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TWENTY TWO TRANSLATIONS OF "HASANAGINICA" INTO ENGLISH

So far "Hasanaginica" has been translated into English twenty two times. Thirteen of those were translations of Goethe's translation into German. The first to translate Goethe's version was Walter Scott at the end of the eighteenth century,¹ followed by John Boyd Greenshields (1800),² John Bowring (1827),³ James Clarence Mangan (1836),⁴ William Edmonstoun Aytoun (1844),⁵ Edgar Alfred Bowring (1853),⁶ Mary Anne Burt (1853),⁷ and George Bancroft (1855).⁸ Owen Meredith (Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, 1861),⁹ at first maintained that he had translated "Hasanaginica" from the original, but later withdrew that statement, as we shall see later. After Meredith, Goethe's version was translated again by Edward Chawner (1866),¹⁰ Paul Dyrssen (1878),¹¹ William Gibson (1883),¹² and M. Gray (1890).¹³ Kate Freiligrath Kroecker published in 1879 her translation of TALVIJ's translation into German.¹⁴ The translators in the twentieth century are George Rapall Noyes and Leonard Bacon (1913),¹⁵ Maximilian Muegge (1916),¹⁶ Robert William Seton-Watson (1933),¹⁷ Duncan Wilson (1970),¹⁸ Thomas Butler (1980),¹⁹ Vasa D. Mihailovich (1983),²⁰ Anne Pennington and Peter Levi (1983),²¹ and Zora Devrnja Zimmermann (1986).²² Muegge paraphrased John Bowring, Seton-Watson translated Ivan Meštrović's version, and almost all others translated the version of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. Pennington and Levi used Miroslav Pantić's edition of *Narodne pesme u zapisima xv-xviii veka* (Belgrade, 1964).

The purpose of this article is to establish the order of translations, to compare the methods used, especially in relation to the faithfulness to the original, and to examine their esthetic value.

There is no need to dwell on the familiar translations of Walter Scott and John Bowring: they have been discussed competently and extensively by Dragutin Subotić²³ and Svetozar Koljević,²⁴ among others. The translations by John Boyd Greenshields and William Edmonstoun Aytoun have been examined and compared with that of Scott by Mira Janković.²⁵ These scholars pointed out Scott's too liberal translation into a hundred and eight verses instead of ninety two as we find in Alberto Fortis or ninety three as in Vuk Karadžić. They traced the history of Scott's translation, especially the mystery surrounding its non-printing until 1924. They discussed the faith-

fulness of Greenshields and Aytoun to the translations of Fortis and Goethe, as well as Bowring's familiarity, though slight, with the Serbo-Croatian text, that sometimes gives the impression that he had translated from the original. All these translations of Goethe's translation are done with a larger or smaller success and with a great sympathy for Goethe, and through him also for the Serbo-Croatian song, which must have sounded to them somewhat strange, after all. The most important question, which perhaps can never be answered, is whether they and their successors translated "Hasanaginica" as a Serbo-Croatian folk poem or as Goethe's work. I believe that they have translated it mainly as a tribute to Goethe.

Leaving that aside, there is a need to analyze the other eighteen translations made in the two centuries after Goethe's and Scott's translations. Some of them are also well known (Owen Meredith's), while others are less known or not known at all, mainly because they were published only once or were published for the admirers of German literature in English, thereby remaining for the most part outside of the sphere of interest for many Slavists.

Of these eighteen translations, one half are again translations of Goethe while the other half are translations of Vuk's or some other version. There is no doubt that at least some of the translators in the latter group have had access to Goethe or some other foreign translator of "Hasanaginica," even though they have by and large used Vuk's version or a combination of his and some other version.

The earliest in the second generation of the translators of Goethe's translation is James Clarence Mangan, who in 1836 added his translation under a somewhat strange title "Hasan Aga" to his translations of several German poets. In the introductory paragraph Mangan quotes the first four verses in Serbo-Croatian taken from Vuk's 1814 version, which gives an impression that he knew Serbo-Croatian. However, his quoting of the words with or without *j* (*bjeli, zelenoi, je, snieg*) reveals that he has simply copied those verses from other than the original source, most likely from Bowring's quotation in *Westminster Review*. Mangan tries to maintain the decasyllabic line as well as caesura, but not always successfully. It is noteworthy that his is the first rhymed translation, mainly *a b*, but there are other combinations. Mangan rhymes because, as he says, it is easier for him than using blank verse.²⁹ About the poem itself he has a few flattering words saying that it is "unexcelled in pathos and simple

beauty by anything that Goethe has given us of his own."⁷ Mangan's translation is fluid and sonorous, no doubt because of rhyming, although the latter has sometimes led to deviation from both Goethe and the original.

Edgar Alfred Bowring published his translation of Goethe without any introduction or explanation save for a line under the title "From the Morlack." His decasyllable is flawless and the caesura almost flawless except in five verses. He follows Goethe's translation to the letter. The same cannot be said about Mary Anne Burt. Even though she uses the decasyllable almost in every verse, her caesura is often irregular, most likely because she also rhymes but in a varying way. For the same reason she often deviates from Goethe, adding here and there invented words, sometimes even entire phrases. She does not respect Goethe's division into stanzas and she lines up verses with indentation on every second line, although often the last two lines are not indented. Her stanzas always end on an even number, most likely because of the rhyme. Burt shows in her translation boldness, originality and deviation from the customary.

George Bancroft uses a nine-beat line in the entire translation, although he maintains caesura after the fourth syllable almost in all verses, with a trochee in the first two feet. He rhymes *a b* throughout the poem. For that reason his stanzas always end on an even number of verses, like those of Mary Anne Burt. Needless to say, Bancroft deviates a lot from Goethe, though not in substance.

Among the remaining four pure "Goetheites"—Edward Chawner, Paul Dyrsen, William Gibson, and M. Gray—there are no substantial differences except, of course, in the choice of words. They all follow Goethe faithfully, use the decasyllabic verse, attempt to maintain caesura after the fourth syllable in great many verses, have approximately the same number of lines (from ninety to ninety two), and no one rhymes. In the translations of Chawner and Gibson there are many direct similarities, even the same expressions, which does not exclude the possibility that Gibson had liberally helped himself from Chawner's translation. Because of almost flawless decasyllable and more or less regular caesura, all these translations sound well and flow fluidly. M. Gray's translation sounds perhaps the best despite the archaic expressions such as "thou," "thee" etc. (which are used, incidentally, by all translators except Dyrsen and the last five in the twentieth century). Having chosen a somewhat unusual title "Ser-

bian Story." Gray translates as though telling a story, deviating here and there from Goethe. However, he (she?) does the job: Gray's translation is one of the most fluid of all twenty two translations.

Another translator has relied on Goethe but indirectly: Maximilian Muegge. Of all translations save that of Gibson, Muegge's translation resembles another the most, that of John Bowring. Thirty four verses are identical and other fourteen are very similar, which means that a half of the translation is Bowring's work. To be sure, Muegge informs us that he has taken the majority of the poems in his book from Bowring but that he has revised them.²⁸ Muegge's extensive reliance on others is all the more puzzling since he maintains that he has translated some poems from the original, speaks of Karadžić, mentions the poem numbers in Vuk's books, and cites Milan Ćurčin's dissertation in German about "Hasanaginica." As it seems that Muegge is of German origin (although this may not be true), he could have used Goethe's translation as well as other German translations directly. Furthermore, his introductory article about Serbian folk poetry reveals a decent knowledge of it and of its metrics. Why he did not translate "Hasanaginica" from the original and why he did not tell us which poems he had translated from Serbo-Croatian we shall most likely never know. Be that as it may, Muegge's translation—at least that part that is not Bowring's—is not bad at all and at times surpasses that of Bowring.

Owen Meredith ushers a series of translations that utilize sources other than Goethe. He made a wrong step right at the beginning of his work on translating Serbo-Croatian poems by saying that he had translated them on their soil, in the silence of the Carpathian Mountains (!) and on the shores of the Danube.²⁹ Later he corrected his mistake by saying that what he had really wanted to say was that he had lived among the people when these poems were created (!).³⁰ It turned out that Meredith had had at his disposal Auguste Dozon's French translation, which he later admitted. He elaborated further that his translations are not exact renditions of the originals and therefore cannot be called that.³¹ If we leave aside all this confusion and unclarities, Meredith's translation is interesting in many ways. His metrics is quite irregular, with a rare caesura, and his hundred thirty verses—the most in all translations—are rhymed. Obviously, Meredith took quite seriously "the inspired paraphrase" which he had employed in the translation.³² The fact that, aside from Scott,

he was the only recognized poet among the translators contributed to his liberties. The end result is a translation that is not the best, that deviates much from the original, yet a noteworthy one that deserves to be read. For those who do not care about purity in transferring literary works from one cultural environment into another his translation is more interesting than many other, more faithful ones.

Kate Freiligrath Kroecker published her "Hasanaginica" in an article about Serbian folk poetry in *Dublin University Magazine*. The name of the translator is not mentioned but, judging by the fact that the author speaks about Serbian folk poetry with considerable authority and understanding and that this translation does not resemble much another published before, it must be assumed that Kroecker is the translator. She does not say which version she had used, but since there are no usual details from Goethe's translation but there are details found in TALVJ's translation (for example, the verse No. 59, "I kad podjem njenom b'jelu dvoru," which TALVJ took from Vuk, as well as the detail of the leather socks in the verse No. 81), the logical conclusion is that Kroecker has used TALVJ's translation. If this conclusion is correct, this translation is the first and only one made after TALVJ. The translation itself does not possess particular virtues; at times it is very rough and full of archaic expressions. Still, in comparison with some previous efforts, it represents a certain progress.

It was not until the twentieth century that "Hasanaginica" was translated directly from the original. That honor belongs to the American Slavist George Rapall Neyes and his cotranslator Leonard Bacon, who included their translation in their book *Heroic Ballads of Servia*. In the accompanying note they mention Goethe's translation,³³ but it is not clear whether they have consulted it. Unfortunately, this translation is perhaps the weakest of all. It could be called versified prose rather than poetry; the metrics is totally irregular, verses consist of anywhere from two to fifteen syllables, and caesura is very rare. The most amazing is the number of verses—only fifty seven, many of which compress two verses of the original into one. For all these reasons, this translation has no particular value except that it is the first made from the original.

The well-known English Balkanologist, Robert William Seton-Watson, published in 1932 his translation of Ivo Meštrović's version of "Hasanaginica"—to date the only one of its kind. It is faithful to

the original, it has a hundred and two verses as in Meštrović, and it is divided into stanzas just as in Meštrović. However, the metrics is quite irregular and the caesura is seldom respected despite the translator's emphasis on the importance of the caesura "in the middle of the line" (!) and despite the printing of the verses with a conspicuous empty space after caesura.³⁴ It seems as if Seton-Watson did not take seriously the role and position of the caesura, because he says that on both sides of the caesura "greater varieties of speed and scansion are attainable than in the facile but sometimes monotonous rhythms of Scott and Byron." He further expresses hope that the special method of printing verses with space in the middle would make his translation suitable for recitation and preserve some of the original atmosphere despite the language differences.³⁵ After informing the reader of all that, it is all the more surprising that the number of syllables in the first part of the line, before caesura, differs greatly from line to line and that almost half of the verses has three, five or six syllables preceding the caesura. Yet, despite these irregularities, Seton-Watson's effort is a useful contribution to the popularization of "Hasanaginica" among the English-speaking readers because it does not use the archaisms of the earlier translations, except for the use of "thou," and because it was published in a leading Slavic periodical in English, *The Slavonic and East European Review*.

The last five translations are of the Vuk's version. Duncan Wilson published his translation in his excellent and extensive book, *The Life and Times of Vuk St. Karadžić*. However, he, too, mystifies more than necessary the problem of translating Serbo-Croatian folk poetry into English when he says, "My own translations follow roughly the metre of the originals. . . . I have found, however, that an exact trochaic pentameter in English is too reminiscent of the *Hiavatha*-type tetrameter, and have therefore deliberately roughened the metre of my own lines, in an attempt to convey something of the stark tone of the original."³⁶ That seems to be the reason why Wilson does not pay much attention to the decasyllabic line, although the caesura is in the right place in all but eight verses.

Similar comments can be made about the translation of Thomas Butler. He follows faithfully Vuk's version, except for the verse No. 59, which does not exist in Fortis's version but was added by Vuk.³⁷ Butler even prints Vuk's version in the original (but without that

verse), together with Fortis's version in Serbo-Croatian, so that all can be compared. Butler does not pretend to artistic translation, does not respect the decasyllabic line, and seldom uses caesura. Because of all this, his translation resembles versified prose and has less of the rhythm and the spirit of the original than all other translations, despite a modern English idiom that makes for a fluent reading.

Mihailovich's translation also follows the Vuk version, respecting the decasyllable and caesura in all verses—the only translation to have done so. At the same time he is as faithful to the original as possible while trying not to make his rendition sound as a translation—always the hardest thing to do. Moreover, he has attempted to make a true caesura, completing a phrase after the fourth syllable rather than just counting four syllables, as many others have done; however, he was not always successful in this. Most importantly, he has checked all previous translations and has used here and there a felicitous solution rather than stubbornly insisting on originality where it was neither wise nor necessary. Admittedly, this has made his work much easier. The only concession he felt he had to make was to abandon the trochaic line now and then since it would sound unnatural in English. Mihailovich's intent was to render "Hasanaginica" in a final English version, in belief that after twenty translations no one would think it necessary to attempt yet another one.

However, that was not the case. In rapid succession two more translations were published, by Anne Pennington and Peter Levi, and by Zora Devrnja Zimmerman. In a highly polished and readable translation Pennington and Levi have tried to keep the decasyllable and caesura but unfortunately not always. Since they have done it in almost a half of the lines, there is no valid reason why they should not have been more persistent. Even so, the translation, done in a modern idiom, reads almost like an original. On the other hand, Zimmerman's effort brings an interesting novelty into the process of translating Serbo-Croatian folk poetry into English. Instead of a customary decasyllabic or a varied meter, she has chosen the octosyllabic iambic meter because, as she states, echoing Duncan Wilson, "In English, trochaic meter has always come across as a hobby-horse rhythm. Longfellow's 'Hiawatha' is a classic example."¹⁰ Furthermore, she was trying to be as literal as possible because "a literal translation comes closest to the starkness, vigor, and condensation of the original."¹¹ Although the octosyllabic meter may grate on a

traditionalist's ear, Zimmerman's translation sounds remarkably natural, showing that the trochaic pentameter indigenous to Serbo-Croatian folk poetry can flow freely when rendered in the iambic tetrameter, the purists' objections notwithstanding. The sacrifices that had to be made by compressing the verses to eight syllables are well justified judging by the end result.

It is possible that there exists yet another translation of "Hasanaginica" in English, especially among the less known translators of Goethe's poetry. The most meticulous bibliographical search has not unearthed it so far. There may be more in the future. Even so, there are not many folk poems in any literature that have been translated twenty two times into another language. This leads to a conclusion that "Hasanaginica" is a unique work in Serbo-Croatian literature, deserving a special place in the history of that literature.⁴⁰

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³⁹"The Lamentation of the Faithful Wife of Asan Aga. From the Morlachian Language." Edinburgh University Library (Laing III 827-of No. 2185). 1794-1798(?): *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 3 (1924), 366-69.

⁴⁰"A Morlachian Funeral Song of the Death of the Illustrious Wife of Asan Aga. From the German of Goethe." John Boyd Greenshields. *Selim & Zaida, an Oriental Poem with Other Pieces* (London, 1800), pp. 149-54.

⁴¹"Hassan Aga's Wife's Lament." John Bowring. *Narodne srpske pjesme: Servian Popular Poetry* (London, 1827), pp. 52-57.

⁴²"Hassan Aga." *Dublin University Magazine*, 7 (1836), 295-98.

⁴³"The Doleful Lay of the Noble Wife of Assan Aga." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 56 (July 1844), 67-68.

⁴⁴"Death-Lament of the Noble Wife of Asan-Aga." Edgar Alfred Bowring. *Poems of Goethe, translated in Original Metres* (London: John W. Parker, 1853), pp. 197-99.

⁴⁵"Lament of Hassan Aga's Noble Wife. Imitated from the Moorish." Mary Anne Burt. *Specimens of the Choicest Lyrical Productions of the Most Celebrated German Poets from Klopstock to the Present Time* (Zurich, 1853).

⁴⁶"Mournful History of the Noble Wife of Asan Aga." George Bancroft. *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (New York: Harper, 1855), pp. 231-35, pp. 480-84.

⁴⁷"The Wife of Hassan Aga." Owen Meredith. *Serbski Pesme; or National Songs of Servia* (London: Chapman-Hall, 1861), pp. 120-27.

⁴⁸"Elegy on the Noble Wife of Assan Aga." Edward Chawner. *Goethe's Minor Poems* (London: Pitman, 1866), 99-102.

⁴⁹"Lamentation of Asan Aga's Noble Wife. From the Morlackish." Paul Dyrsen. *Goethe's Poems, translated in the original metres* (New York: F. W. Christern, 1878),

pp 211–14.

¹²"The Wife of Hassan Aga." *Dublin University Magazine*. 95 (1879). 292–94.

¹³"The Lament of the Noble Wife of Asan Aga." William Gibson, *The Poems of Goethe* (London: Simpkin, 1883). pp. 31–34.

¹⁴"A Serbian Story." M. Gray, *Lyrics and Epigrams. After Goethe and Other German Authors* (Edinburg: D. Douglas, 1890). pp. 23–26.

¹⁵"The Wife of Hasan Aga." George Rapall Noyes & Leonard Bacon, *Heroic Ballads of Servia* (Boston: Sherman-French, 1913). pp. 271–75.

¹⁶"Hasanaginica." Maximilian Muegge, *Serbian Folk Songs, Fairy Tales and Proverbs* (London: Drane, 1916). pp. 64–68.

¹⁷"Lament of the Noble Wife of Hassan Aga." *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 11, No. 31 (1932), 134–37.

¹⁸"Hasanaginica." Duncan Wilson, *The Life and Times of Vuk St. Karadžić, 1787–1864: Literacy, Literature and National Independence in Serbia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). pp. 361–63.

¹⁹"Hasan Aga's Wife." Thomas Butler, *Monumenta Serbocroatica* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1980). pp. 417–22.

²⁰"The Wife of Hasan Aga." *Serb World*. 4, iii (1983). 24, 35.

²¹"The Wife of Asan-aga." Anne Pennington & Peter Levi, *Marko the Prince: Serbo-Croat Heroic Songs* (London: Duckworth, 1983). pp. 168–70.

²²"Hasanaginica." Zora Devrnja Zimmerman, *Serbian Folk Poetry: Ancient Legends, Romantic Songs* (Columbus, OH: Kosovo, 1986). pp. 239–43.

²³Dragan Subotić, *Yugoslav Popular Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).

²⁴Svotozar Koljević, "Naše junačke pesme u engleskoj i američkoj kritici." *Putevi reči* (Sarajevo, 1978).

²⁵Mira Janković, "Tri engleska prijevoda 'Hasanaginice' u Škotskoj." *Rad JAZU*, knj. 304 (1955), 137–58.

²⁶J.C. Mangan, "Faust, and the Minor Poems of Goethe." *Dublin University Magazine*. 7, No. 39 (1836). 295.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Maximilian Muegge, *Serbian Folk Songs, Fairy Tales and Proverbs*, p. 7.

²⁹Owen Meredith, *Serbski Pesme: or National Songs of Servia*, p. 15.

³⁰R. Lytton, *Orval or The Fool of Time* (London, 1869). p. 362.

³¹Meredith, p. 3.

³²Lytton, p. 363.

³³George Rapall Noyes & Leonard Bacon, *Heroic Ballads of Servia*, p. 271.

³⁴*The Slavonic and East European Review*. 11 (1932). 134.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Duncan Wilson, *The Life and Times of Vuk St. Karadžić*, p. 361.

³⁷Thomas Butler, *Monumenta Serbocroatica*, p. 417.

³⁸Zora Devrnja Zimmerman, *Serbian Folk Poetry*, p. vi.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.

⁴⁰Many quoted translations have been republished two or more times in various publications. The complete list can be found in Vasa D. Mihailovich and Mateja Matejic, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Yugoslav Literature in English 1593–1980* (Columbus: Slavica, 1984), pp. 12–14.

THE WIFE OF HASAN AGA
(HASANAGINICA)
Translated by Vasa D. Mihailovich

What shines so white there in the green forest?
Is it white snow, or a flock of white swans?
If it were snow, it would've melted by now;
If it were swans, they would have flown away.
It is not snow, nor is it swans either.
But the tent of Aga Hasan Aga,
He lies there ill with severe battle wounds.
His mother and dear sister visit him,
But not his wife, for she is too ashamed.
After his wounds had begun to heal some,
He sent a word to his dear faithful wife:
"Don't wait for me in my white court again.
Not at my court, nor among my people."
When the lady understood the message,
While, the poor one, was still pondering it,
Trampling horses were heard around the court.
Hasan Aga's wife then hurried headlong
To throw herself from the tower's window.
Her two maiden daughters ran after her:
"Come back to us, oh, our dearest mother!
It is not our father, Hasan Aga,
But our uncle, the Bey Pintorovich."
And she returned, Hasan Aga's woman,
And threw her arms around her brother's neck:
"My dear brother, it is a great disgrace
To send me away from our five children!"
The silent bey says not a single word,
But puts his hand in his silken pocket,
And he takes out a writ of annulment,
That dissolves her marital vows in full,
And sends her back to her mother with him.
When the lady had examined the writ,
Two of her sons she kissed on the forehead
And her two daughters on their rosy cheeks,

But from her son sleeping in the cradle
She could not part or tear herself away,
Till her brother took her by the white hands
And barely led her away from her son.
He placed her up near himself on his horse,
And together they rode to their white home.
With her kinsfolk she stayed but a short time,
Short time, indeed, not even a full week.
A good woman, from a good family,
From all over suitors came to woo her,
More than others came Imotski's Cadi.
Noble lady then implored her brother:
"For the sake of our love, my dear brother,
Don't marry me to any other man,
Or my sad heart will surely break grieving
At the sight of my poor orphaned children."
But the bey paid no heed to her pleading
And gave her hand to Imotski's Cadi.
Noble lady then implored her brother
To write for her a letter on white sheet
And to send it to Imotski's Cadi:
"Your bride sends you her most cordial greetings
And she begs you kindly in this letter:
'When you gather your big wedding party
And when you set out for her white dwelling,
Please bring with you a long veil for the bride,
So that, when she goes by the aga's court,
She does not see her poor orphaned children.'"
When the Cadi received the white letter,
He gathered his wedding guests together,
Gathered the guests and set out for the bride.
The wedding guests came gaily for the bride
And merrily they turned homeward with her.
But when they were passing the aga's court,
Her two daughters saw her from the window,
And her two sons came out in front of her,
And as they did, they spoke to their mother:
"Come to see us, O our dearest mother,
That our dinner we may offer to you."

When the wife of Hasan Aga heard that,
She spoke to the bridesman of the party:
"Brother in God, bridesman of the party,
Halt the horses beside the aga's court,
While I give some presents to my orphans."
The horses stopped beside the aga's court.
She gave fine gifts to all of her children:
To either son she gave a gift of a knife,
To each daughter a dress down to the ground;
And to the son sleeping in the cradle,
To him she sent a bundle of fine clothes.
When the manly Hasan Aga saw this,
He called to him sadly his two young sons:
"Come here to me, my poor orphaned children,
Since she won't have any pity on you,
Your own mother, with a heart of cold stone."
When the wife of Hasan Aga heard that,
She fell and hit the ground with her white face.
At that instant she parted with her soul
From the grief of looking at her orphans.