

Petraru, Ana-Magdalena

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# High and Low Canadian Literary Products in Post-Communist Romania

“High” et “Low” – Produits littéraires canadiens  
en Roumanie post-communiste

Ana-Magdalena Petraru

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## Abstract

This paper aims at rendering the image of English Canadian literature after the fall of communism in Romania. It draws on the polysystem theory as developed by Itamar Even-Zohar and others. A distinction is made between the “low” literary products that characterized the first decade after 1989 and high ones that became known to the Romanian public in the second decade – that is, after 2000. Thus, the paper gives an account of the (media) reception of English Canadian literature in Romania, as far as the works and their translators are concerned, not to mention the context that favoured this reception.

## Keywords:

Canadian literature in Romania, polysystem theory, translation

## Résumé

Cet article se propose de présenter l'image de la littérature canadienne en Roumanie après la chute du communisme, particulièrement dans sa dimension anglophone. Dans notre démarche, nous nous appuyons sur le fondement théorique de l'École du Polysystème, ainsi qu'il a été proposé par l'École de Tel-Aviv et ses partisans, particulièrement Itamar Even-Zohar. Notre but est de faire la distinction entre les produits littéraires inférieurs de la première décennie ayant suivi 1989 et de la deuxième décennie, c'est-à-dire les années 2000, qui est notamment marquée par des produits littéraires supérieurs. Ainsi, nous allons parler de la littérature canadienne anglophone en Roumanie, de ses moyens, de ses traducteurs et du contexte qui a favorisé sa réception.

**Mots-clés :** littérature canadienne en Roumanie, théorie du *polysystème*, traduction



## Polysystem Theory and Literary Reception<sup>1</sup>

Before starting this account of Canadian literature in Romania after 1989, I will provide a few theoretical insights that were helpful in outlining the reception of literature in general and Canadian literature in particular. The article draws on polysystem theory as developed by Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s and enriched by Gideon Toury, a translation studies scholar from the same area. In his theories on the functioning of literary systems, Even-Zohar was inspired by Russian Formalist assumptions, i.e. the notion of “system” consisting of interactive and relational elements. Even-Zohar entitled his approach “the polysystem theory” because it envisages literature as a system of systems, a complex network of relations and hierarchies in which translated literature holds its own position and fulfils its own functions.

Even-Zohar’s literary polysystem can be reduced to a number of contrasting pairs that illustrate the status of translated literature according to its position in the host literary polysystem. Thus, the first conceptual couple opposes canonized literary forms (literary masterpieces) to non-canonized ones (“low” literary products: popular fiction, detective novels, cheap sensational romances, etc.): “those literary norms and works (i.e., both models and texts) which are accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles within a culture and whose conspicuous products are preserved by the community to become part of its historical heritage” to “those norms and texts which are rejected by these circles as illegitimate and whose products are often forgotten in the long run by the community (unless they change their status)” (Even-Zohar 1990b, 15).

The second contrasting pair in Even-Zohar’s theory opposes the centre of the polysystem to its periphery. This pair comes to complete the previous one since canonized literary translated works and the systems they belong to hold a central position within the polysystem, while non-canonized works with the corresponding systems are cast away to the periphery of the polysystem. The latter, however, are unceasingly struggling for a position closer to the centre. The third dichotomy is a continuum of the first two contrasting couples as it opposes the primary (innovatory) literary forms to the secondary (conservatory) ones.

In Even-Zohar’s view, translated literature can occupy both a primary position and a secondary one in the literary polysystem. From this viewpoint, he is among the first to adopt “a non-elitist and non-prescriptive approach to literature, realizing that canonicity is not an inherent feature of texts but is ascribed to them by people and institutions” (Dimitriu 2006, 37). When it occupies a primary position, a literary work

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brings in new forms and models depending on the status of the target or receiving literary and cultural polysystems.

Even-Zohar distinguishes three cases in which a translated literary text may turn into a canonized literary work in the receiving culture and literature:

when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is "young," in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either "peripheral" (within a large group of correlated literatures) or "weak," or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature. (Even-Zohar 2000, 193-194)

As far as the first situation is concerned, it can be argued that Romanian literature was a "young" literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when literary polysystem sought literary genres to adopt from older well-established literatures, such as the French and German ones. For the second situation, he provides the instance of the Low Countries whose "peripheral" and/or "weak" literatures lack the formal and content resources to create valuable literary works that could compete with "stronger" literatures of larger countries. Consequently, they are forced to import forms and genres from those countries. A literature at a turning point, in the scholar's opinion, would be American literature in the 1960s as its canonized models needed inspiration from foreign literatures so as to satisfy the younger generation's needs for new forms and contents.

Even-Zohar also claims that a literary polysystem is flexible, since translated texts can hold both a primary and a secondary position. Such an instance was Hebrew literature in the inter-war years, when translations from Russian occupied a primary position, while translations from languages such as English, German and Polish occupied a secondary position. He also speaks about a correlation between translations:

translated works do correlate in at least two ways: (a) in the way their source texts are selected by the target literature, the principles of selection never being uncorrelatable with the home co-systems of the target literature (to put it in the most cautious way); and (b) in the way they adopt specific norms, behaviours, and policies – in short, in their use of the literary repertoire – which results from their relations with the other home co-systems. These are not confined to the linguistic level only, but are manifest on any selection level as well. Thus, translated literature may possess a repertoire of its own, which to a certain extent could even be exclusive to it. (Even-Zohar 2000, 192-193)

Furthermore, Even-Zohar underlines that the position occupied by translation in the receiving literary polysystem affects the translators' freedom of choice. Since



translated texts are innovatory in form and function, translators are keen on preserving the norms peculiar to the source language, creating “adequate” translations. He uses the term adequacy to refer to the “reproduction of the dominant textual relations of the original” (Even-Zohar 2000, 196).

All literatures influence one another, claims Even-Zohar. In “Laws of Literary Interference” (1990a), he approaches the issue of literary interference, defining that concept as “a relation(ship) between literatures, whereby a certain literature A (a source literature) may become a source of direct or indirect loans for another literature B (a target literature)” (1990a, 54). He identifies the following ten laws of literary interference: “Literatures are never in non-interference”; “Interference is mostly unilateral”; “Literary interference is not necessarily linked with other interference on other levels between communities”; “Contacts will sooner or later generate interference if no resisting conditions arise”; “A source literature is selected by prestige”; “A source literature is selected by dominance”; “Interference occurs when a system is in need of items unavailable within itself”; “Contacts may take place with only one part of the target literature; they may then proceed to other parts”; “An appropriated repertoire does not necessarily maintain source literature functions”; “Appropriation tends to be simplified, regularized, schematized” (1990a, 59).

Polysystem theory as understood by Even Zohar is extremely useful for this paper since the aim is to establish the place of Canadian literature in the receiving Romanian literary and cultural polysystem. Moreover, I am interested in establishing whether Romanian literature was “weak” or “strong” during the period under discussion, i.e. the post-communist one. This is because it will help us account for the “peripheral”/“marginal” or “central” place of foreign literatures as opposed to the national one and consequently of the “interferences” of Canadian literature in the Romanian polysystem. As mentioned above, the translation policy in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romania largely focused on foreign models so translation had an important role in filling in the gaps of the young Romanian literature of the time. The early communist period was confronting a similar situation according to partisans of the new regime such as Dan Petrașincu (cf. Selejan 2007, 27), who claims that the previous period (i.e. the inter-war and WW II years) ignored creations by Romanian writers in favour of rather cheap foreign translated works. It was, therefore, essential for a new generation of writers to emerge so as to celebrate the virtues of the new regime and also reflect the ideology of the communist party and serve its interests. In other words, translations occupied a central position within the pre-communist Romanian literary polysystem and it was time for them to be driven to the periphery so as to make room for new Romanian works in line with the Marxist grid. This perspective could perhaps also account for the first translations



from (English) Canadian literature that were carried out in the 1950s, namely two novels by the minor Canadian writer Carter Dyson. He was probably chosen for his socialist progressive views reflected in his works.

## English Canadian literature in Romania after 1989

Post-communist Romania witnesses the privatization of the state publishing houses that functioned during the communist years and the foundation of new, private, ones. This had an impact on post-communist rewriters who were forced to adapt to the new capitalist market economy that comprises the book market, as well. Translations carried out during the early 1990s were a result of the incoherent translation policies of the newly established publishing houses. This situation recalls pre-communist Romania when commercial criteria guided the selection process for works to be translated. Thus, “low genres” such as dime novels, detective novels, spy novels or cheap sensational novels have, once again, invaded the market. However, since the 1990s the Romanian “cultural capital” was also enriched with translations from genres that were little enjoyed during the totalitarian regime. Thus, science fiction novels by William Gibson have now been translated by leading Romanian translators and specialists in the SF movement: *Neuromantul/Neuromancer* (1994), *Virtual Light/Lumina virtuală* (1995), *Chrome* (1998) and *Count Zero/Contele Zero* (1999).

What is characteristic of the post-communist period of reception is that it introduces new genres to the Romanian public such as, for instance, Canadian romance fiction. The Romanian Translation Studies scholar Magda Jeanrenaud argues that this is something specific to former communist countries and gives cultural and economic reasons for this phenomenon:

In Romania, like in the other ex-communist countries, the first years after 1990 mark a kind of “reading celebration” as books invaded the streets of small and big towns. Apart from books that had been prohibited or censored in the previous periods, bookstalls are now invaded by “low genres”: dime novels, detective novels, spy novels, science-fiction novels or cheap sensational novels. They all aim to make a quick profit by sacrificing the quality of translations and the price to be paid consists in the flaws of a copyright legislation not entirely settled yet; the rising inflation has led to a production of books destined to be sold quickly on a market lacking proper distribution channels and considered as inoperational by most actors in the field. [...] “Intellectual” works that address a small number of readers are less popular, whereas other genres (such as poetry) have hit a low and made room for mass literature [...]. New fields, either partially or completely neglected during the previous



period, such as religion, mysticism, esotericism, homeopathy, popular medicine, and cookbooks, attract editors.<sup>2</sup> (Jeanrenaud 2006, 180-181)

Volumes such as *The Baby Arrangement/Necunoscuta din casă* (1999) by the Canadian Moyra Tarling, *Macnamara's Bride/Anunț matrimonial* (1998) by the American Quinn Wilder or *For Now, for Always/Nu poți fugi de dragoste* (1999) by the British writer Josie Metcalfe are just a few instances of such cheap sensational novels. They were released by publishing houses specialized in such editions, some of which no longer exist today, e. g. ZZ publishing house. Wilder's *Matrimony Notice* came out with Alcris publishing house, which "was set up in 1992 to offer readers fond of romantic fiction the easiest and most pleasant writings of this genre. Over the years, the publishing house arranged its romantic novels in five collections [...] In 2006, it launched two new collections: one comprising modern detective novels and the other romantic novels of 320 pages full of events, happiness and a lot of love" [S1]. Thus, the number of pages was also an important feature at the time that influenced the criteria of selection. Ringier Romania is a branch of a Swiss publishing house. It started its activity in Romania in 1992 and owns not only the most popular tabloid in the country (i.e. *Libertatea*) but also "trendy" and "glossy" women's magazines (*Bolero*, *Unica*), TV guides and the "teenagers" choice magazine *Bravo*" [S2]. Translators of such works (Adriana Cisman, Adriana Tomescu, Ruxandra Radu and Cristina Vodă) are not among the renowned Romanian translators.

In this publishing context, the first translations from Canadian literature published after 1989 are Trevor Ferguson's *Onyx John* and Peter Such's *Riverrun/Curgerea râului* in 1993 and came out at Porto-Franco Publishing House in Galați which, according to Gheorghe Buluță in his study devoted to Romanian publishing houses, "has edited books which illustrate a coherent cultural programme" since it was founded in 1991 (1996, 77). Of the two novels only *Onyx John* was translated by a well-known translator, namely, the Romanian writer Ileana Cudalb. One of the most translated Canadian authors in the last decades has been the science fiction writer William Gibson. His success could be related to the preference of publishing houses for new genres that blossomed after the fall of the communist regime. Four of Gibson's novels have, so far, been translated, including his masterpiece, *Neuromancer: Virtual Light/Lumina virtuală* (1995), *Chrome* (1998), *Count Zero/Contele Zero* (1999), *Neuromancer/Neuromantul* (2005). The translations from Gibson have been published by Nemira Publishing House and Fahrenheit which are specialized in science fiction; only *Neuromancer* came out with Leda Publishing House in the "SF Nautilus" collection which is coordinated by Mihai-Dan Pavelescu and is considered to be one of the best known brands of Romanian science fiction. As far as the translators of his works are concerned, Mihai-Dan Pavelescu, who

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2) All translations mine, unless stated otherwise



translated *Chrome*, *Count Zero* and *Neuromancer*, is also the founder of the Romanian Society of Science Fiction and Fantasy, and a science fiction editor. In addition, he has published articles on SF works and translations since the communist years. Mircea Ștefanțu, the translator of *Virtual Light*, is also a specialist in SF literature. Another reputed Canadian SF writer who was introduced to the Romanian public after 1989 is Robert James Sawyer. Winner of over forty awards for his twenty novels, Sawyer’s work explores the intersection between science and religion, where rationalism frequently wins out over mysticism. He also has a great fondness for paleontology (*Calculating God*), for an alien world to which dinosaurs from Earth were transplanted (*End of an Era*) and explores the notion of copied or uploaded human consciousness (*Mindscan*, *Flashforward*, *Golden Fleece*, *The Terminal Experiment*) [S3, *passim*]. with his *The Terminal Experiment/Alegerea lui Hobson* (2008) published by Nemira Publishing House in the Science Fiction Collection and *Calculating God/Programatorul divin* (2009) by Leda Publishing House. The translations are by specialized SF translators: Antuza Genescu and Mihai-Dan Pavelescu, respectively.

The Romanian public has also been introduced to Canadian war novels (Rohmer’s *Rommel and Patton* and *Massacre 747*), famous popular classics (Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*), Japanese-born writers (Kerri Sakamoto’s *The Electrical Field*), authors of bestsellers (Andrew Davidson, Jack Whyte, Linwood Barclay) fantasy writers (Richard Scott Bakker, Tanya Huff, and Kelley Armstrong) and children’s books (Vicki Blum, Matthew Skelton, J. Fitzgerald McCurdy, and Kenneth Oppel) That said, important literary figures such as Margaret Laurence, Timothy Findley or Joe Kogawa, to name only a few, have remained untranslated to this day.

Interestingly enough, a series of translations that came out during the inter-war and WWII years were republished in the early 1990’s. This is the case of Jul Giurgea’s translations of Mazo de la Roche’s first novels of the *Jalna* series republished by Venus Publishing House. Despite their low quality, these old translations were probably preferred to new ones because they did not present the publisher any additional costs. Some of the novels in the same series that came out during the communist period have been also republished, i.e. *Mary Wakefield* (vol. 12), translated by Simona Copceag and *The Whiteoaks/Clanul Whiteoak* (vol. 16) by Liana Dobrescu. The rest of the series has now been published and translated by: Radu Anagnoste – *Reîntoarceala la Jalna/Return to Jalna* (vol. 7), *Vrăjile Jalnei/Variable Winds at Jalna* (vol. 9) and *Moștenirea familiei Whiteoak/Whiteoak Heritage* (vol. 15); Maria Ivănescu (*Fiica lui Renny/Renny’s Daughter* (vol. 8) and *Centenarul Jalnei/Centenary at Jalna* (vol. 10); Elvira Chirilă – *Nașterea Jalnei/Building of Jalna* (vol. 11); and Sofia Oprescu – *Dimineața la Jalna/Morning at Jalna* (vol. 12).

Furthermore, most of other authors’ novels published after 1989 have come out without a preface, as opposed to the major postmodern authors published after





2000, whose works are usually accompanied by afterwords or forewords by Romanian scholars. The only exceptions are Richard Rohmer's *Rommel and Patton/Rommel și Patton* (1995) prefaced by His Majesty King Mihai I of Romania and William Stephenson and Farley Mowat's *Să nu ne temem de lupi/Never Cry Wolf* (2006) accompanied by the original preface by the author. So far, neither of the two books has stirred the interest of our literary critics and reviewers, as no articles on their authors have been published in Romanian periodicals.

Major-General Richard Heath Rohmer, “one of Canada’s most colourful figures of the past half-century, was a World War II fighter pilot, later a major-general in the armed forces reserve, a high-profile lawyer and a successful novelist and biographer” (S4). *Rommel și Patton/Rommel and Patton* is accompanied both by a foreword by King Mihai I of Romania, who was asked by the author himself to introduce the book to the Romanian readers, and by William Stephenson’s original preface to the novel. Mihai I starts with a recollection of his first encounter with Major-General Richard Rohmer in 1992 when they had lunch in Toronto. They shared a passion for flying airplanes. King Mihai I of Romania (1995, 5) argues that Rohmer was a distinguished soldier, lawyer and public figure, confessing that he did not know much about the Canadian’s literary career and was surprised when he was asked to write a foreword for the Romanian version of *Rommel and Patton*. Mihai I further argues that this book is a fictional one, yet the scholarship of the research and its depth, which is deepened further still by the author’s experience during WW II, contribute to a better understanding, from a historical viewpoint, of the events that followed the Invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. Further on, Mihai I makes remarks on Rommel and Patton, two opposite characters. Patton was extroverted, unpredictable, passionate, ready to fight, the king arguing that his vocabulary might pose serious problems to the Romanian translator. According to Mihai I, Patton’s vocabulary was a consequence of his frustration of being held in England as key actor in one of the most renowned treacheries of the Allied Powers during WWII. The result was Germany’s effort to send troops to Pas de Calais and wait in vain for an invasion led by Patton. Marshal Rommel, on the other hand, never used foul language and his subordinates tried to do so too, when addressing him. He was equally respected by Germans and the Allied Powers. Mihai I concludes that Richard Rohmer’s book discusses the period between June 17 – when Romania was trying to put an end to its relations with Germany – and August 15, eight days before the coup d’état. The book includes many events that might remind Romanians of the summer of 1944, and Romanians are compared to Rommel in their aversion for Hitler.



## English Canadian literature in Romania after 2000

After the fall of the communist regime, and especially since 2000, Romanian scholars have got involved in international projects related to Canada or took part in national and international conferences disseminating the results of their research in the field. Various conference proceedings and other publications bring together contributions by specialists from all over the world. Moreover, programmes of English and French Canadian Studies have been developed in most Romanian universities, not to mention that centres of Canadian Studies have been founded in most universities of the country, which testifies to a movement of Canadian literature from the periphery to the centre of the Romanian polysystem.

The post-communist period is also characterized by massive translations from Canadian postmodernism and other fairly recent fiction (Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje). Several publishing houses published part of Margaret Atwood's work in prose and no less than seven of her novels came out in the series “Leda Masters” at “Corint” Publishing House which owns the copyright in Atwood's works. Michael Ondaatje is the second most translated Canadian “postmodernist” author (four novels), followed by Leonard Cohen (his two novels and *The Book of Longing*).

Margaret Atwood, probably the most renowned Canadian author worldwide, has her novels published in Romania by several publishing houses. Apart from “Corint” Publishing House, where seven of her novels came out in the “Leda Masters” collection, “Tritonic” published *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing/Negocierea cu moartea: un scriitor despre scriitură* (rather poorly translated by Gianina Chirazi). In a review on the book published in *România literară/Literary Romania*, the writer and critic Radu Ciobanu complains about the poor quality of this translation, which is obvious even to a Romanian reader who does not speak English. The Romanian rewriter (2007: S1) argues that anyone could seize Romanian *inappropriacies*, confusions, obscurities and pleonastic or simply clumsy structures that are against the spirit of the Romanian language. In certain passages, the translator is obscure, though not in order to preserve Atwood's style (in addition to some stylistic weaknesses, the translator took Iris Murdoch to be a male writer).

Moreover, two of Margaret Atwood's novels have been republished during this period. The first is *The Handmaid's Tale* which came out as *Galaad 2195 (Gilead 2195)* at “Univers” Publishing House in 1995, probably because the editor believed that such a title would be found more attractive by science fiction readers than its literal translation. However, the novel was republished in the “Leda Masters” series with a literally-translated title (*Povestirea cameristei*) in 2006. The second novel is *The Edible Woman*, which was first published as *O femeie obișnuită (An Ordinary Woman)* in 1989,



just before the fall of the communist regime. This title was perhaps changed because a literal translation might have appeared as too shocking to the censors of the time. As in the previous case, the 2008 Romanian edition of the novel published by “Corint” Publishing House preserves the original title in translation, i.e. *Femeia comestibilă*. Both translations were done by scholars.

Apart from the novels mentioned in the table above, Margaret Atwood’s short story “*Lesus naturae*” was translated as part of “*McSweeney’s Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories*” (New York: Vintage Books, 2004, edited by Michael Chabon). The volume – the Romanian title of which is “*Colecția McSweeney’s. Povestiri incredibile*” – was translated by a team of translators (Cristina Barbu, Cristina Iordache, Alexandra Popescu and Gabriel Stoian) and published in 2006 by “*Nemira*” Publishing House with the editor’s preface. As for the translators of Atwood’s novels, except for Gianina Chirazi, they are all professional translators. Thus, Canadian Studies scholars (Monica Bottez, Margareta Petruț and Florin Irimia) carried out four of the eight translations, the other four being done by Gabriela Nedelea (a poet and translator of English literature, member of the *Writers’ Union of Romania*), Lidia Grădinaru (translator of English literature) and Virgil Stanciu (professor of English Literature at “*Babeș-Bolyai*” University of Cluj).

As mentioned, Michael Ondaatje is the second most translated postmodern Canadian author in post-communist Romania. In terms of literary celebrity, he is included in the same category with Margaret Atwood and Carol Shields, the contemporary writers that oppose Lucy Maud Montgomery, Pauline Johnson, Stephen Leacock, and Mazo de la Roche for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canada (York 2007, 6). It could be argued that this writer holds a central position in the Romanian literary polysystem as far as the translations from postmodern Canadian literature during the post-communist period are concerned. Major Romanian works in Canadian Studies (studies, courses, doctoral theses, etc.) devote sections or entire chapters to his works (cf. “*Postmodernism with a Lyrical Touch: Michael Ondaatje*” in Florin Irimia’s *The Postmodern Canadian Novel. Perspectives on Four Major Writers* or “*Cuvintele, Caravaggio, au putere*” / “*Words, Caravaggio. They Have a Power*” in Margareta Petruț’s *Romanul canadian postbelic între tradiție și postmodernism/The Post-War Canadian Novel between Tradition and Postmodernism*).

Two of Ondaatje’s novels, namely his masterpiece *The English Patient/Pacientul englez* and *Divisadero*, came out at “*Univers*” Publishing House. *The English Patient/Pacientul englez* was published in the collection “*The Novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*” (1997) and, interestingly enough, the translation was by Monica Wolfe-Murray, a specialist in conflict and conflict resolution trained at Oxford. *Divisadero* was included in the “*Literature*” collection that was distributed with the national paper *Cotidianul/The Daily Newspaper* and sold at a lower price than a regular volume. Ondaatje’s *English*



*Patient*, translated by Monica Wolfe-Murray and initially published in 1997, was also reedited and sold with this paper. Since 2007, *Cotidianul* has distributed over 130 titles of contemporary fiction and four of the published authors are Canadian. All in all, the paper had sold two million books by November 2007, including a variety of authors from Nobel Prize winners (Faulkner), to Pulitzer (Jhumpa Lahiri) and Booker Prize winners (Canadian Yann Martel) (Dima 2007). Apart from Ondaatje’s two novels, *Cotidianul* also distributed Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi/Viața lui Pi*, which was translated by Cătălina Chiriac and published in 2007. The novel had also been published in 2004 by Humanitas Publishing House in the translation of Andreea Maria Popescu. The fourth Canadian novel that was sold with *Cotidianul* in 2008 was William Gibson’s afore-mentioned *Neuromancer/Neuromantul*. (Some of these translations, it appears, were carried out very hastily and apparently also entrusted to young translators at the beginning of their career.)

To return to Ondaatje, *Anil’s Ghost/Obsesia lui Anil* and *In the Skin of a Lion/În pielea unui leu* were both published by Polirom. The former came out accompanied by a comprehensive afterword by Maria-Sabina Draga who claims that *Anil’s Ghost*, “unlike *The English Patient*, does not benefit from a famous film adaptation or a tragic-melodramatic plot” (2002, 321). The latter novel was published in an unprefaced edition. The translations were done by experienced professionals such as Liviu Bleoaca (Romanian writer, translator and secretary general of the Romanian Cultural Institute) and Ana-Maria Baciuc (teacher of English at a high school in Bucharest and translator of English fiction).

Last but not least, Leonard Cohen is the third most translated major postmodern Canadian author in post-communist Romania. Both translations of Cohen’s novels came out in 2003 at “Polirom” Publishing House. The two afterwords, i.e. “Masomecanic placat pe viu/The Maso-Mechanical Encrusted upon the Living” to *Beautiful Losers* and “Rănille copilăriei/Childhood Wounds” to *The Favourite Game* belong to the Romanian writer and critic Mircea Mihăieș. The afterwords were extracted from the biography he devoted to Leonard Cohen, *Viața, patimile și cântecele lui Leonard Cohen/Life, Passions and Songs of Leonard Cohen* – a volume intended for a wide audience and published in 2005 by “Polirom” Publishing House. The book became a national bestseller, being listed as one of the most popular non-fiction books of 2006 according to the local publication *Ziarul de Iași/Iași Paper* [S6]. Although it mainly focuses on Cohen’s music and poetry, the volume also devotes two chapters to Cohen’s prose, which were used as afterwords to the published Romanian translations of his novels. Thus, “Rănille, copilăria/The Wounds, the Childhood” is centered on Cohen’s *Favourite Game*, an autobiographical novel that, according to Mircea Mihăieș, starts “with the image of a *wound* and ends with the metaphor of a soft trace in the snow [...]. The favourite game of the childhood friend is also the favourite game of the character-



narrator: a faithful remembrance of the ineffable existence. *The Favourite Game* is a celebration of memory and pain” (2005, 207). “Viul, ratarea/The Living, the Failure” analyzes Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* which is seen by the Romanian critic as:

a discourse on the decay of traditional values, on a hysteric Saturnalia in which “religious freedom” is achieved through sex [...]. The brutality of the approach, breaking the language or behavior barriers make up a fascinating mosaic, a virulent satire of *Canadianness* – the confusing result of a brutal interaction between English, French, Indian and, to a certain extent, Hebrew identities. This confusion of identities can only be escaped through the “mechanic extasis” of drugs or faith. (Mihăieș 2005, 228)

Apart from his novels, Cohen’s poems collected in *The Book of Longing* were translated as *Cartea aleanului* and also came out at “Polirom” Publishing House. The afterword is also by Mircea Mihăieș. In his opinion, “*The Book of Longing* looks like the end of a career. It is both recapitulative and prospective, leaving the impression that it opens a stage in the poet’s creation by its over 160 poems and 43 drawings (mostly self-portraits). [...] In one of his recent confessions, Leonard Cohen found the right words for it: “If we’re lucky, we grow old” (2006, 230). As far as the translations of Cohen’s works are concerned, they are all outstanding and they were carried out by professional Romanian translators and writers: Liviu Bleoaca, Vlad Arghir (translator of English fiction), Cristina Chevereșan (professor of English at the West University of Timișoara, writer and critic) and Șerban Foarță (Romanian poet and translator). Arghir is also the first Romanian to devote a book to Cohen, although it was conceived and printed in Germany and it came out at Pont Publishing House in Budapest (1999) with a short introduction by Mircea Florian. Arghir, the visual creator of the Romanian cultural review *Altitudini/Altitudes*, discusses the Canadian author from an admirer’s perspective in a documented, yet subjective manner (Irimia 2008).

Equally translated in terms of numbers is Douglas Coupland. During this period, four of his novels, i.e. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture/Generatia X: povești pentru cultura de accelerație* (2008), *All Families Are Psychotic/Toate familiile sunt psihotice* (2008), *Miss Wyoming* (2009) and *Girlfriend in a Coma/Tânăra în comă* (2011) have come out at Humanitas Publishing House (“Humanitas Fiction” collection) in un-prefaced editions; each translation was done by a professional translator.

## New media of reception. Novels and their film adaptations

After the fall of the communist regime, new media diversified and refined the reception process. As mentioned above, novels started to be distributed with daily newspapers



at lower prices (e.g. *Cotidianul/The Daily Newspaper*). In addition, the general public became acquainted with some renowned international writers by means of the film adaptations of their works. This is the case of Michael Ondaatje's *English Patient* and of other contemporary English novelists who were introduced to the Romanian public via the film adaptation of their works, and have been appreciated irrespective of their literary value as writers. As Florin Irimia argues in one of his articles published in *Observator cultural/The Cultural Observer*, this applies to Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement*:

If it had not been for Anthony Minghella and his film, Romania would have never heard of Charles Frazier and *Cold Mountain* as it would not have heard of *The English Patient* and Michael Ondaatje [...]. In our country, both novels were translated shortly after the premiere of their film adaptations even though the original novels had been published years before and had been extremely successful: *The English Patient* was awarded the Booker Prize and *Cold Mountain* the National Book Award. (Irimia 2004)

The Romanian Canadianist also claims that few works of (Canadian) English fiction have been translated so far and this situation may not change unless more film adaptations are produced. In his doctoral thesis on the postmodern Canadian novel discussed above, Irimia even criticizes the faithfulness of the film adaptation to the original novel. In his opinion, the film is weaker than the novel:

Like any adaptation, the film does not faithfully follow the plot of the novel; moreover, some critics said that Hollywood managed again to ruin another good book by switching the viewer's attention from the ideological, colonial dialectics of the novel to a soap-opera romantic love story [...] (Nevertheless, if we consider the fact that the novel was translated into several languages – including Romanian – immediately after the film had been released, we can appreciate that at least sometimes cinematic adaptations can boost the readership of printed versions). (2006, 66)

This viewpoint is also shared by Draga in her preface to the Romanian edition of *Anil's Ghost*:

Michael Ondaatje – Canadian writer from Sri Lanka is known to the readers all over the world (including the Romanian readers thanks to a recent translation) by his novel, *The English Patient*, Booker Prize, 1992 or rather by its film adaptation by Anthony Minghella. The celebrity of the film truly surpasses that of the book [...] the characters created by Ondaatje in his book may forever be associated with Kirstin Scott Thomas, Juliette Binoche and Ralph Fiennes. (Draga 2002, 321)





However, apart from Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, it is difficult to account for the other less famous film adaptations that are perhaps less known to the Romanian public if we were to take into consideration the fact that, in some cases, the original novel was not even translated into Romanian (as is the case with Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Avonlea*, adapted for television in 1975 and 1989, Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, which was adapted in 2007, Timothy Findley's *The Last of the Crazy People*, turned into the film *Le dernier des fous* in 2006 or *The Piano Man's Daughter* in 2003). Ana Olos claims that the Romanian public became familiar with at least one of the writings of Timothy Findley via the film adaptation on HBO, after the author's death:

The English language often makes us forget the identity of a series of cinema or TV productions although TV series like "The Road to Avonlea" made us recently become familiar with Canadian actors less known than Christopher Plummer. Yet, probably only few of the people who have watched *The Piano Man's Daughter* on HBO know anything about Timothy Findley, the author of the novel on which the script is based and even fewer know why it has been scheduled now. Kevin Sullivan's film (starring Christian Campbelle and Isabelle Fink) that barely succeeds in adapting a large and complicated psychological novel, although the characters' lines preserve the poetry in Findley's writing, is meant to be homage to its recently passed away author. (2002, 13)

Other film adaptations (of translated novels) that could be familiar to the Romanian public are: *Anne of Green Gables* (1985, based on a novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990, based on Atwood's), *Grey Owl* (1999, a biographical film of the writer), *The Robber Bride* (2007, another Atwood novel), *Fugitive pieces* (2007, based on a novel by Anne Michaels) or *Barney's Version* (2010, after Mordecai Richler's novel).

## Conclusions

To conclude, the post-communist period has brought novelty to the reception of Canadian fiction in Romania. First, apart from the classics that were also translated during the former periods, new genres have been introduced to the Romanian public. As shown above, this has been the case with romantic fiction that was largely spread in the 1990s and mainly read by a less educated public; most of these novels are no longer available today. Second, apart from Margaret Atwood's SF novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*, this period has introduced William Gibson, a classic of Canadian science fiction. Third, it can be said that in post-communist years



the reception process has been facilitated by the easy access to the film adaptations of Canadian works. As a result, one could argue that during the post-communist years, and especially after 2000, Canadian literature comes to occupy a central position in the Romanian polysystem. This highly dynamic period of popularising Canadian literary and cultural values has not come to an end and, in the near future, further translations from Canadian literature and other forms of rewriting are expected.

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**ANA-MAGDALENA PETRARU** / a post-doctoral research fellow at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, conducting research in the field of the Romanian discourse on translation.. She has been working in the field of Translation Studies since her undergraduate years and took an interest in Canadian Studies during her doctoral studies while working on a project funded by SSHRC: *The Contribution of Literary Translation to Intercultural Understanding: Developing a Model for Reciprocal Exchange*. Her doctoral thesis, *The English Canadian Novel in Romania, defended in 2011, draws on the project. The results of her research were disseminated at several international conferences in the country (Iași, Galați, Brașov, Cluj, Baia Mare, Pitești, Bucharest) and abroad (Zagreb, Belgrade, London), as well as in a number of journals.*

**Address:** Ana-Magdalena Petraru, Str. Ciomei nr. 4, bl.D4A, et. 1, ap. 6, Iasi-700350, Romania. / <e-mail: petrarualina@yahoo.co.uk>