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Abstract

This study focuses on Hungarian translations of Anglophone Canadian literature and works set in Canada, investigating main groups of literature along the lines of writer, theme, content and style, and their possible relationship with Hungarian publishing strategies.

Résumé

Cette contribution vise à traiter des traductions vers le hongrois de la littérature canadienne et des œuvres chez qui le Canada constitue un sujet tout en mettant en rapport les courants littéraires les plus importants, étudiés sur le plan thématique aussi bien que stylistique, avec les stratégies de publication mises en œuvre en Hongrie.

"A translation is good if it manages to transplant something different, the otherness of the source culture. Translators often claim that they have translated a poem so well that it reads like a Hungarian poem. In my opinion this is unacceptable, because Hungarian poems should be written by poets rather than by translators. In the case of a translation it is important to be able to recognise the source culture that has been translated into Hungarian. A good translation should transplant the foreign culture. Many people don't realise how important this is" (Csordás; translation from Hungarian by G.S.). In line with these remarks of the Hungarian poet and translator Gábor Csordás, this paper plans to explore what kind of images Hungarian translations of Canadian and Canadian-related literature have managed to preserve and transplant about Canadian culture and identity in the past and present.

Instead of dwelling on the long debated problem of how to define Canadian identity, in a recent German volume on *Translating Canada,* Klaus Peter Müller provides six main reasons why a Canadian text may be translated and published. They are as follows: "1) the exotic otherness of Canada, 2) ethnicity, 3) regionalism, 4) Canada as a contemporary (post)modern nation, 5) the author's renown and popularity, and 6) the text's literary qualities" (54). As Müller's experience is primarily derived from the German context, these landmarks need to be "transplanted" into the Hungarian setting, even if they do not always seem to be compatible. In order to counterbalance the possible shortcomings some new criteria that are more relevant to the Hungarian context have been added to the list. These are the following: 7) war

as an important theme, 8) French-Canadian writers, 9) children's and juvenile literature, and 10) Canadian writers of Hungarian origin.

The exotic otherness of Canada as a familiar theme owes much to two seminal studies addressing issues of Canadian identity – Northrop Frye's ***The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*** (1971) and Margaret Atwood's ***Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*** (1972). Yet wilderness, as the single most popular image of national identity, can hardly be detected in the case of Hungarian translations. In 1983 the Hungarian publisher Európa published an anthology of English-Canadian poetry under the title ***Gótika a vadonban*** (Wilderness Gothic). And in the case of three separate translations the country's name, Canada, has been added to the Hungarian title; Ridgwell Cullum's novel ***One who Kills*** has been translated into ***Kanadai farkasok*** (***Canadian Wolves*** – 1941). William Byron Mowery's ***Singer in the Wilderness*** features as ***Kanadai őrjárat*** (***Canadian Patrol*** – 1940), while another novel by the same writer, ***Forbidden Valley*** has been translated as ***Kanadai embervadász*** (***Canadian Manhunter*** – 1941). Presumably the "Canadian" was added to help with sales; rather ironically, however, though these works are indeed set in Canada, neither of the authors was Canadian.

Aboriginal and ethnic writers in Canada

Contrary to other European cultures, like in Germany, where in terms of literary and cultural interests the most important ethnic group is that of Canada's Aboriginal peoples (Klaus 57), in Hungary, apart from the fast fading popularity of romantic Indian literature, much less interest seems to be generated in that area. Into this category belongs Grey Owl's ***The Adventures of Sajo and her Beaver People***, which was translated by the widely known Hungarian orientalist Ervin Baktay in 1940 into ***A vadon fiai*** (***Sons of the Wilderness***). In 1976 the same book was republished under a different title, ***Két kicsi hód*** (***Two little Beavers***), by one of the best known Hungarian publishers, Móra, which specialises in juvenile literature. When searching for Indian and Inuit literatures there are only a few titles to be found, one of them being Duncan Pryde's ***Ten Years of Eskimo Life***, published in 1976. The writer was known as a hunter, trapper, lexicographer and politician from the Northwest Territories of Canada; his book was published in the "Világjárók" ("Globetrotters") series under the Hungarian title ***Most már eszkimó vagy!*** (***You are Already an Eskimo!***). From the more recent writings, Joseph Boyden's ***Three Day Road*** belongs to this group on account of the writer's partially Native ancestry, but more importantly because of the theme of his book. The novel was originally published in 2005 and it was translated for the occasion of the 2007 Hungarian Bookfair (***Három nap az út***), when Canada was the guest of honour. In ***Three Day Road*** Boyden writes about his First Nations heritage and culture. It is a novel about two Cree soldiers serving in the Canadian army during World War I. The main character was most likely inspired by the legendary Ojibwa sniper Francis Pegahmagabow.

In terms of the better recognition of contemporary ethnic Canadian literatures, the Hungarian translation of the Sri Lankan-Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje's ***The English Patient*** (***Az angol beteg*** – 1997) provided a major breakthrough. The success of the novel was largely due to its Hungarian connections concerning Count László Almásy, the main character of the

novel, rather than to the writer's literary merits. In the wake of the novel's success when it appeared in translation, a second novel by Ondaatje, ***Anil's Ghost***, was also translated (***Anil és a csontváz*** – 2000), but it received considerably less attention in spite of the fact that the author had previously been awarded with the Booker Prize for Fiction and also nominated for the Man Booker International Prize.

Rohinton Mistry

The best known contemporary Canadian writer of Indian ethnic origin is undoubtedly Rohinton Mistry, whose worldwide popularity is most likely fuelled by a more general interest, and the globally rising popularity of Indian literature. The Hungarian publications of Mistry provide the bases of a case study that focuses on current trends of publishing and marketing strategies. The writer's first book, a collection of short stories entitled ***Swimming Lessons and Other Stories from the Firozsha Baag***, was published in 1987. It was the writer's first novel, ***Such a Long Journey*** (1991), however, that put Mistry on the international scene. In terms of awards, it won Canada's Governor General's Award for fiction, the Commonwealth Writer's Award for Best Book of the Year, and the WH Smith Books in Canada First Novel Award and it was also nominated for the Booker Prize and the Trillium Award. Born in Bombay in 1952, Mistry left India in July 1975, not long after Indira Gandhi declared the state of emergency against which the action of his later novel ***A Fine Balance*** unfurls. Mistry landed in Toronto with a degree in mathematics and economics from the University of Bombay. He completed degrees in English and philosophy but he did not start writing seriously until the early 1980s, when for two years running his stories won a literary competition at the University of Toronto (Smith). Rohinton Mistry is a member of the Indian diaspora of Canada. He also belongs to the Zoroastrian Parsi community, as his ancestors were exiled by the Islamic conquest of Iran that already marginalised him into the diaspora state on the Indian subcontinent. After the partition of India in 1947, some Parsis found themselves toeing "the line of discontent" between two warring regions. This situation drove many of them to England and to America. Similarly to other Parsi writers, Mistry's work is heavily influenced by his experience of double displacement. As a Parsi, Mistry finds himself at the margins of Indian society, and hence his writing challenges and resists absorption by the dominating and Hindu-glorifying culture of India (Takhar).

According to an article in the Canadian literary magazine ***Quill and Quire,*** "Mistry would like to write a novel about Canada, but India keeps getting in the way" (Smith). Mistry's ***Tales of the Firozsha Baag,*** similarly to his other works, is set in India, with the exception of the last story, which takes the reader to Canada, where the narrator reminisces about his past back in India. Firozsha Baag is the name of the house where the characters of the collection dwell. They belong to the Parsi community and Mistry reveals the problems and beauties of this closed and orthodox society. Although the collection was originally published in 1987 it was only translated into Hungarian in 2011 following the success of his other, by then internationally renowned novels. In terms of literary reputation, short story collections seem to have a generally lower esteem than novels, and in spite of their brevity, which could be to their

advantage, they don't seem to travel so well. The Hungarian volume borrows its title, ***Add kölcsön a lámpásod fényét: Egy bombayi öreg ház meséi*** (Lend me your light: tales of an old house in Bombay), from one of the volume's short stories, "Lend Me Your Light". In it the protagonist makes a personal confession that reveals his acute sense of guilt for having deserted his homeland: "I am guilty of the sin of hubris for seeking emigration out of the land of my birth, and paying the price in burnt-out eyes: I, Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives, that one in Bombay and the one to come in Toronto" (Mistry 180).

When examining the Hungarian translations of Mistry's books, we find that all of them have been reworked by the same translator, András Csikós. Curiously enough, the translator addresses his readers directly in his afterword to ***Add kölcsön a lámpásos fényét*** (***Tales from Firozsha Baag***). With forewords and afterwords moving out of fashion, it is rather peculiar that the translator provides an afterword to his third translation. The only reason to justify this is that it contains the translator's response to critical articles condemning him for transforming the title of ***A Fine Balance*** into ***India, India***. Csikós apologises to the readers and claims that the book was re-titled by the publisher against his own will. As part of the marketing strategy, on the back cover of the short story collection Mistry is compared to Salman Rushdie based on their similar fate, namely that both writers originate from India and both of them live in exile. In terms of their literary careers, another parallel is drawn between the scandalous book burnings of Rushdie's ***Satanic Verses*** and ***The Moor's Last Sigh,*** and the withdrawal of Mistry's ***Such a Long Journey*** from Mumbai University's syllabus. Csikós also highlights the powerful tool of writerly fantasy and representational strength (translator's Afterword 284). It looks as if the publisher was trying to "exploit" Rushdie's fame and popularity in order to boost the sale of Mistry's novels. There are no references made to the Canadian context; instead, the writers' Indian origin and the rising popularity of Indian literature is highlighted. Mistry's translator is also known for translating other Indian writers, among them David Davidar, Manju Kapur and M. J. Akbar, into Hungarian.

According to blurbs and book reviews, translations primarily seek to establish connection with the host and target cultures, where publishers, and to a lesser extent translators, are in the position of making decisions. However decisions are mostly determined by marketing strategies that try to comply with the taste of the general reading public, or with the expectations of the wider literary establishment. This seems to have been the case in the following example too. ***A Fine Balance*** was published in 2007 by Ulpius publisher under the title ***India, India,*** and it contains no fore- or afterword, nor any blurb. The most striking aspect of the book is its exotic packaging in bright colours, with the partially veiled figure of a beautiful oriental woman on the front page, thus heavily exploiting stereotypical orientalist modes of representation. Alan Tomlinson observes that decisions concerning title, cover and blurb are often taken by the publishers, in compliance with the general expectations of consumer society; the process itself in the language of marketing has been technically termed as the "packaging of pleasure" (Müller 54).

Analysis of critical articles on foreign works translated into Hungarian seems to indicate that very few articles deal with the translation as such. In Mistry's case the Hungarian translation is criticised for simplifying the language and imagery of the original, and for unnecessarily translating Hindi words and expressions, thus depriving the readers of the act of surmising

these Indian expressions from the context (Bényei 26). On the issue of whether it is necessary to translate foreign words when used in the original, different positions prevail. Another Hungarian critic, Dóra Elekes, on the contrary, is disturbed by Indian words not being translated; at the same time she considers this to be a sign of the translator's "insider knowledge" of India (Elekes 408). In connection with ***A Fine Balance,*** one of the critics highlights the political lessons of the novel, namely that it debunks popular perceptions of Indira Gandhi as the dogooder of the poor, which has been a prevalent myth sustained by communist propaganda in Hungary (Krausz).

General overview of the situation of Hungarian translations

The nature of Canadian identity and its rootedness in regionalism has been a focal interest of literary criticism. The popular argument that geography was more important than culture was closely connected to the northern climate and character of Canada, which provided one of the chief attributes of her nationality (Berger 84). The rising interest in environmental issues and ecocriticism can also be observed in the case of the Hungarian translations of Farley Mowat's works. As one of Canada's most widely read authors, Mowat has been translated into fifty-two languages of the world. The region of the Canadian North gained international reputation through his writings, among which perhaps the most popular, ***Never Cry Wolf***, was translated into Hungarian in 1976 (***Ne féljünk a farkastól***) and more recently republished in 2005. Mowat is also well-known as a leading conservationist, and six other books by him have also been translated, ***The Desperate People*** (***A jégsivatag népe*** – 1965) being the first and ***Owls in My Family*** (***Baglyok a családban*** – 2000) the most recent.

Besides targeted consumer interests, publishers also try to address more general trends, like that of pop-culture-related themes. The Canadian singer, songwriter, musician, poet and novelist Leonard Cohen's novel ***Beautiful Losers*** was written in 1966, but it was only translated and published in Hungarian forty years later as ***Szépséges Lúzerek***. Cohen's success as a pop-culture icon most likely oustrips the otherwise rather moderate interest in him as a Canadian writer. If we consider the literary reputation of contemporary Canadian writers translated into Hungarian, we find that Alice Munro is the most popular woman writer, with five volumes of short stories already translated (two of which ran into second editions). Her popularity may be connected to the peculiar atmosphere of her stories, which are set in rural Ontario yet manage to portray the widest possible array of universal human issues. Compared to her, Margaret Atwood, the internationally celebrated writer, is in a less favourable position, with so far only four of her novels translated: ***Surfacing*** (***Fellélegzés*** – 1984), ***The Blind Assassin*** (***A vak bérgyilkos*** – 2003), ***The Handmaid's Tale*** (***A szolgálólány meséje*** – 2006) and ***The Penelopiad*** (***Pénelopeia*** – 2007). Atwood is not only among the best known Canadian writers, but she also addresses some of the most Canadian themes in her novels, among them national identity, in the context of region and nation, gender relations and also the problematic aspects of American cultural imperialism (Ferguson 99). When searching for the most popular Canadian writers in Hungary, we find that the gold medal goes to Lucy Maud Montgomery, who is best known for a series of novels beginning with

Anne of Green Gables. The internationally famous writer published eight novels about Anne, the orphan heroine of children's literature, and all of them have been translated and published in many editions in Hungary.

Canadian writers of Hungarian origin

In a recent literary anthology, *Migrating Memories: Central Europe in Canada*, published by the Central European Associations for Canadian Studies in 2010, Mária Palla takes note of Katalin Kürtösi's observation that Hungarian-Canadian writers generally use the language of their secondary or higher education in the course of their literary career (Palla 140). Those who have become familiar with two languages are generally considered to be lucky, but this is not always the case with diasporic writers, whose relationship with their homeland is often problematic. Palla also observes that after the fall of the communist era in 1989 "it has become possible for émigré writers to publish their works in their mother tongue in the old country" (Palla 141). Among the first generation Hungarian immigrants, one of the best known names is that of Anna Porter, who left the country with her family in 1956. As the founder and publisher of Key Porter Books in Canada she writes in English; consequently her novels had to be translated in order to be published in Hungarian. The first of them, *The Bookfair Murders*, was published in 1998 (*Gyilkosság a könyvvásáron*), to be followed by *The Storyteller: Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* (*Fénytörések: Családom történetei és nemtörténetei*) in 2006 and *Kasztner's Train* (*Kasztner vonata*), a historical novel about the holocaust, in 2008. Porter does not seem to express much concern for contemporary Canadian life: her interest lies with the traumatic historical events of the Central European region that her family fled from. In terms of belonging and identity, Pablo Urbányi's case is even more complex. He claims himself to be a Hungarian-Canadian, writing in Spanish, and as an Argentine émigré he lives in Ottawa. So far four of his novels have been translated and published in Hungarian.

Diaspora literature often addresses the problematic aspects of dislocated identities in the wider context of home, place, language and belonging. George Jonas's *Beethoven's Mask* was translated as *Történelem seprűnyélen: Önéletrajz másképp* in 2006. Stephen Vizinczey's most controversial work, *In Praise of Older Women*, was translated in 1990 as *Érett asszonyok díscérete*. Susan M. Papp, whose career is linked to Hungary through the Rákóczi Foundation in Toronto, wrote a book called *Outcasts – A Love Story*, which is based on true events in Hungary. It was translated into Hungarian in 2010 as *Megtagadva: egy szerelem igaz története*. Kati Rekai is a childrens author whose *The Adventures of Mickey, Taggy, Puppo and Cica, and How They Discover France* was translated in 1995 as *Mickey, Taggy, Puppo és Cica kalandjai Franciaországban*. This selection is far from being complete but further names and details of translations are to be found in the database.

Unknown Canadian writers

Tamás Bényei in his review article on Canadian literature calls the Hungarian readers' attention to the fact that a large number of highly reputed Canadian writers are still unknown, and that the International Bookfair of 2007 with Canadian literature in focus did not provide a major breakthrough for Canadian literature. His list of unpublished writers includes Robert Kroetsch, Timothy Findley, Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, George Bowering, Mavis Gallant, Janette Turner Hospital; from among the French-Canadian writers, Marie-Claire Blaise, Hubert Aquin, Gabrielle Roy and Nicole Brossard are badly missing. Apart from the recently discovered Rohinton Mistry, other multicultural writers are unavailable: Bharati Mukherjee, Joy Kogawa, Frank Paci and M. G. Vassanji (Bényei 12). From among the more recently discovered names, the Lebanese-born Canadian writer Rawi Hage in his much acclaimed novel ***Cockroach*** reveals the highly controversial life-experience of what it feels to be an exile in contemporary Montreal. According to Bényei, Hungarian culture is mostly ethno- and Eurocentric, therefore non-European literatures like Chinese, Arabic, African, Caribbean and Indian are almost unheard of. Writers from the USA and, lately, more Latin American writers, are the exception; Canadian literature is still waiting to be translated (12).

It would be interesting to compare publication figures before and after 1990, but publishers are rather reluctant to disclose information and they shy away from providing exact data. There is no doubt that, with state subsidies decreasing, profit-oriented market interests have taken priority over matters of cultural and literary value. Literary translations move like vehicles between different cultures that help the better understanding between different peoples. In the context of Hungarian-Canadian relations they contribute towards the shaping of images about Canada, and just as importantly, they also respond to the needs and expectations of the host culture.

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