

[Open Peer Review on Qeios](#)

# Ivan Bunin's Prose in English: a Diachronic Analysis of Translations

Yuri Vsevolodovich Maslov<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Belarusian State Economic University

**Funding:** No specific funding was received for this work.

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

## Abstract

The material deals with the problem of retranslations of classical Russian prose into English viewed diachronically. The material is a short story by Ivan Bunin, the Nobel Prize winning émigré writer, and its four published English-language renditions made between 1949 and 2008. The retranslations are compared using four excerpts from the original text. A machine-produced version is also analyzed, along with the translation produced by the author. The conclusions offer some recommendations on how translators may improve the overall quality of the product of their efforts.

**Keywords:** Translation Studies, retranslation, Russian literature, comparative analysis, diachronic analysis.

## Retranslation studies: why the importance

In recent decades, retranslations have become staple objects of research. It can be explained, primarily, by the fact that certain cultures are experiencing a retranslation boom. For instance, Saeedi (2020) describes Persian retranslations of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The first translation appeared in 1965, but the period after 2010 saw seventy-seven (!) published retranslations of the novella (Saeedi: 35). A similar situation can be observed in other cultures. In Turkey, thirty-eight retranslations of *The Jungle Book* by Kipling were published between 1936 and 2016 (Bayraktar Özer 2017). Such examples abound.

A variety of terms is used to describe the phenomenon, such as *asplurality*, *multiplicity*, and *retranslation*. The origin and uses of the term *plurality*, for instance, has been thoroughly explicated by Ukrainian scholars (Boiko & Nikonova 2021). As the term *retranslation* is more commonly used in Western studies, it will be given preference.

Retranslations got into the spotlight in the 1990s when A. Berman formulated the Retranslation Hypothesis stating that the first translation is always an introductory one (domesticating) and can never become great while subsequent translations (foreignizing) can communicate the true elements and features of the original text better (Wijebandara 2023). Brownlie (2006) translates Berman's idea as follows: it is necessary to expose a text to several retranslations to arrive at a

great canonical translation (Brownlie: 148). No doubt, an important distinction should be made between retranslations and revisions (Gunes 2019). Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish between the two, especially if they appear during the same period.

It has been postulated (van Poucke 2017) that a good reason for multiple retranslations is the aging of the language of translation. However, it is hardly the case with retranslations produced synchronically (Bayraktar Özer: 427-428). In fact, other reasons can be traced to cultural change, paradigm shifts in translation studies, etc. (Van Poucke: 92).

The exponentially growing corpus of retranslations into many languages calls for their precise classification. Having studied multiple research sources, Boiko & Nikonova (2021) present various types of plurality. We can modify these ideas a little and offer a classification of plurality that contains five types.

These include “spatial” plurality (the same work translated into different languages), “temporal” plurality (synchronic or diachronic, when the same work retranslated simultaneously or in different epochs), “stylistic” plurality (when rivalry occurs between translators of the same culture), “autodidactic” plurality (if one work is translated differently by the same author), and “subcultural” plurality (when different versions are created to satisfy the demands of different cultural groups). Thus, any retranslation may fall into one of these categories.

In case of canonical literary works, we typically deal with diachronic and/or synchronic retranslations of the “spatial” type. Comparative analysis of several retranslations into one and the same language performed over a long period of time can yield valuable observations, primarily, on the overall quality of foreign language versions. In fact, this analytical procedure can be beneficial for translators operating in the target culture, especially if we deal with a work of literature that has stood the test of time.

The stories written by the Russian writer Ivan Bunin certainly belong to the category of timeless masterpieces.

## Bunin: an iconic figure in global literary culture

Ivan Bunin (1870-1953) is the first Russia-born recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1933). He is, according to some critics, one of the best masters of short story writing in world literature. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century his literary reputation was triumphantly revived in his native land making him one of the most celebrated émigré writers of Russia.

There exists a plethora of studies in many languages that focus on Bunin’s creative heritage. One can truly say that his literary work has been analyzed inside out.

Primarily, the writer’s stories and poems have been viewed through the lens of the literary process taking place both in Russia and abroad. In a recent study by an Italian researcher (Deotto 2019), Ivan Bunin’s work is placed within the context of the continuous Russian poetic tradition. No doubt, Bunin did “stand on the shoulders of giants” being inspired by the poems of the Russian Symbolists like Bryusov or Balmont or the American poet Henry W. Longfellow whose *The Song of Hiawatha* the young aspiring author translated into Russian in his early twenties. As a young prose writer, Bunin

was influenced by the works of such contemporaries as Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky.

Goncalves (2017) points out that the similarities in some of Chekhov's and Bunin's works are indeed "striking", as if certain stories were written by either of the two authors. In his paper, the present-day researcher proves the thesis in detail by comparing Bunin's *A Sunstroke* and Chekhov's *The Lady with the Dog* which share in the same themes and similarly constructed characters.

In his turn, Bunin later influenced the following generation of Russian writers such as Nabokov, though their personal relationship can hardly be called an idyllic one.

It was not only great Russian writers who influenced Bunin's art but also foreign ones. Meskin & Galay (2017) underscore the obvious connections between the stories written by Bunin and the French writer Maupassant. Both artists exploit the same subject matter – love and nature. At the same time, critics noted certain differences. Bunin is more concerned with the mood of the story, whereas the French predecessor seems to focus on story endings.

In today's literary world, Bunin's reputation is that of a giant. His work earned multiple translations from the Russian into many other languages. The obvious question arises whether the global reader has been receiving what can be called "genuinely authentic" Bunin's text.

To answer this question, one needs to describe the peculiarities of Bunin's writing technique and then identify some of his most telling literary texts. Then we can start analyzing translations of Bunin's works into English approaching the task from the standpoint of "diachronic plurality" in translation.

## Ivan Bunin's idiosyncratic style

There are several things that are crucial for understanding Bunin's style. One of the striking features is the absence of the rigid plot structure in many of his prosaic pieces. It was pointed out early on (Woodward 1980; Fedoulova 1983) that Bunin relies on contrast structure. The writer can insert an independent plot or interrupt the main one and contrast a few images to create a unique atmosphere that readers are supposed to immerse into. There happen hardly any events, and the reader is exposed to no conflicts. The present and the past are closely knit.

Besides human characters, there are always natural phenomena that play an important role in creating the atmosphere (Meskin & Galay 2017). Bunin had a keen eye for minute details, be it human relationships or the life of nature, and he saw great vitality in everything around him as his worldview was influenced by Oriental philosophy and religion (Liu & Suzdalova 2020).

The Christian Bible, too, left a mark on Bunin's style. Shroyer (1998) describes the writer's "Biblical syntax" which, according to the researcher, amounts to the use of Russian conjunctions equivalent to the English "and" that serve as markers opening a sentence or connecting a series of sentences.

Jurascek (2020) conducts a comprehensive review of publications dedicated to Oriental themes in Bunin's prose.

Scholars have emphasized the impact of Bunin's travels to the East in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his familiarity with Buddhist teachings. Yahyapur (2021) points out Bunin's profound knowledge of Oriental and Islamic poetry that may have been a factor shaping many of his later stories. In fact, some of these stories may well be juxtaposed with certain iconic works of Oriental literature, for instance, Japanese and Korean (Choi 2011). There is also an extensive corpus of texts authored by Bunin that deal directly with the East (Астащенко 2003; Jurascek 2020). That is why the specific chronotope of Bunin's stories does become a key for more profound understanding of the prosaic work.

Bunin's style was highly appreciated by translators, too. In the foreword to a collection of Bunin's works, Richards (1986) writes that his prose possesses 'a subtle melodiousness' and is characterized by 'cool verbal precision'. Thus, the peculiar style of Bunin's prose does present a challenge for any translator. All the above-mentioned features should be conveyed with fidelity in a foreign language version.

## Ivan Bunin at his best as a writer

What constitutes Bunin's best work as a writer of prose is an open question. His manner of writing was evolving over a long period of time. Stringent economy of stylistic means of the early period was gradually replaced by the richness of detail and the use of multiple epithets. Moreover, Bunin's later stories are quintessentially musical; his prose possesses an unmistakable rhythmic quality due to elaborate orchestration of sounds and the organization of sentences of various length (Соколов 1971).

Although critical opinions may differ on what should be considered Bunin's best work due to the literary or ideological persuasions of the critics, the distinctive status of Bunin's collection of short stories entitled *Dark Avenues* seems to be universally acknowledged (Meskin & Galay 2017).

In his profound essay, Shrayner (1998) writes that the said collection was Bunin's masterpiece intended not just to crown his entire career in fiction but to address the issues central to the writer's worldview. According to the essayist, the stories "focus on love, death, and the female body" that are the three notions inseparable in Bunin's artistic perception. At the same time, the author, with his overt classical leanings, tried to steer clear of any sexual expressions. Highly poetic means are employed by Bunin in the *Dark Avenues* collection to portray even the phenomena of the basest nature.

Thus, rendering this collection in a different language presents a serious challenge. It is necessary to keep many elements of Bunin's prose intact, such as rhythm, word choice, syntax, and even the marks of punctuation (the writer was known for his meticulous attention to punctuation marks). The stories in the collection differ in length and/or mood. The limits of the present paper call for choosing a not-so-lengthy text for analysis. The choice invariably falls on the second story in the collection, *Caucasus*. There are several reasons for that.

Firstly, it is a piece of prose that, in a way, became seminal for the entire collection as it was written between September and October 1937. The whole collection was gradually taking shape over a period of fifteen years, but *Caucasus* never lost its prominent position as story number two following the number one story, *Dark Avenues* (Reese 2003). That means

the writer put a high premium on this story.

Secondly, it belongs to a much bigger corpus of texts inspired both by the author's impressions of the East and the attitude to the concept of Caucasus specific for Russian literary mentality (Глухова 2015). As is known, the story was being created at the time when the centennial of Pushkin's tragic death was commemorated in Russia.

The year 1837 saw the death of a genius poet from wounds sustained in a duel and the younger poet Lermontov's exile to the Caucasus. The Nobel laureate knew all these facts very well. A century later, the year 1937 prompted the creation of a literary work with rich allusive quality that integrated the concepts of paradise-like Caucasus, literature, poetry, beauty, tragic love, and violent death.

Last but not least, the story is short and elaborately crafted. It bears all the traces of Bunin's original style and presents many challenges when being rendered into a different language. It's a kind of material that tests the mettle of the translator. Simply put, if one can faithfully translate this story, he or she can certainly translate any of Bunin's work.

### *Caucasus*: the text peculiarities

Our choice text remains a work that invariably kindles multinational researchers' interest (Глухова 2015; Juracsek 2020; Liu Ziyuan, Miao Hui 2021; Саморукова 2021; Семенова 2023).

For instance, the Chinese scholars Liu Ziyuan and Miao Hui (2021) have thoroughly analyzed the text's chronotope concluding that the dominant technique employed by the author is contrast. Contrasted are the urban and open-air natural spaces, day and night, the cold autumn in Moscow and the hot season in the Caucasus, all of which symbolize the opposites of bliss and blight, devotion and desperation, life and death.

Broadly speaking, Bunin's description of the Caucasus can never be reduced to a sentimental-idyllic topos (Семенова 2023). In a way, the plot of the story can be elevated to much higher plain alluding to the *Book of Genesis*, thereby actualizing the motif of the creation of the world.

Elements of contrast are found everywhere in the descriptive epithets used by the writer (Саморукова 2021). The first-person narration provides many opportunities for creating "special literary effects" such as juxtaposing seemingly unmatchable descriptors and creating meaningful oxymoronic combinations

Numerous in the story are symbolic elements (Глухова 2015) that are vividly seen in the concepts used in the text. One such concept is Mystery, and it looms over the reader from the very first line of the opening paragraph. There are multiple other details in the text that deserve closer attention, and they belong to different characteristics of the verbal structure – lexical, grammatical, and syntactical. It has been emphasized that alliterations and repetitions, too, serve the purpose of intensifying the overall message of the story.

Thus, potential translation pitfalls abound in this story, so the translators can run into many difficulties while doing their job.

## The analysis of retranslations

Presenting so many challenges for translators, the story *Caucasus* seems to be a perfect object for comparative analysis of retranslations. It can be quite illuminating to observe how translators of various generations deal with those challenges.

We will consider the translations made by Richard Hare (1949), Sophie Lund (1984), Graham Hettlinger (2007), and Hugh Aplin (2008). We will also refer to the versions produced by machine translation service (DeepL) and to our own never-published-before versions of the same passages (see the list of publications below).

<i>Dark Avenues</i> and Other Stories by Ivan Bunin. London: John Lehmann, 1949. Pp. 16 – 21.	Translated from the Russian by Richard Hare.
<i>The Gentleman from San Francisco</i> and Other Stories. London: Penguin, 1984. Pp. 196 – 200.	Translated from the Russian by Sophie Lund.
Ivan Bunin. <i>Collected Stories</i> . Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 2007. Pp. 281 – 286.	Translated from the Russian by Graham Hettlinger.
<i>Dark Avenues</i> . Ivan Bunin. Croydon: CP I Group, 2008. Pp. 15 – 19.	Translated from the Russian by Hugh Aplin.

For a more in-depth analysis, we will focus on several ‘purple patches’ in the story text. For the sake of symmetry, we will consider the same passages in English retranslations. The passages discussed further are brief, yet the perusal of the whole texts produced by each translator suggests that these examples are representative of their work as a whole.

Our chief intention is not to criticize and find fault with this or that translation, but to try to show how foreign language versions can – or, in some instances, should – be improved for the benefit of the international reader. Our analysis presents an attempt to view the existing translations from the perspective of a native Russian (with a knowledge of English) who has been savoring Bunin’s prose-writing mastery for five straight decades.

### Excerpt A

The story opens with a paragraph that sets the tone of the whole work (Excerpt A). It contains just 45 words. Given in bold face are the ‘signposts’ that need to be dealt with utmost care as they play a key role in setting the mood full of apprehension.

*(А) Приехав в Москву, я **воровски** остано**в**ился в **незаме тных** номе**р**ах в переулке возле Арба та и жил **томи тельно, за т**ворником — от свидания до свидания с нею. Была она у меня за э ти дни всего три раза и ка**ж**дый раз входила поспешно со словами: — Я то**ль**ко на одну мину**т**у...*

The narrator, never named by the author, imparts the idea of an illicit love affair that needs to be kept hidden from the public eye (*воровски, незаме тных, за т*ворником). The passage is compact and terse, written with considerable economy of language. It is also characterized by unmistakable rhythm.

The earliest translation known to the present writer was published during Bunin's lifetime, in 1949 (Excerpt A1).

**(A1)** *Arriving in Moscow, I furtively established myself in an obscure hotel near the Arbat, and lived there feverishly, secluded – between one meeting and the next with her. She only came to me three times during all those days and each time she entered hurriedly with the words: “I’ve only come for one minute...”*

As one can see, Richard Hare did a good job of handling the Russian original. His translation is a faithful, if not slightly simplified, rendition of the text containing 53 words, an acceptable length (45 in the original). There is practically nothing to quarrel with in this version apart from the English adverb *feverishly* that can hardly stand for the Russian *ТОМИТЕЛЬНО* (*experiencing the feeling of yearning*). The variant chose by the translator conveys, perhaps, a sentiment different from the one in the original.

The subsequent 1984 translation (Excerpt A2) is nearly 20 words longer than the original (63 words). Sophie Lund visibly tried to add a certain measure of explanatory information.

**(A2)** *On arrival in Moscow I took rooms, furtively, in an obscure lodging house tucked away in an alley close to the Arbat and lived the tedious existence of a recluse – from one meeting with her to the next. She came to me on only three occasions during that period, and each time arrived in haste, exclaiming: ‘I can only stay a minute ...’*

In such a way, an *obscure hotel* turns into an *obscure lodging house*, and what was described previously as a *secluded* life becomes the *tedious existence of a recluse*, a much more complicated phrase that, unfortunately, adds the unwelcome note of tedium, the idea contrary to the passionate intensity of the original. There is also a feeling that the expression *on three occasions* sounds a bit too formal in the given context, and the combination *arrived in haste* draws a picture of too much hurry.

The 2007 translation (Excerpt A3) made by Graham Hettlinger is 10 words longer than the original (55 words). It doesn't represent a very faithful rendering as it contains several departures from the original text.

**(A3)** *After arriving in Moscow, I furtively took a room in an inconspicuous guest house in an alley near the Arbat, and between our meetings, I lived like an anchorite, hungering for her. She came to me only three times during those days, saying, “I’m here for just a moment” as she darted into the room.*

The translator allows himself a certain measure of freedom when dealing with the original text. Not unexpectedly, the degree of passion seems to be greater in this translation, as the narrator *hunger*s (sic!) for his beloved *between meetings*. However, this kind of expressiveness seems to be ‘un peu trop’ in the context. Moreover, it creates an unintended oxymoron as the narrator is described as an *anchorite*, i.e. a man of strong religious views, a monk. This word may be a good choice in a text by Pushkin, but not by Bunin. The young woman, the narrator's beloved, *darts into the room*, which creates the impression of a quick, sudden movement that is absent in the story.



The translator tries to build sentences in accordance with the rules of English syntax, which fosters authenticity, yet it somewhat interferes with the uniquely *Buninesque* rhythmical organization of the passage. Thus, one can say that Hettlinger's translation is not without its problems.

Hugh Aplin seems to have done well in his 2008 translation (Excerpt A4), as it faithful to the original text, if not slightly longer (57 words).

**(A4)** *On arriving in Moscow, I put up furtively at inconspicuous rooms in a side street near the Arbat and led the tiresome life of a recluse – from meeting to meeting with her. During those days she visited me just three times, and each time she came in hurriedly with the words: "I've only come for a minute..."*

The choice of the verb *put up* is exact, but the subtle hint at being sick with love expressed in the Russian adverb *томительно* is lost, as the narrator, again, leads *the tiresome life of a recluse*. The combination *inconspicuous rooms* can perhaps be replaced by *unobtrusive rooms*, which will carry both the author's alliteration and meaning. Anyway, the translator's choice is too long a word. Overall, the translation is accurate in its faithfulness to the original content.

For the sake of comparison, a machine translation was also produced using DeepL service (<https://www.deepl.com/ru/translator>). The resulting version has a few points of interest (Excerpt A5).

**(A5)** *When I arrived in Moscow, I thievelly stayed in inconspicuous rooms in an alley near the Arbat and lived languidly, a recluse, from date to date with her. She visited me only three times during these days, and each time she came in hurriedly with the words: "I'm only for one minute..."*

First, it is almost as short as the original (52 words), which means there are few unnecessary words. Yet the problem with the translation lies in its literality. For reasons unknown, DeepL invents the word *thievelly* that sticks out of the text. In English, the narrator's life is described as *languid* that better corresponds in meaning with the Russian *томно* (*languorously*). It sounds similar (that, perhaps, explains the machine's choice) but differs semantically from Bunin's poetic adverb. Interestingly, the overall rhythmic organization punctuated using commas can be viewed as acceptable.

Finally, we can offer an alternative version of the opening paragraph in which we primarily tried to keep the alliteration intact (Excerpt A6). The dash, a punctuation mark that is less characteristic of English syntax, has been omitted. We tried to be as economical with words as possible (only 51 in our version).

**(A6)** *Upon arrival in Moscow, I furtively rented a room in a guest house hidden amid Arbat lanes and lived there in seclusion, yearning for yet another rendezvous with her. We met but three times during these days, and each time she came in saying hastily, "I'm only for a minute here..."*

## Excerpt B



The second paragraph of the story (Excerpt B) provides the narrator's description of his beloved and reads like genuine love poetry. It is short and presents one compound sentence.

**(B)** Она была бледна прекрасной бледностью любящей взволнованной женщины, голос у нее срывался, и то, как она, бросив куда попало зонтик, спешила поднять вуальку и обнять меня, потрясло меня жалостью и восторгом.

The 1949 translation (Excerpt B1) follows the syntax of the original, with the addition of a semi-colon. This punctuation mark clearly divides the passage in two unequal parts, which is contrary to the author's intention to produce a continuous flow of vivid, fleeting impressions.

**(B1)** She was pale with the beautiful pallor of a woman moved by love; she spoke in spasms, and the way she threw down her parasol, and immediately lifted her veil to embrace me, filled me with pity and rapture.

The passage is devoid of unnecessary words (only 39 against 31 in the original). One phrase seems out of place (*speaking in spasms*) as it may evoke the idea of a medical condition, non-existent in the original.

Another combination may cause slight misunderstanding, *lifted her veil to embrace me*. From what the present writer knows about veils (not much, though), a woman might embrace her beloved without lifting it. The expression *filled me with pity and rapture* seems to be a weaker version of the author's strong *verbно потрясло* (literally *shook [me] with emotion*).

The subsequent 1984 translation (Excerpt B2) is again 20 words longer than the original (51 words).

**(B2)** She was pale, with the exquisite pallor of a woman filled with love and apprehension, her voice kept breaking, and the way in which, having cast down her umbrella without caring where it fell, she hastened to lift her veil in order to embrace me, overwhelmed me with rapture and pity.

The version follows the syntax of the Russian text, but this time it won't work in the translator's favor. For example, the predicate *overwhelmed* is separated from the subject *way*, which somewhat clouds the meaning of the sentence. Also, the structure *the way in which, having cast down* doesn't read very well. As a result, the whole passage emanates a feeling of detachment. The formality of tone is intensified by the conjunction *in order to* that belongs to the official discourse.

One can expect that the 2007 translation (Excerpt B3) may somewhat depart from the original text, and the expectations are justified.

**(B3)** The exquisite pallor of a woman filled with love and apprehension had blanched her skin. Her voice cracked when she spoke, and I was overwhelmed with tenderness and joy as she flung her umbrella on the floor, fumbled with her veil, hurried to embrace me.

Though the translator succeeds in keeping the paragraph reasonably short (45 words), the translation is not without its problems. First, the whole text sounds unnecessarily straightforward (*flung – fumbled – hurried*, all in one go). Bunin's intentional repetition (*бледна ... бледностью*) is omitted, but added is an unsavory feature of the female lover's *scracking* voice. More importantly, the pair of nouns, *tenderness and joy*, are not in the least equivalent to the Russian *жалость и восторг*, which describes a much more complicated feeling that becomes manifest – and thus, crucial – by the end of the passage.

In the 2008 translation (Excerpt B4), the original text makes a comeback containing just 41 words.

**(B4)** *She was pale with the beautiful pallor of an excited woman in love, her voice would break, and the way that, after tossing her umbrella down anywhere, she would hurry to raise her veil and embrace me struck me with pity and delight.*

The translation is generally faithful, the only thing problematic being the gap, however well-filled with words, between the subject *way* and the predicate *overwhelmed*. Nevertheless, the paragraph still reads well.

Not surprisingly, DeepL the machine negotiated meanings rather successfully (Excerpt B5).

**(B5)** *She was pale with the beautiful pallor of a loving, anxious woman, her voice was breaking, and the way in which she threw her umbrella everywhere and hurried to lift her veil and embrace me shocked me with pity and delight.*

The only trouble is that the character throws her umbrella *everywhere* (do machines have imaginations?), and there is also a repetition of pronouns that can hardly be found in a sentence crafted by a Nobel Prize winner. Also, the rhythm of the phrase seems to be lost in translation.

Once again, we can offer our alternative version of the second paragraph (Excerpt B6).

**(B6)** *She was pale with that beautiful pallor of an excited woman in love, her voice was breaking, and both pity and rapture engulfed me when I saw her fling her parasol carelessly, lift her little veil and hurriedly embrace me.*

The rule of thumb is keeping the translation short (ours is only 40 words long). We opt from the combination *pity and rapture* as its sound pattern is closer to the original version (*жалостью и восторгом*). Also, the syntax of the phrase is in accordance with the rules of the target language. There is a minute addition, the descriptor *little*, contributing to the impression – unmistakable in the original – that the young woman's appearance and body language are somewhat 'girlish'.

## Excerpt C

Let us consider how translators deal with more complex paragraphs of the story that require not only hard-earned skills but a keen sense of harmony. The following 85 words of the story, a separate paragraph, describe the beginning of what is doomed to become a full-fledged tragedy.

*(C) План наш был дерзок: уехать в одном и том же поезде на кавказское побережье и прожить там в каком-нибудь совсем диком месте три-четыре недели. Я знал это побережье, жил когда-то некоторое время возле Сочи, — молодой, одинокий, — на всю жизнь запомнил те осенние вечера среди черных кипарисов, у холодных серых волн... И она бледнела, когда я говорил: «А теперь я там буду с тобой, в горных джунглях, у тропического моря...» В осуществление нашего плана мы не верили до последней минуты — слишком великим счастьем казалось нам это.*

The 1949 translation (Excerpt C1), though 30 words longer (116 against 85 in the original), follows the Russian version without departures.

*(C1) Our plan was a bold one; to travel in the same train to the Caucasian coast and live there for some three or four weeks in a completely wild place. I knew that coast; I had spent some time near Sochi – as a lonely young man – and remembered all my life these autumn evenings among the black cypresses near the cold grey waves... And she turned pale when I said, “But this time I shall be there with you, in the forest of wild plane trees, in the hilly jungle by the tropical sea...” Till the last day we did not believe that our plan would be realized – it seemed to us too great a happiness.*

Yet the phrase *remembered all my life* seems to be a careless choice, as it is not what the phrase *на всю жизнь запомнил* means. Also awkward is the picture of *hilly jungle* in which the translator manages to place *plane trees*, a detail nowhere to be found in the original text. There is another syntactical element, the semicolon, added without any reason. Knowing what a stickler Bunin was for punctuation marks, this translator’s choice seems to be nothing but carelessness.

The 1984 translation (Excerpt C2) is again a bit longer than it should be (109 words) but overall, it follows the original more or less faithfully.

*(C2) Our plan was audacious: to leave by the same train for the Caucasian coast, and to live there in some totally wild spot for three or four weeks. I knew that coastline, I'd stayed at one time near Sochi – young and lonely – and for the rest of my life would remember those autumn evenings amid the dark cypresses, close to the cold grey waves. Her face grew white when I said: ‘And now I’ll be there with you in the mountain jungles, beside the tropical sea ...’ We didn’t believe in the realization of our plan until the very last minute – to us it seemed too great a happiness.*

The adjective *audacious* is a more subtle move, but the expression *her face grew white* is not. The author’s idea is, again,

to evoke the blissfully beautiful pallor of the lover's skin. Growing white in the face is associated with a different emotion. Moreover, Bunin's 'Biblical syntax' – the conjunction *and* at the start of sentences – is overlooked here. At the end of the paragraph, we find another instance of officialese, *the realization of the plan*. One might say that the translator displayed a certain lack of sensitivity to the nuances of the style.

The 2007 translation (Excerpt C3) remains true to its spirit of creative freedom, which can't but lead to minor discrepancies between the original and its rendition.

**(C3)** *It was a daring plan: take the same train together to the coast of the Caucasus and stay for three or four weeks in some utterly remote place. I knew that coast – I had lived a little while near Sochi when I was young and alone, and all my life I'd remembered autumn evenings among black cypresses and cold, grey waves ... She grew pale whenever I reminded her of this, and said, "But this time you'll be with me in that mountain jungle near the sea." We didn't believe our plan would come to life until the very last – it seemed too great a happiness.*

For instance, the narrator *reminds* his beloved of the days he spent near Sochi, but it simply cannot happen within the story space. The phrase *all my life I'd remembered* looks more Bunin-esque rhythmically, but it still is not what the phrase *на всю жизнь запомнил* means. The adjective *remote* evokes the idea of distance, but the original one (*дикий*) means that the place is just wild, not favored by campers/tourists. However, the translation is not too long (108 words) and generally faithful. The translator finds an effective way to get rid of officialdom: the phrase *our plan would come to life* describes the characters' feeling of apprehension correctly.

The 2008 translation (Excerpt C4) is the longest (116 words). The first impression of the text is that most of the words chosen by the translator are multisyllable ones.

**(C4)** *Our plan was audacious: to leave for the coast of the Caucasus by one and the same train and to live there in some completely wild place for three or four weeks. I knew that coast, I had once lived for some time near Sochi – when young and single – I had those autumn evenings amidst black cypresses by the cold, grey waves committed to memory for the rest of my life... And she would turn pale when I said: "And now I'll be there with you, in mountainous jungle, by the tropical sea..." We did not believe in the realization of our plan until the last minute – too great a happiness did it seem to us.*

Hugh Aplin manages to render Bunin's verbs correctly: the narrator *has [those days] committed to memory*, a very elegant rendition. There is also an attempt to emphasize the lovers' feelings grammatically: *too great a happiness **did** it seem to us*. This variant is a complete rhythmical and emotional equivalent of the phrase that crowns the paragraph. Overall, the translator seems to have done a good job.

However, he again reverts the officialese (*realization of our plan*). There is also a wrong choice of word in the translation that determines the narrator's marital status (*single*). It's not what he was in his young years according to the story

(одинокий = *lonely*). That's why even this latest known translation is not completely unblemished.

Excerpt C5 presents the machine-made version by DeepL. Even a brief look proves that the text is generally rendered correctly.

*(C5) Our plan was daring: to leave on the same train for the Caucasian coast and live there in some wild place for three or four weeks. I knew that coast, I had lived once for a while near Sochi, – young, lonely – I remembered those autumn evenings among the black cypresses, by the cold gray waves... for all my life. And she paled when I said: "And now I will be there with you, in the mountain jungles, by the tropical sea..." We did not believe in the realization of our plan until the last minute – it seemed to us too great a happiness.*

Except for the officially sounding *realization*, there are no words that stick out as incongruent. The combination *for all my life* seems out of place, perhaps, but overall, the translation is acceptable, if not somewhat bland.

Our version of the paragraph (Excerpt C6) that, perhaps, passes for a revision rather than an entirely new translation.

*(C6) Ours was a daring plan: to board the same train bound for the Caucasus coast and spend two or three weeks together in some totally wild spot. I knew the coastal area as I'd lived once near Sochi, young and lonely then, and treasured the memories of those autumn evenings under black cypress trees, beside grey cold waves... And paler she grew when she heard me say, "And this time I'll be there with you by the southern sea, amid mountain jungles..." Till the very last minute, we doubted our plan would work – to us, it appeared too great a bliss.*

We tried to keep it concise (101 words) and the only departure from the original that we allowed to make is to use the adjective *southern* instead of *tropical* for the purposes of alliteration (**southern sea, amid mountain jungles**). The word *happiness* becomes *bliss*, i.e. happiness complete. The verb *seem* is replaced in our version to avoid the unsavory combination of sounds.

## Excerpt D

The comparisons can be multiplied further, but it's about time we had a look at how the translators deal with the 62-word paragraph that ends the story and, according to well established views, presents the crux of the tragedy.

*(D) Он искал ее в Геленджике, в Гаграх, в Сочи. На другой день по приезде в Сочи он купался утром в море, потом брился, надел чистое белье, белоснежный китель, позавтракал в своей гостинице на террасе ресторана, выпил бутылку шампанского, пил кофе с шартрезом, не спеша выкурил сигару. Возвратясь в свой номер, он лег на диван и выстрелил себе в виски из двух револьверов.*

The 1949 translation (Excerpt D1) is again 20 words longer following the Russian without departures.

**(D1)** *He searched for her in Gelendjik, in Gagry and in Sochi. On the second day after his arrival in Sochi, he took a morning bathe in the sea, then shaved, put on clean linen, a snow-white military jacket, had lunch in his hotel on the terrace of the restaurant, drank a bottle of champagne, and coffee with chartreuse, then slowly smoked a cigar. Returning to his room, he lay down on the sofa and shot himself through the temples with two revolvers.*

The only detail that can attract undue attention in the above text is *slow smoking* of the cigar. We'd rather say that the betrayed officer and gentleman smokes without hurry, at a leisurely pace, having already made his suicidal decision.

The rest of the translation seems to be acceptable, and in this case, the very simplicity of expression may contribute to the cathartic effect of the whole passage.

The 1984 translation (Excerpt D2) is somewhat longer (72 words) but overall, it also follows the original faithfully.

**(D2)** *He searched for her in Gelendzhik, in Gagry and in Sochi. On the morning after his arrival in Sochi he swam in the sea, then shaved, put on a clean shirt and a snow-white, high-collared tunic, lunched at his hotel on the terrace of the restaurant, drank a bottle of champagne, took coffee with chartreuse, and smoked a leisurely cigar. Returning to his room, he lay down on the divan and using two revolvers shot himself through both temples.*

At the same time, an ominously telling detail – *clean linen* (Excerpt D1) put on by the officer, possibly an officer of the navy – is overlooked in translation: the character puts on a regular *clean shirt* instead. The officer has *breakfast*, not *lunch*, too. Though a *leisurely* cigar is a graceful move, shooting oneself *using two revolvers* looks, in our opinion, cumbersome. Yet the translator feels that the effect of the phrase *revolves* (pun intended) around the two pistols and seeks a way to express that, if not without difficulty.

However, a way out of this difficulty is found in the subsequent 2007 translation (Excerpt D3).

**(D3)** *He searched for her in Gelendzhik, Gagry, and Sochi. On the morning after his arrival in Sochi, he swam in the sea, shaved, put on a clean shirt and an officer's jacket that was white as snow. He had breakfast on the restaurant terrace at his hotel, drank a bottle of champagne and coffee with Chartreuse, slowly smoked a cigar. Then he went back to his room, lay down on the couch, put a pistol to each of his temples, and fired.*

The version's best find seems to be the final sentence that captures the tragic dynamism of the original ending. Out of the four translations, this one really hits the nail on the head. At the same time, it looks verbose (82 words against 62 in the original). Again, there appears a *shirt* (not the best choice), and the overly poetic phrase, *officer's jacket that was white as snow*, is out of sync, perhaps, with the generally stringent style of the original.

The 2008 translation displays a comeback to the original, though it is still 15 words longer (Excerpt D4).

**(D4)** *He searched for her in Gelendzhik, in Gagry, in Sochi. The day after his arrival in Sochi, he bathed in the sea*

*in the morning, then shaved, put on clean linen, a snow-white tunic, had lunch at his hotel on the terrace of the restaurant, drank a bottle of champagne, had coffee with chartreuse, unhurriedly smoked a cigar. Returning to his room, he lay down on the couch and shot himself in the temples with two revolvers.*

In D4, we observe a precise translation that follows with fidelity the syntactical structure of the Russian text. One might want to argue, perhaps, whether the adjective describing the officer's jacket/tunic should be *snow-white* or *snowy-white*. Strangely, the translator also indicates the time as *lunch* but not *breakfast*, which might be due to mere inattentiveness. Apart from that, there are no departures from the original text.

Now, the machine. It is only in this version produced by DeepL (Excerpt D5) that we stumble upon an error made by artificial intelligence. This fact proves that, for machines, it is still a long way to top translation.

**(D5)** *He looked for her in Gelendzhik, in Gagra, in Sochi. The next day on his arrival in Sochi he bathed in the morning in the sea, then shaved, put on clean underwear, a snow-white tunic, had breakfast in his hotel on the terrace of the restaurant, drank a bottle of champagne, drank coffee with chartreuse, smoked a cigar leisurely. Returning to his room, he lay down on the sofa and shot himself in the whisky with two revolvers.*

First, the unnecessary repetition (*drank ... drank*) is unimaginative; more than that, the actions are different (*finished a bottle ... drank coffee*) but they are identical in the translation. The gravest error is made due to the machine's inability to decode the plural form of the Russian word *виски* (*temples*), which results in a strange-looking creation, *whisky*, that belongs to neither language.

Just like in all other cases, we offer our version of the translation (Excerpt D6). However hard we tried to compress the passage it remained 74 words long despite all our efforts.

**(D6)** *He searched for her in Gelendzik, Gagry, and Sochi. On the morning after his arrival in Sochi, he took a swim in the sea, shaved, put on clean linen and a snowy-white tunic, breakfasted on the terrace of the hotel restaurant, finished a bottle of champagne, drank coffee with chartreuse, and leisurely smoked a cigar. Back in his room, he lay down on the sofa, put his two revolvers to both temples, and fired.*

## Conclusions

The comparative analysis based on four English human-made translations of passages from Ivan Bunin's story has proved that A. Berman's retranslation hypothesis may not always work. As we have said before, the examples of translation work by four translators are representative of their work as a whole (limited by the confines of this one story, of course).

Our observations suggest that the earliest translation came out as a fair copy of the original, though the English version



seems to be simplified if compared with the Russian original.

The second translation that arrived thirty years after the author's demise was supposed to be an improvement of the earlier version, but it failed the task as there is a touch of artificiality in it; the 1984 version lacks energy and passion that are manifest in the original.

The third translation presents a commendable contemporary attempt at bringing Bunin's art to the Western reader but the level of accuracy in dealing with the Russian text is lower than in the previously published variants. The authenticity is jeopardized if the rendition of Bunin's text is less a translation than an interpretation.

Finally, the fourth translation is clearly a step forward because it presents a comeback of the original wording and syntax without the errors made by the other translators. Still, even in this variant, we come across certain elements of text that could have been rendered with more fidelity. Perhaps, having a pair of 'Russian eyes' scrutinizing the translation can never do any harm. In conditions of the global character of present-day communications, literary translation projects should be realized by multinational teams.

Our analysis also produces a clear caveat for all translators. Machine translation services of today can also do a reasonably good job when dealing with literary texts as well. In this brave new world of translation, human translators should be prepared to live dangerously and to do no worse than the original authors. Every decision to retranslate a text with a high reputation in the world of letters should be fully justified.

## References

- Saeedi, S. (2020) *New Perspectives on Retranslation: The Case of Iran* // *TranscUlturAl*. 12 (1). Pp. 27-46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21992/tc29496>.
- Brownlie, S. (2006). *Narrative Theory and Retranslation Theory. Across Languages and Cultures*, 7 (2), 145-170. doi:10.1556/Acr.7.2006.2.1
- Boiko, Y.; Nikonova, V. (2021) *Cognitive Model of the Tragic in Ukrainian Retranslations of Shakespeare's Play* // *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*. Volume 17 (Special Issue 2). Pp. 1034-1052.
- Van Poucke, P. (2017) *Aging as a Motive for Literary Retranslation. A Survey of Case Studies on Retranslations* // *Translation and Interpreting Studies*. Number 12 (1). Pp. 91–115. DOI: 10.1075/tis.12.1.05van.
- Güneş, A. Z. *A Conceptual Inquiry: What May Retranslation Offer for Translation Studies Research?* // *transLogos*. – 2019. – Volume 2, Issue 1. – Pp. 47-67. – DOI:10.29228/transLogos.2/1.3
- Bayraktar Özer, Ö. *Retranslation Hypothesis Revisited for The Jungle Book: Time versus Context in Retranslation* // *SÖYLEM Filoloji Dergisi*. – 2022. – Pp. 415-433. – DOI: 10.29110/soylemdergi.1186059.
- Wijebandara, N. *An Interpretation to Retranslation* // *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*. – 2023. – Volume VII, Issue II. – Pp 234-243. – DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS
- Глухова, Ю. О. (2015) *Филологический анализ рассказа И. А. Бунина «Кавказ»*. *Филологический аспект*. № 5.

<https://scipress.ru/philology/articles/filologicheskij-analiz-rasskaza-i-a-bunina-kavkaz.html>

- Семенова, Н. В. Мотивный анализ рассказа И.А. Бунина «Кавказ» // Новый филологический вестник. 2023. №1 (64). URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/motivnyy-analiz-rasskaza-i-a-bunina-kavkaz>
- Астащенко, О. А. Принципы художественной организации текста И. А. Бунина (Поэзия и проза эмигрантского периода): дис.... канд. филол. наук: 10.01.01: Москва, 2003. – 250 с.
- Bunin, I. A. *Dark a venues and other stories by Ivan Bunin / Ivan Bunin; translated from the Russian by Richard Hare.* Westport: Hyperion Press, 1949. – 205 p.
- Bunin, I.A. *The gentleman from San Francisco and other stories / Ivan Bunin; translated from the Russian by D. Richards, S. Lund.* London: Angel Books, 1984. – 243 p.
- Bunin, I. A. *The collected stories of Ivan Bunin / Ivan Bunin; translated from the Russian, and with an introduction by Graham Hettlinger.* Chicago, 2007. – 363 p.
- Соколов, А. Г. Заметки о художественном мастерстве И. Бунина / Русский язык за рубежом / А. Г. Соколов. М.: Гос. ИРЯ им. А. С. Пушкина, 1971. С. 95–100.
- Reese, H. (2003) *Ein Meisterwerk im Zwielficht: Ivan Bunins narrative Kurzprosaverknüpfung Temnye allei zwischen Akzeptanz und Ablehnung — eine Genrestudie.* München, 2003. (Slavistische Beiträge. Bd. 424). 411 S.
- J.B. Woodward. *Ivan Bunin: A study of his fiction.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980. 275 p. (84)
- LIU, YUANYUAN & Suzdalova, Nadezhda. (2020). *Aesthetics of Ivan Bunin in the Context of Chinese Literary Theory.* DEStech Transactions on Social Science, Education and Human Science. 10.12783/dtssehs/icpcs2020/33873
- Juracsek, Kata. (2020). *Images of the East in the Short Fiction of Ivan Bunin.* Slavica. 49. 10.31034/049.2020.09
- Yahyapour, M., Karimi- Motahhar, J. (2021). *Ivan Bunin and Eastern Mysticism.* In *Quaestio Rossica.* Vol. 9, № 2. P. 533–546. DOI 10.15826/qr.2021.2.594
- Fedoulova-Touja, Rosa. *О некоторых особенностях языка И. Бунина (Темные аллеи) / Rosa Fedoulova-Touja.* In: *Revue des études slaves, tome 55, fascicule 4, 1983.* – p. 567-575.
- Саморукова, Я. А. Субъектная организация повествования в рассказе И. А. Бунина «Кавказ» // Филологический аспект: международный научно-практический журнал. 2021. № 1 (69). <https://scipress.ru/philology/articles/subektnaya-organizatsiya-povestvovaniya-v-rasskaze-ia-bunina-kavkaz.html>
- Meskin, V. & K. *Ivan Bunin and Guy de Maupassant: Ties Across Creative Writing.* *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities.* Volume 9, Number 4, 2017. DOI: 10.21659/rupkatha.v9n4.10
- Liu Ziyuan, Miao Hui. *Features of the Chronotope in the Story of I. Bunin The Caucasus.* *Philology.* 2021. № 2 (32). Pp. 41 – 43.
- Goncalves, J. (2017) *Ivan Bunin and His Literary Antecedent Anton Chekov: A Comparison of "The Lady with the Dog" and "A Sunstroke".* <https://www.academia.edu/31099720>
- Деотто П. Иван Бунин: три автобиографические заметки // Литературный факт. 2019. № 1(11). С. 357–368. DOI 10.22455/2541-8297-2019-11-357-368
- Choi, Inna (2011). *Possessed by the Creative Process (Based on the Short Stories by the Korean Writer Kim Dong-In (1900-1951), the Japanese Writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927) and the Russian Writer Ivan Bunin (1870-*

1953)). <https://www.academia.edu/12975819/>

- Shroyer, M. (1998) *Vladimir Nabokov and Ivan Bunin. A Reconstruction.* <https://www.academia.edu/63640815/>