Aleko Konstantinov

The Hypertext Project

Summary

The project aims to achieve two main goals:

1. *To create an Internet-based hypermedia platform presenting a part of the cultural heritage in ways unique to the electronic medium. These ways should be designed from the very start to be highly useable and instantly recognizable as a must-learn for the largest possible scope of research work, and not a mere demonstration of digital content presentation.*

2. *To build a digital library of author-related material to which the hypermedia platform serves as a two-way portal – providing access to the already selected, edited, and digitally-enhanced hypertexts, and providing a streamlined way to publish new scholarly work on the subject in various electronic forms.*

Choice of Author

Aleko Konstantinov is a late 19 century author whose works for the first time opened the Bulgarian cultural space towards the European and American culture. There are three basic arguments to choose this author for the proposed project:

- *The main motifs in his novelettes, travel notes and feuilletons are related to the travel as a way to define national identity. The inter-cultural communication's initiation became the focal point in Aleko's writings. The result was the creation of the most-emblematic national character, Bay Ganyo, who is a cultural, literary and national focus of each Bulgarian generation.*

- *Aleko's topics and ideas discuss both the open and the closed character of national culture, the integration and preservation of national uniqueness, the dynamic and controversial contact of the "own" with the "other's."*

- *Aleko's works affirm the values of the modern European man as a model for the ethical development of the individual in the environment of a post-colonial society. His life and works build*

an image of a perfect idealist, with clear and firm moral principles, with an active civil position and readiness for social action.

Project Participants

The constant participants are four full-time positions as follows:

- *Prof. Zhivko Ivanov – Project Leader;*

- *Alexander Vantchev – Associate Director;*

- *Svetlozar Zhekov – Associate Director;*

- *Project Coordinator (to be determined).*

The team of the first three constant participants in this project has enough experience and good coordination since their work on the "A New Perception: Digitalization of the Bulgarian Book Heritage" project and its first edition "Hristo Smirnenski – The New Perception" (Pero Publishers, Sofia, 2001).

Project Leader

Since the late 1990s, the Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" has been developing new presentation technologies to enrich the classic humanitarian knowledge (philosophy, language, literature, history) with new angles and viewpoints, achieved through new forms of structuring and presenting information. The university fund for scientific research with its limited financial resources has backed certain steps in that direction.

Since 1998, Prof. Zhivko Ivanov's activity is linked to the use of new technologies in the field of classic humanitarian sciences. As a result, the web-site of the Philology Faculty was created to be used for academic administration and teaching language, literature, folklore, sociology and history (http://slovo.pu.acad.bg). In 2001, he joined the other participants in the proposed project to create the first CD-ROM edition of a Bulgarian classic.

Associate Directors

The team led by Prof. Zhivko Ivanov has two associated directors – Alexander Vantchev and Svetlozar Zhekov. Alexander Vantchev is a doctoral candidate at the Sofia University's Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, teaching courses in electronic publishing and publishing practices. He has authored numerous Internet and

multimedia products, including the award-winning CD-ROM "Hristo Smirnenski: The New Perception", produced together with Zhivko Ivanov and Svetlozar Zhekov. Apart from his proven programming and graphic-design skills, Alexander Vantchev is a prolific translator and author, with hundreds of film and book translations. Since 2000, Alexander Vantchev has written and published more than a hundred articles dealing with the Information Technology Economy in various U.S.-based online and printed editions.

Svetlozar Zhekov is a literary critic, translator and publisher with vast experience and hundreds of publications. He is one of the pioneers of the digitalization of the Bulgarian literary heritage. As early as 1998, as a director of the National Book Center (1997-1999) at the Ministry of Culture, he created the "Bulgarian Literary Heritage" program, aiming to digitize the most-significant parts of the Bulgarian literary heritage and provide free access over the Internet to it. However, that program did not receive the needed government funding. After his return to the publishing business, he assembled a team featuring the other two participants in the project, and published the first multimedia edition of the Bulgarian classic Hristo Smirnenski (in two printed volumes and a CD-ROM). In 2001, the edition and the team's work were distinguished by the highest national award in the field of book publishing – "Hristo G. Danov" in the "Electronic Publishing and New Technologies" category. With his rich experience as a literary historian, critic, and publisher, with his proven qualities as an administrator in the field of culture, as well as with his knowledge of new technologies and the new book economy, he is extremely appropriate as this project's associate director.

Editorial Board

At a later stage of the project, an Editorial Board is also to be established, when the corpus of the already processed and accessible material is prepared, and the possibilities of scientific publications and research are made clear. The board is expected to feature two leading contemporary specialists – a literary historian and a philosopher, as well as one of the three constant participants in the project.

Team

The research team will feature 6 specialists on part-time basis (two persons for each of the constant participants in the project), who are going to work on:

- *Finding and describing of documents, archive material, and objects;*

- *Finding and describing manuscripts, letters, memoirs, et al.;*

- *Finding and describing first editions;*

- *Finding and describing newspapers from the period and linking them to works by the author based on a specific actual event;*

- *Digitalization of works, documents, archive material, et al.;*

- *Classification of material gathered, division in different thematic groups;*

- *Structuring of the digital material according to the adopted technology for online publishing.*

Over the course of work, for many specific tasks, graduate students or doctoral candidates will be employed on a part-time basis or will be otherwise involved in the project.

Benefits and Challenges

There is a strong demand for a comprehensive digital collection of materials by and related to the author in searchable indexed form, available to any researcher with Internet access. The members of the team have identified this need both in their own research efforts and in their teaching activities. The access to a large number of materials that are part of the cultural heritage remains physically limited in many cases to a single user at a time, since the originals haven't been reproduced in any widely useable form. The access is in fact restricted by availability, even if legally it is more or less free. The indices – traditionally chronological – of archived materials are stored in the archives themselves, meaning that the researcher needs to visit the site just to study the map.

In Konstantinov's case, there are at least three such major "maps" which are to some extent overlapping but not identical – one in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, one in the National Library, and another in the author's museum in Svishtov. Furthermore, the court transcripts of the legal cases Konstantinov has led as an attorney are kept in various collections at the City Prosecutor's Office, the Court of Appeals, the Ministry of Justice, and others. Letters, memoirs, objects, and other memorabilia are scattered around the globe and even a comprehensive map of the sources, where they are located and why – the first step of the project – is of significant research value. One that is freely accessible on the Internet is even more valuable.

The scientific research work is usually comprised of two phases – learn to use, and use to learn. The first phase when the researcher is learning how and where to find and obtain relevant materials is extremely important and so far a comprehensive knowledge about the available sources has been an essential virtue of any person considered an authority on the subject. With the advent of the information technology, however, this part of the research process started to appear also extremely cumbersome. It is

particularly striking for a person who comes from software development, for instance, to the field of humanities, where the phrase "you can find that on the Net" is seldom heard.

On the other hand, the learning process in humanities is inherently hyper-textual. While working with text A, a researcher finds reference to text B, which in turn relates to the event C, documented in source D, and so forth. The traditional retrieval of items A, B, C and D, however, has been time-consuming and costly. An Internet-based hyper-platform can facilitate this process by orders of magnitude. In the case of Konstantinov, where a researcher faces a lot of social, political, economic, as well as geographic references, the proposed comprehensive collection of interconnected material should become indispensable. The "learn-to-use" part will be basically transparent for any researcher with basic Internet knowledge, allowing much more "use-to-learn" time than previously imaginable.

A completely new option is to use the repository of material combined with the interactivity of the platform to build guided-learning materials in the form of *eLessons* and *eCourses*. A teacher can thus use the system to build a presentation as a visual aid to their lecture before an auditorium with Internet access, or to develop an entirely "unmanned" teaching course. Since the system will be open to the broader academic community, it will thus provide also an exchange of views on the methodology of studies.

The main challenge so far for almost any Internet-based project to assist humanitarian studies is that scholars either cannot find what they are looking for or doubt the credibility of the source. The project proposed addresses both issues by first, aiming to provide as large as possible collection of materials both by and related to the author, and second, by ensuring that the team is comprised of experienced scholars and publishers, applying the high editorial standards associated with academic publishing.

The Project Stages

The project will proceed in two general stages, which will require different allocation of work resources. During the first stage, most of the effort will be directed at the gathering of the material, its digital preparation and availability. Until a "critical mass" of available content is reached and the interface for its efficient usage is tested and proven,

the access to the project will be limited to those involved in its development. Only in its second stage the hyper-learning platform will open to the broader public and the team will direct most of its efforts to promote it to the scholarly community and the general
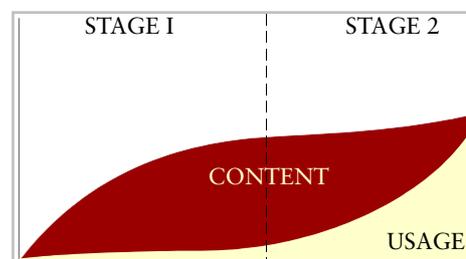
audience. In this stage the scholars and researchers actively involved in the project will also contribute an initial batch of original work on the author, utilizing the hyper-learning platform as fully as possible. There is little doubt that during the initial stage, the team involved in the project will find more than enough under-researched material to serve as a base for new studies or critical essays. At the end of the second stage, there is expected to be sustained flow of new contributions from the scientific community, further expanding the project's content base.

Workpackage (Materials)

Author Texts

Author's works, critically published collection	**approx. 2000 pages**
Manuscripts (facsimile reproductions of archived material)	**approx. 5000 pages**
Reproductions from periodicals (newspapers "Zname", "Mir", et al.)	**approx. 1000 pages**

Reception

Critical texts	**approx. 15000-18000 pages**
Media clippings (Aleko in the media)	**approx. 10000 items**
Photos, cartoons, paintings, drawings, sculptures	**approx. 5000 items**
Video, film documentaries in 3-minute clips (films and video recordings of plays based on Aleko's works), National Film Centre, Bulgarian National Television Fund, video archives of the Satirical Theatre, National Theatre "Ivan Vazov", Army Theatre	**approx. 80 hours**
Abstracts from the Sofia Law Faculty archive (habilitation work in law)	**approx. 1000 pages**
Abstracts from the archives of Sofia City Prosecutor's Office, Sofia Court of Appeals, the Central State Archive, the Archive of the Ministry of Justice	**approx. 1500 pages**
The Murder Trial (documents and materials)	**approx. 1000 pages**
Contemporary studies on Aleko Konstantinov	**25 studies**

Contextualization

Geographical Topography

Video documenting of the basic topoi related to the classic Aleko texts

45 days Svishtov – research of the archive, the museum, the birthplace

14 days Gabrovo – research of the high-school archive, the Museum of Education

20 days Nikolaev, Ukraine – the high-school archive, Aleko Konstantinov

30 days Odessa, Ukraine – the Law Faculty, archive material

14 days Paris, documenting archive material on the Paris World Exposition in 1889

14 days Prague, documenting archive material on the World Exposition in 1891

45 days Chicago, documenting the World Exposition in 1893, video recording of the route "To Chicago and Back" (Paris – Le Havre – New York – Chicago – Boston – Philadelphia – Niagara Falls – New York – London – Sofia)

60 days Bulgarian routes (Sofia – Mezdra – Vratza), (Sofia – Poganovski Monastery – the river Erma gorge), (Sofia – Tchepino), (Sofia – Plovdiv – Peshtera)

The First 18 Months

After the first 18 months, the team aims to have at least one third of the planned materials in each category processed, and the interface for their access and display to be ready. The software for the personalized experience – personal bookshelves, eLesson and eCourse builders – is also planned to be developed over the first 18 months. It will be later extended and fine-tuned mostly with user feedback.

Workpackage (Timeline)

Phase / Duration (months)	1-6	7-12	13-18	18-24	25-30	31-36	37-42	43-48	49-54	55-60
II. Build a **comprehensive list** of the available material to be processed and included – where it is located, in what form, the best ways for its digitization, display, indexing and hierarchical presentation.										
III. Procurement of the hardware and **development of the software** needed to carry out the work identified in Part I. Assembling a team, assigning tasks, and **preparation of the digitized material**.										
IV. Development of the **user interaction** with the content prepared in Parts I and II. • **indices** with various degrees of complexity, systems for **search and retrieval** of documents; • various **display options** for various types of content – graphical, textual, multimedia; options for **efficient bandwidth usage** – partial display, abstracts, thumbnails; • **personalized** user workspaces: saved searches, virtual "**personal bookshelves**" with hyperlinks to materials each registered user has gathered for specific purposes;										
V. Development of a system for **scholarly contributions** – an interface for submitting original critical works, essays and other academic texts to the editorial board for **peer review** and subsequent online publishing.										
VI. *eLessons and eCourses*: development of a teaching system for building a "virtual lecture" including parts of the available material and critical contributions in the form of an interactive online presentation and the subsequent combining of a number of lectures into a whole course of study.										