, as well as expanding the previous chapters with more examples.

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the particular case of comics, visual context to a different culture. “Culture”, on the other hand, will cover all aspects that are familiar to most of the target audience – this includes elements of national, cultural heritage e.g. customs, references to everyday activities and pastimes – books, TV programs, etc. According to previous research, “In the first 8 issues of the comic, 181 intertextual references were found, the largest proportion of which were references to literature, religion and mythology. Comic book references were second highest in number, followed by music and finally references to films series and theatrical pieces which were the least common ones.” (Dakić, 2023: 63). Key among these will be analyzed.

PART 1: THE NAMES IN “THE SANDMAN”

One of the great difficulties when it comes to translating comics is how character names should be interpreted, as often, especially in the superhero genre, names often relate to each particular character’s physical appearance, backstory, special powers and even purpose. As Mackova points out “...in some literary genres, for example in comedies, fairytales etc., connotations of the respective names have to be taken into consideration and the needs to be translated according to that (Newmark, A Textbook 214). The exact, generally applicable rules on translating, transferring and naturalization of names do not exist and the choice on this matter is usually the translator’s choice. [...] Some names have different functions in comics – comical effect, characterizing function, referential function, metaphoric function etc. Some names appear only in short, one-shot stories, and some re-appear throughout one or more long-running series.” (2012: 49-50)

One must also consider that such characters, currently, are often considered as merchandising opportunities, with them being adapted for movies and television, video-games, toys and collectibles, and any other form of marketable product imaginable. Thus, with multiple factors being present, there is no single approach to translating the name of each character.

The techniques most commonly adopted include: direct translation (“Iron Man” – „Железния човек“), transcription (“Spider-Man” – „Спайдър-мен“), transliteration (“Batman” – „Батман“) or reinterpretation/adaptation (“Wolverine” – „Върколак“).

The title character of The Sandman presented a curious case, as he shares a name with several completely different characters, appearing in publications of both “DC Comics” and competitors such as “Marvel

Comics”, as well as a mythological figure of folklore (the connection with which will be analyzed more thoroughly later in this paper).

The first issue arises with the common association of names ending in „ман“ or „мен“, with an emphasis on the „man” (not to be confused with the stress of more common last names such as “Goldman”, “Silverman”, etc.) with the superhero naming trope. As the character does not have a superhero persona (unlike most of his namesakes), presenting him as „Сандман“ or „Сандмен“ respectively would have potentially alienated audiences, who are not interested in the superhero genre and thus limit the broader appeal of the author, whose name is attached to the work. Thus, transcription or transliteration were almost immediately rejected as viable options.

We then turn to a potential direct translation, that being „Пясъчния човек“. Returning to the concept of alienating an audience, such a translation would have likely been rejected by the comic’s pre-established fan-base in Bulgaria, who, due to an official translation not existing, would most commonly simply refer to the character using his original name. Furthermore, a direct translation could easily become a target of criticism from readers, who are familiar with the concept of The Sandman of folklore, his connection to the plot of the book and his Bulgarian equivalent, Suncho (Сънчо). Yet another reason for wanting to avoid the direct translation is that „Пясъчния човек“ had long since been established in various media as the name of the villainous Sandman (Flint Marko) featured heavily in books by “Marvel Comics”.

In conjunction with the Bulgarian publisher, it was therefore decided that, for marketing purposes, the title of “The Sandman” shall remain in English on the cover of the books and any mentions of it throughout the plot of the book will be substituted in various ways (such as using the character’s in-universe name, Dream, or other descriptive titles). In an attempt to give insight on what the story is about to newcomers, a sub-heading – „Господаря на сънищата“, was then added. It was deemed that the addition of this translated interpretation of the title character could also be supported by the fact that during their original English-language publication, issues #1-8 featured the very same sub-heading – “Master of Dreams”. „Господаря на сънищата“ respectively became the main form for interpreting “The Sandman” as a sobriquet throughout the story.

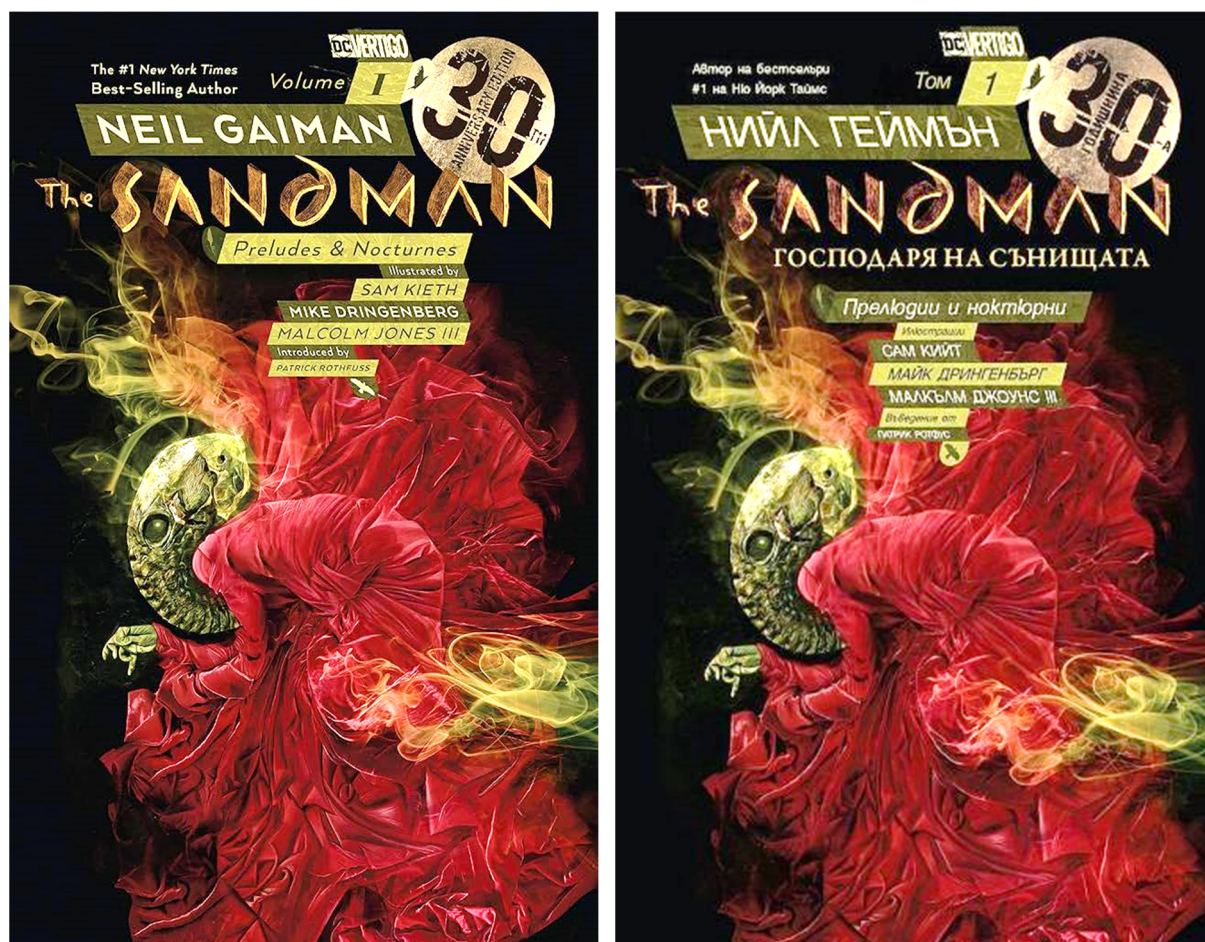


Fig. 1. Original (left) and Bulgarian (right) covers to “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition)

This, however, does not completely resolve the problematic nature of the name. A huge part of the initial storyline involves The Sandman trying to reacquire his tools of the trade, one of which is a pouch of magical sand, with his quest for it being the main plot point of issue #3 – “Dream a Little Dream of Me”. In a sequence from that story, the characters of John Constantine and Mad Hettie discuss the re-emergence of The Sandman after his long absence. In the translation process, I took advantage of their dialogue and used it as a way to gradually introduce the various concepts and potential translations for The Sandman, with him being referred to as “оня с пясъка“, „пясъчния човек“ and even being compared to „Сънчо“ in an additional short sentence, not present in the original story. This helped establish „Пясъчния човек“ as a valid translation where particular story sequences require it due to unavoidable plot threads or visual cues. A more detailed analysis of this scene is featured later in the paper.

With his more formal title now decided upon, it was time to focus on The Sandman’s “true” identity – that of Dream of the Endless. The Endless

are a family of seven anthropomorphic personifications of mythological and metaphysical entities, the names of which all start with the letter “D” – Dream, Destiny, Death, Desire, Despair, Delirium (formerly known as Delight) and Destruction. Despite only Dream and Death appearing in significant roles throughout volume 1, long-term plans for the series required all of the Endless’ names be considered carefully from the outset, so that the concept of the matching starting letters be preserved in the Bulgarian translation. Fortunate circumstances, that being that the Bulgarian words for both “dream” and “death” – „сън“ and „смърт“ respectively share the same starting letter, meant that “D” would be substituted with „C“. It was then a matter of trying to find words which both start with said letter and encapsulate to as close a degree as possible, the main concept of the characters. The list of The Endless’ names therefore turned out as follows:

Dream – Сън

Death – Смърт

Destiny – Съдба

Desire – Стрaст

Despair – Слабост

Delirium – Смут

Delight – Сладост

The name of the final Endless – Destruction – is still in development, as the character has not yet been mentioned within the first two volumes of the series. Options being currently considered include „Сеч“, „Съкрушение“ and „Страдание“.

In a paper focusing on the translation of volume 1, Jula Dakić points out that an identical approach, right down to the letter chosen, was also adopted for the Croatian translation by Tatjana Jambrišak (2023: 22)

Another alteration that was dictated by the changing of the letter was the quotation by character John Dee, included in the beginning of volume 1. While the original book features the line “D is for a lot of things”, the Bulgarian edition substitutes it with „Сънищата са истински“ – a line uttered by the same character, which fits the main concept of the book just as well.

Of particular interest in volumes 1 and 2, despite only being mentioned briefly, is Destiny, as the introduction to volume 2 puts an emphasis on the distinct connection between him and the “DC Comics” character Dr. Destiny (featured throughout volume 1). Naturally, as „Съдба“ had already been decided as the translation of Destiny, it would only make sense for the same word to be used for Dr. Destiny. However, a different character from the DC Universe – Dr. Fate – had already been established as „Д-р Съдба“ in Bulgarian throughout different media, such as the “Batman: The Brave and

the Bold” television series or the “Black Adam” theatrical feature. Thus, an alternate take was needed and Dr. Destiny was translated as „Д-р Участ“ instead. In an attempt to preserve the connection between Destiny of the Endless and Dr. Destiny, during the recap of events in the foreword to volume 2, the following sentence underwent slight alterations:

„John Dee, the self-styled Doctor Destiny (but shouldn't that name belong to another? To someone like our neighbor, with his robe and his book?)“

„Джон Дий, дал си прозвището Доктор Участ (Участ... Съдба...дали това име не принадлежи на някой друг? Някой като нашия събеседник, с неговата роба и тази книга?)“

Other characters of interest include incarnations of mythological figures such as The Norns of Norse mythology, introduced as “The Three-In-One” in the original book and established as „Тройната норна“ in their original appearance. It should be noted that, just like Dream, as the series progresses, they are also addressed as their equivalents from other cultures, such as the “The Moirai” or “The Fates”.

Mentions of the Erinyes or Eumenidies of Greek mythology as “The Kindly Ones” are adapted as „Благосклонните евмениди“ respectively.

Last but not least, we have Fiddler’s Green – a “place of perpetual mirth, where a fiddle never stops playing” from 19th-century English folklore, featured in volume 2 of “The Sandman” as an anthropomorphic personification, who, by the end of the story, has returned to its original physical form. In an attempt to have a more pleasing-to-read phrase as the character’s name, „Полето на покоя“ was chosen, as it also features alliteration – a common trope in naming comic-book characters. A more detailed meaning of the concept of “Fiddler’s Green” was included as a footnote during the introduction to volume 2.

The final element to be included in this section is a list of names of other characters, most of which with relatively minor roles, whose names underwent reinterpretation or adaptation, as opposed to direct translations:

Brute – Грамадата

Glob – Буцата

Squatterbloat – Разплутин

Colonel Knowledge – Полковник Познание

Of the examples above, of most interest would probably be „Полковник Познание“, as, in its translated form, it once again falls under the comic trope of alliterative names.

Further examples include:

Dog Soup – Дроб сарма

Candyman – Дон Бонбон

Eye Guy – Вади очи

The Shades – Цайса

Boogeyman – Торбалан

Flay-by-night – Среднощния кожодер

This second group of names belong to serial killers featured in the final issues of “The Sandman” vol.2. We, as readers, are not given too much insight into their specific methods and, as such, they are more open to interpretation. „Дроб сарма“, for example, is a multi-layered adaptation of the name, as it is once again a meal (although not soup) and it incorporates the Bulgarian colloquial phrase „направих се на дроб сарма“ – being in a good-for-nothing state (thus addressing what happens to the killer’s victims). And although not immediately noticeable to readers who might not be fluent in the foreign language, it also includes the notion of “chopped liver” used in English as a phrase signifying being ignored and left out (thus giving the character a notion of being a social misfit). “Candyman”, on the other hand, was much simpler, as the main goal here was simply to avoid potential confusion with the Clive Barker character of the same name, who debuted in 1985.

PART 2: CONFINING DREAMS

With comics being a predominantly visual medium, naturally, there are cases where the translation is dictated not only by the written words, but also the visuals – an integral part of any form of comic-book translation. This section will also explore several examples of such occurrences. Speech bubbles and caption boxes, which are used to provide narration, character dialogue and internal monologues also limit the translator in terms of the number of characters they can use to carry over a particular phrase. As such, proper translation may sometimes need to be sacrificed for the sake of fitting the translation in the allotted space.

The title of issue #1 – “Sleep of the Just” is presented in a rigid grid, consisting of two groups of boxes, each box containing a single letter. Thus, the Bulgarian title of the issue was dictated by the fact that it needs to consist of at least 2 words, the first being 5 letters and the final – 4 letters, respectively. This ultimately led to the title „СЪНЯТ ТЪЙ БЛАГ“.

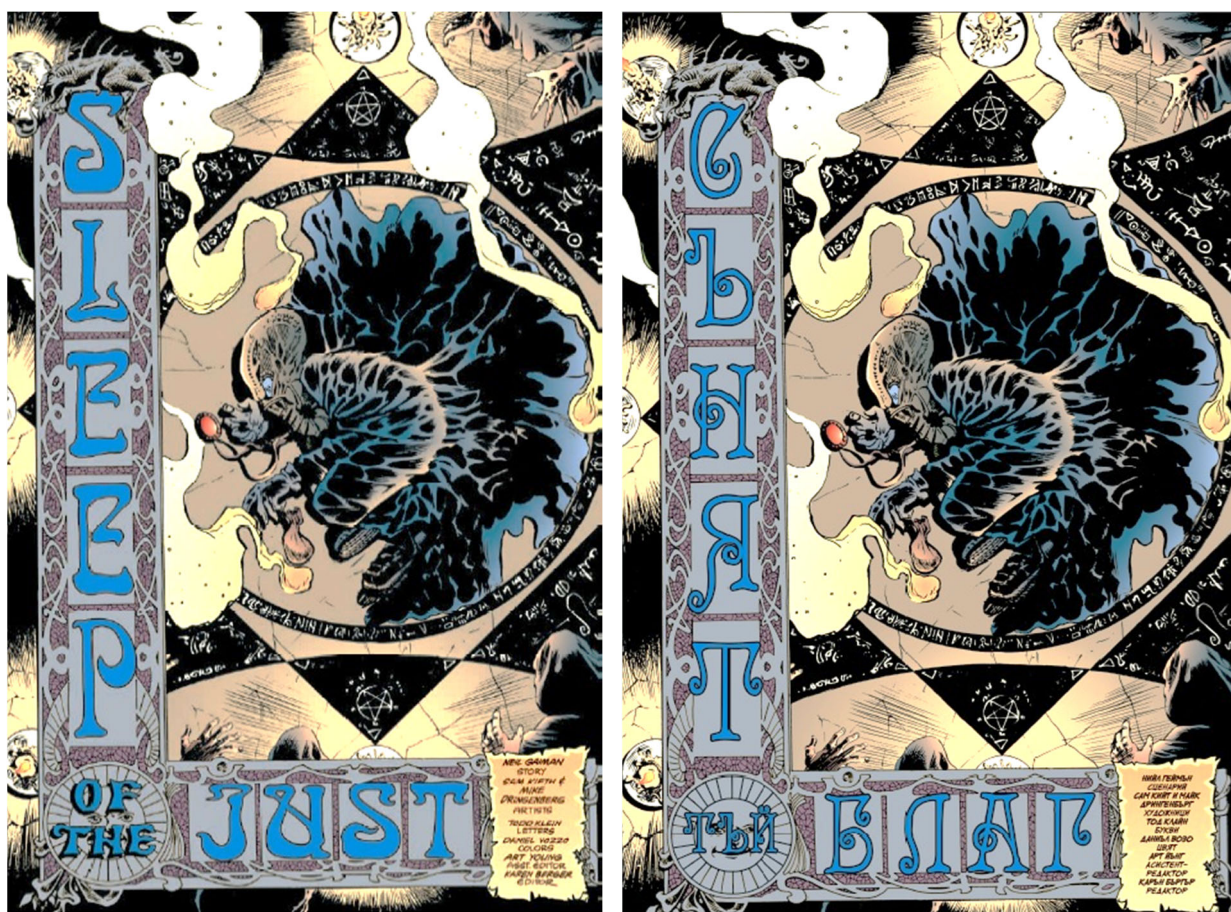
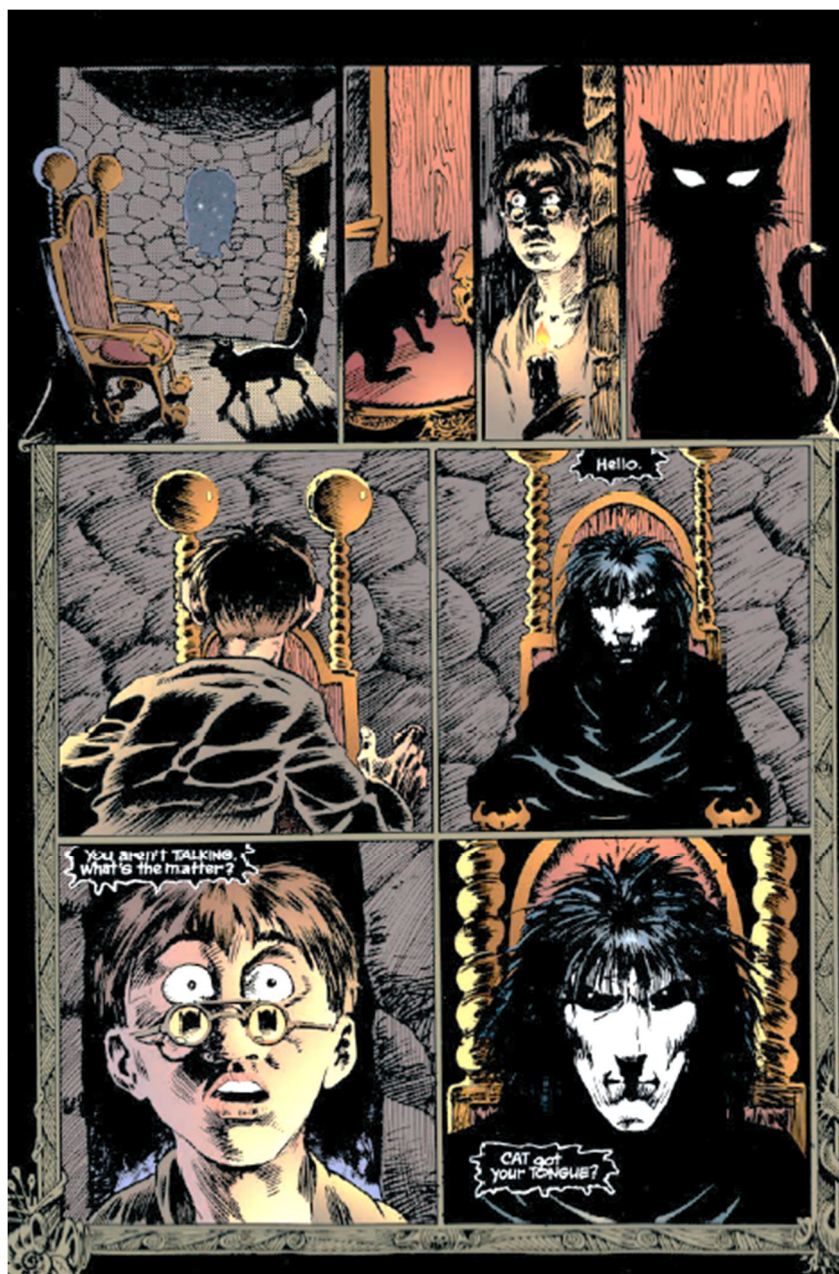


Fig. 2. “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 20 – Original (left) and Bulgarian (right)

Issue #1 also features a scene in which Morpheus has taken the form of a cat and, once he once again assumes anthropomorphic appearance, he turns to a man with the phrase “Cat got your tongue?”. The Bulgarian equivalent of this phrase, however, does not incorporate cats in any way. Therefore, the proper translation of “Cat got your tongue” was moved in an earlier speech bubble, which allowed for more letters to be fit (by replacing the sentence “You aren’t talking.” with the single word „мълчиш“), and an additional line involving cats was inserted, in order to preserve the connection to the visuals:



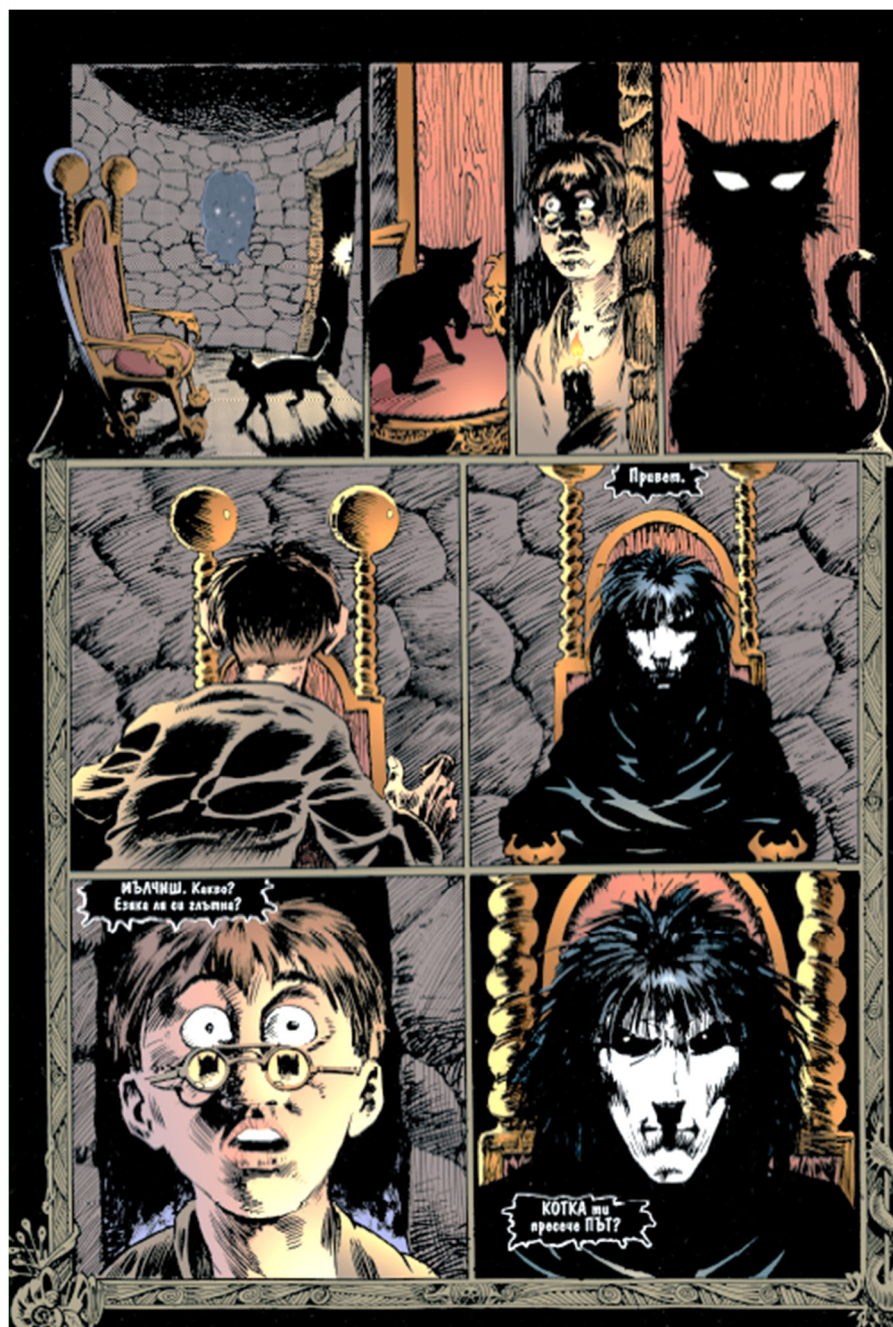


Fig. 3. “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 48,
Original (top) and Bulgarian (bottom)

PART 3: CULTURAL CONJURING

While a lot of comics generally rely on allusions, this is especially true regarding Neil Gaiman’s work, where references to folklore, literature, pop-culture, etc, are abundant in nearly every issue of “The Sandman”. As Mackova points out, “...the translator often needs to trace these allusions to their source, which can be a demanding job. In addition, the translator may often encounter allusions to works which were not translated in his/her target

language and then s/he is confronted with a decision whether to translate such allusion (and how), substitute it with a different allusion, explain the original allusion somehow or leave it out” (2012: 52). Part 3 of the paper will explore but a few examples of this, encountered in the first two volumes of “The Sandman”.

3.1 A DREAM BY ANY OTHER NAME

One of the most captivating aspects throughout “The Sandman” is that it crafts its own universe by incorporating characters, plot threads and various other elements from mythologies from all over the world. Within volume 1 alone, for example, the reader encounters Cain, Abel and Lucifer of Christian religion, the Norns of Norse mythology. This acceptance of world culture extends heavily to the title character himself, as Morpheus appears to everyone encountered in accordance with their beliefs. To Nada, queen of a distant African kingdom, he is Kai’ckul, whereas to J’onn J’onzz of Mars, he is Lord L’zoril. This storytelling decision enabled the Bulgarian edition to feature a reference to our own equivalent of The Sandman, namely Suncho (СЪНЧО), as well as elaborate, albeit briefly, on the “sand” aspect of The Sandman for an audience that might not be thoroughly familiar with the concept. In a 2015 paper, Nieminen refers to this approach as being one of the modifying strategies which “Ruokonen places [in] four classes (2010:149–154). The first one (number 4 on the overall list), adding guidance, essentially involves allusions, where translator has added something to the original ST allusion. These additions include some brief contextual guidance, for example introductory phrases, and footnotes, but also different stylistic or formal markers, which deviate from those of the original ST.” (35)

This usage of a modifying strategy appears in issue #3, “Dream a Little Dream of Me” which features an interaction between John Constantine (a character well-versed into multicultural mythology) and a homeless lady by the name of Mad Hettie. Mad Hettie refers to the title character as “Morpheus”, the “Oneiromancer” and “The Sandman”, to which Constantine responds with the following statement:

“Look, The Sandman’s a fairy story you tell kids to get them off to sleep. Sprinkles magic dust in your eyes and brings you sweet dreams.”

For the Bulgarian translation, this line was slightly altered:

„Виж, това с Пясъчния човек е приказка за лека нощ. Като Сънчо. Вместо перце има вълшебен прах, поръсва те и ти носи сладки сънища.“

A proverbial “Have your cake and eat it too” solution aimed at pleasing every reader, this change dictated another line alteration which, ultimately, was abandoned, but will be explored in the next section.



Fig. 4. Panels from “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 85, Original (left) and Bulgarian (right)

3.2 LULLABIES

As previously established, in order to bring a sense of familiarity to the reader, it is not uncommon for fiction to incorporate elements of real-world culture and pop-culture. In the current case, that is the usage of songs. And whereas in other types of media, e.g. a novel, titles and lyrics might remain as they were originally and a translation be provided in a footnote, so that the reader can grasp the significance of the reference, elaborate explanations are a luxury in the comic-book world and therefore, most of the time, translations become a necessity. Certain stories and characters may allow more room for improvisation. For example, books featuring Deadpool, a character known for his fourth-wall-breaking antics, would usually include references entirely for comedic purposes. Therefore, in order to bring about the same reaction in a Bulgarian reader, instead of translation proper, we can provide an equivalent that the target audience might be more familiar with. As such, in “Deadpool Kills Deadpool” („Дедпул убива Дедпул“, Студио Артлайн, 2018 г.) instead of saying “Holla at your boy” (a song by Nigerian singer Wizkid), he now says „Я елате пиленца при батко“, referencing the song „Къде си батко?“ by Milko Kalaydzhiev. Many examples of this variety exist in a multitude of titles translated from various languages to Bulgarian over the years, such as “Asterix” or “Tom & Jerry”.

An approach of this sort, however, would not be suitable for “The Sandman”, as it would ruin the suspension of disbelief and the serious nature of the story.

In regards to translation of songs, Osoblivaia makes the following observations:

Semantics, syntax, language register, metrics, rhyme, rhythm, and choreography are combined in the writing, even the translation of an entire text. Here it is important to understand the process of creation of the songs, then analyze the overall meaning of the texts in question to apply this process in their translation.

Here are the factors that come into play when translating the lyrics of a song:

Rhythm

[...] the lyrics must be in accordance with the rhythm of the song, except that many languages use more words than English to express the same idea. Therefore, if the word-for-word translated song is intended to be sung, it would be impossible to set certain lyrics to the rhythm. [...]

References

Many songs are written about events, except that these references are not always known by the audience for which they are translated. You have to try to translate these references so that they are understandable, but there is always a word limit because of the rhythm.

Style

Some song lyrics have a very particular style, with puns or alliterations, for example. This style is difficult to transcribe in a translation because of the number of words imposed by the rhythm. However, if this style is not respected, the song loses all its charm, and the presence of the author disappears.

(2021)

Issue #3, which we previously explored, relies heavily on quotations from various songs, the lyrics of which include the word “dream”. The very title itself, “Dream a Little Dream of Me” is lifted straight out of the eponymous 1931 song, written by Fabian Andre, Wilbur Schwandt (music) and Gus Kahn (lyrics). While the loss of the potentially easily recognizable reference is unfortunate, an additional problem arises from the fact that we are provided with a lead-in to the title within the page itself, by using the lyrics of the song, as can be seen on pages 81 and 82 (though it should be noted that, in order to emphasize the transition between the pages Gaiman not only combines parts of the first two verses, but also alters “Say ‘nighty-night’” to “count ninety-nine” as one of the characters is in the middle of counting to a hundred):

„Count ninety-nine and kiss me. Just hold me tight and tell me you’ll miss me. Birds singin’ in the sycamore trees. Dream a little dream of me.“

*„До деветдесет и девет брой и целуни ме. С тъжен поглед здраво прегърни ме. Поваят на вятъра мислите ти ми шепти...
...сън за мен сънувай ти.*



Fig. 5. Page 82 of "The Sandman" vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), Bulgarian

As with the numerous other songs, featured throughout the book, an attempt was made to have the lyrics not only be as accurate as possible, but to also match the original melodies and be singable. Serving the story-telling purposes, however, took precedence and therefore the word „dream” was never interpreted as „мечта“, but as „сън“ instead. Had the multitude of quotations remained in the source language it would not only have been visually unappealing, but their significance would be lost to those not fluent in it.

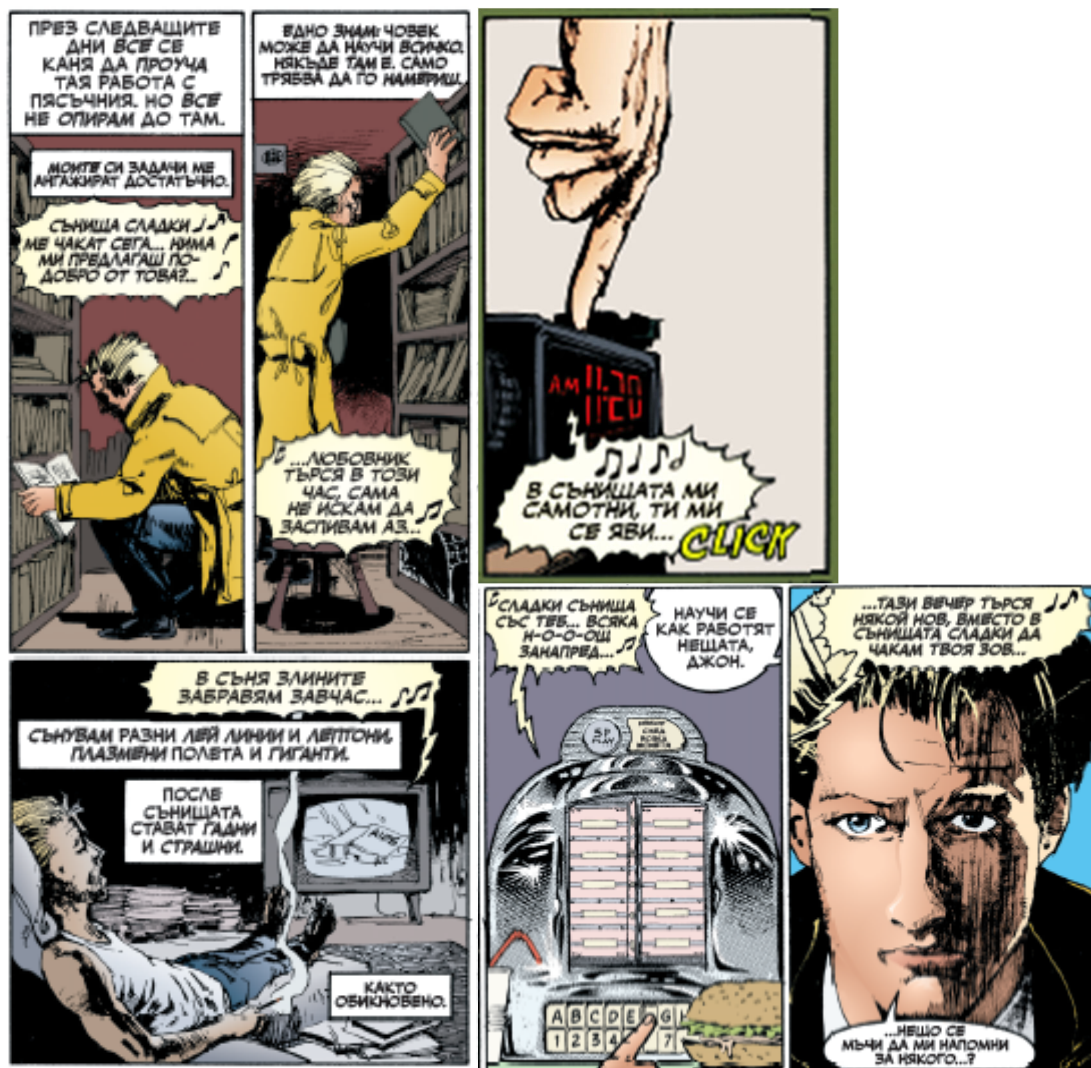


Fig. 6. Panels from “The Sandman” vol.1 (30th Anniversary Edition), pages 84 and 85, Bulgarian

Issue #3 wraps up with the character of John Constantine singing “Mr. Sandman” by The Chordettes in the final two panels of the page, as he wanders off into the night:

„Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream... make her the cutest that I’ve ever seen... Give her the word that I’m not a rover... then tell me that my lonesome life is over... “

Originally, as an additional reference, this was intended to be replaced with:

„Сънчо иде от горица да ви каже лека нощ, дечица. Че е тъмно вече вън. Време е за сън... “

Late in the adaptation process, a change was decided upon by the publisher and therefore a translation of the original lyrics was provided, however, one done by the editor, not the translator:

*„Мистър Сандмен, със сън ме дари. Нея най-хубавата направи.
Че скитник не съм кажи ѝ, а на мен – че самотата приключи...“*

Later in the book, page 173 has a scene where “The Addams Family” TV series is playing in the background, with its iconic theme-song being audible to the characters, as shown through the use of speech bubbles:

*„Their house is a mu-se-um. When people come to see ‘em, they really
are a scree-um. The Addams Family.“*

Originally, it was intended for the pre-existing translation, used in the TV dub of the 1991 animated series to be used:

*„Домът им на музей прилича и всеки той привлича. Но види ли
ги, с крясък тича. Те са Семейство Адамс.“*

Sadly, due to space limitation, the translation needed to be altered and therefore a new one was made, lowering the number of characters with spaces used from 94 to 81.

*„Музей е цял домът им. Към тях щом се запътим, със страх ще
се изпълним. Такива Адамс са.“*

This new translation also follows the original melody’s rhythm, unlike the pre-existing translation, which is simply recited and not sung in the dubbed version of the series.

3.3 COMIC CONCEPTS

While bearing a significant importance as a piece of literature, “The Sandman” is also naturally dependent on various tropes of the comic-book medium, its early issues even more so, as they involve elements, characters and events from the broader DC Comics universe such as the aforementioned Dr. Destiny, John Constantine, Martian Manhunter, Batman, The Scarecrow. The featured versions of Cain and Abel are also pre-established in this universe, having first appeared in the late 1960s. As

such, personality traits, as minor as they may be, needed to be preserved. These include:

– Speech patterns:

John Constantine's cockney accent – while an accent cannot be easily interpreted in written form, let alone in a different language, Constantine's dialogue does not necessarily follow grammatical and spelling norms both in the source and target versions of the text. This is also in line with how his speech patterns had already been presented in the Bulgarian edition of "Batman: Damned" („Батман: Прокълнат“ книги 1-3, Artline Studios)

Etrigan's rhymes – Issue #4, "A Hope in Hell", features an appearance by popular DC character Etrigan (also known as The Demon), well-known for his rhymed speech (with even Morpheus pointing out that he's "a rhymmer now", indicating his rise in Hell's hierarchy). Thus, his rhyming dialogue needed to be preserved.

– References to other stories:

Page 90 features a panel of Constantine going through a series of books, all carrying the titles of other comic stories he has appeared in. Their translations needed to match the respective plots of said stories.

Pages 137-140 are based on Jack Kirby's "Fourth World" series, which in itself required adherence to previously established translations of its terminology, although such exists in Bulgarian only within other media, e.g. television series.

– Naming tropes

A common trope in comic books, especially in the superhero genre, is the heavy use of alliteration, not only in speech, but also in naming characters and places. Volume 1 features appearances by Mister Miracle and Martian Manhunter. Due to pre-existing translations that needed to be adhered to for consistency's sake, their translations – „Мистър Чудо“ and „Марсианския ловец“ respectively, do not follow this formula (although the translation „Мистър Маг“ was considered for Mister Miracle). The focus on the trope is a bit heavier in volume 2 of the series – "The Doll's House" („Куклена къща“, Artline Studios, 2022). Part 3 – "Playing House" (Issue #12 of the series) revolves around a superhero referring to himself as "The Sandman", whose roots run deep into the history of "DC Comics". The man in question is named Hector Hall. His wife's name, on the other hand, is Hippolyta Hall (although she is mostly referred to as "Lyta") and their home – The Dream

Dome – also preserves the alliterative naming scheme. By doing this, Neil Gaiman shows clear understanding of the specifics of the genre, while managing to completely subvert expectations of what a comic featuring a superhero could be about. It also enables him to feature a connection between the previous characters who have carried the “Sandman” monicker (with the original Sandman, Wesley Dodds, having a cameo in volume 1) and his own radical re-interpretation. Thus, while the names of Hector and Lyta did not require alteration to preserve the trope, the aforementioned “Dream Dome” was adapted as „СЪННИЯ СВОД“, as opposed to „купол“.

PART 4: MAKING A KILLING

Issue #12 also features the first mentioning of a “Cereal Convention” (volume 2, page 100) which plays a significant role, as it is the scene for several important confrontations later on. What the reader does not know at this point in the story is that the naming actually features wordplay, as the convention in question is, in fact, a gathering for serial killers. Many options were considered here, such as wordplay between „палач“ and „палачинки“ or „трупа“ and „труп“ respectively. A simpler option revolved around using „сериен“ in a phrase like „сериенни събирачи“, but that too failed to carry the joke across.

What makes wordplay particularly challenging for a translator is the fact that it employs particular structural characteristics of the source language for its meaning and effect. For these structural characteristics, it is often impossible to find a counterpart in the target language.

(Koochacki 2016: 1)

Ultimately, “Cereal Convention” became „Семинар – Колене и пиццали“, where by simply shifting the stress of the words, in Bulgarian, one could get the phrase either as “Knees and shins” or “Stabbing and screaming”.



Fig. 7. Panels from “The Sandman” vol.2 (30th Anniversary Edition), page 140, Original (top) and Bulgarian (bottom)

This, according to Gottlieb (1997: 210), falls under the category of “Adaptation – to local setting, maintaining humorous effect”.

This change, however, provided a necessity for further alterations of some lines – the participants in the convention are, at one point, referred to as “Cereal growers. Or Eaters.” which in the Bulgarian translation was changed to „ортопедите или каквито са там“. Two panels further we have the following line:

“So what do you think cereal fans are into, huh? Maybe they collect those little plastic figurines and old Captain Crunch whistles...”

This was again altered to not address *cereal* in Bulgarian:

„За какво ли ще си приказват на семинара? Сигурно за контузии, артрит и ревматизъм...”

The convention is once more brought to light in issue #15, which opens with the convention attendees making various murder-related puns. They are presented below, alongside their translated versions:

„The journey was a real killer“ – „Направо ми се видя сметката“
„I wouldn’t be seen dead here“ – „Убий ме, ама не бих стъпил тук“
„I could murder a stake“ – „Бих пречукал някого за една хубавичка пържола“

„I could’a died“ – „Щях да пукна“
„They do this chocolate fudge whip that is just to die for“ – „Правят убийствен шоколадов кекс.“

„He slays me“ – „Направо ме утрена.“
„I thought the whole issue was dead and buried“ – „Мислех, че са се затрили“

„The TV version butchered it!“ – „Телевизионната версия? Осака-тили са филма!“

The main purpose of the translation in this case was, once again, to not merely be a direct representation of the lines (as they are, ultimately, inconsequential to the plot), but also preserve the pattern they are all phrased in.

CONCLUSION

While the paper, by no means, covers all aspects of the problematic nature of comic-book translation and that of “The Sandman” in particular, it nevertheless serves as an insight into a field, rarely explored by Bulgarian translators and scholars. Based on the examples provided, certain conclusions on commonly adopted translation strategies and procedures, and potential limitations of the medium can be drawn. The focus on more extensive adaptation, adherence to visual context and stylistic patterns such as puns, literary and pop-cultural references can also serve as a basic guide for other translators in their own endeavours. Further research will be aimed towards addressing the literary connections and references within the remaining volumes that have been translated in Bulgarian, as well as expanding the previous chapters with more examples.

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