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In: *Canada in eight tongues : translating Canada in Central Europe*. Kürtösi, Katalin (editor). 1st edition Brno: Masaryk University, 2012, pp. 131-137

ISBN 978-80-210-5954-2

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.81921>

Access Date: 08. 04. 2025

Version: 20250404

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Timothy Findley: The Canadian Pilgrim in Bulgaria

Abstract

The translation of Canadian literature in Bulgaria began in the very early years of the twentieth century, gathering force in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The present paper focuses on just one example of how works of a Canadian author, the acclaimed writer Timothy Findley, have found their way into the Bulgarian cultural context in recent years. The paper will discuss how the demands of the small book market in Bulgaria have influenced the choice of books to translate, what has provoked the publishers to pick this particular writer as well as what the challenges the translators had to deal with were.

Résumé

La traduction de littérature canadienne en Bulgarie commence dans les premières années du vingtième siècle pour atteindre un pic dans les premières décennies du vingt et unième siècle. Ce texte se concentre sur l'exemple d'un auteur canadien : Timothy Findley et étudie comment ses œuvres ont trouvé leur chemin dans le contexte culturel récent de la Bulgarie. L'article va notamment étudier la demande de livre en format de poche sur le marché bulgare et en quoi celle-ci a influencé les choix des livres à traduire et les difficultés que cela impose aux traducteurs.

Introduction

The process of translating authors writing in English into languages spoken and read in other countries is a complex and challenging one, subject to tastes and social progression, to political and economic forces inherent in the country where the works will be consumed. In addition, the “cultural transfer” (von Flotow & Nischik, 5) that must take place is subject to the encoding of the non-native Canadian citizen. Works that “expose the ideological underpinnings of the cultures in which they exist” (Bailey 3) are especially influential in developing international book markets, where people often discover their collective social and critical voice through a variety of foreign works. These sociopolitical factors that help foster a book market also create a dual market for both widespread public reception of a body of work and the author’s identity in relation to the work, as well as a body of criticism that allows a body of work to flourish in a foreign country.

Timothy Findley is a highly renowned Canadian author who has seen success in having his works translated for international markets, including the one in Bulgaria, the country of



focus in this paper, which examines the reception of Canadian authors in general and Timothy Findley's works in particular, together with the role of the government in promoting foreign works. In addition it offers the perspective of the publisher and the translator of Timothy Findley in Bulgaria, in order to present a more comprehensive view of his public and critical reception in the country.

Worldwide translation of Canadian works

The Canadian literary mystique is difficult to identify and define due to the vast cultural diversity within the country and its literary canon. One asks, "can you even use" the term "Canadian literature" to reflect the body of work created in Canada? (Davey 117). And while in recent years many cultural and literary theorists and historians such as E.D. Blodgett and W.H. New have argued that there are multiple Canadian literatures, two roughly differentiated groups, Canadian and Québécois, have developed (Davey 117). Although it may sound "mutually exclusive" in "geographic terms" (Davey 118), the distinction here is in fact linguistic and cultural rather than geographical. Diverse literary traditions run through the literary works of Canada. For instance, the Southern Ontario Gothic tradition, typical of what we still call Canadian literature and exemplified by Margaret Atwood and Timothy Findley, can be contrasted with the Québécois style of writing, often attributed to writers such as Hubert Aquin and Marie-Claire Blaise and others (Davey 117).

Another factor that has played a significant role in the reception of Canadian authors worldwide has been the advance of a transnational, commercial, "postmodern" canon in international writing since the 1980s (Davey 127). Before that the reception of Canadian literature in countries outside North America had been mixed, as the market for Canadian authors did not have any significant global momentum before the mid-twentieth century when the geo-political borders began to open slowly. However, it was not until the 1980s, and the worldwide movement toward democratic societies, that Canadian authors began to receive more international exposure, appreciation and acclaim for their works. Canadian works, particularly Canadian writers of fiction, hold a particular niche that has led to the reputation of Canadian literature as allegorical, self-reflective, character-driven "historiographic metafiction" with conflicting characters whose dark sides are more often than not in the center of the narrative (Stacey 276). The most often discussed authors who have helped usher in this particular sensibility of Canadian literature and have helped its spread to worldwide markets are Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen and Timothy Findley (Stacey 276).

If we turn to the Bulgarian book market, which is relatively small, we can see an attempt to use a niche of growing demand that has influenced the choice of which books to translate and that has provoked publishers to pick specific writers. Although, in the case of Findley, one can expect that what appeals to international audiences is the interplay between modernist and fascist subjectivities and often-ambiguous resolutions in his books that have created a political tone to many of his works (Bailey 27), the reasons his publisher gives are a bit different. As Sanya Tabakova, the owner of Lege Artis Publishing House, claims:



Several years ago we were looking for a niche in fiction publishing, particularly one related to financial support. Furthermore, the general policy of our publishing house has always been to develop new tastes, to take chances with authors who are relatively unknown to the Bulgarian reader. The underlying reason for this has been the strong competition among publishing houses in Bulgaria to obtain the rights for publishing the bestselling Western writers. We have followed a slightly different course in our choice of writers over the years, looking for less familiar authors and literatures – Polish, Irish, Austrian, Swiss, Canadian, etc. Not all of our projects and plans have been realized. At the start of our business (1999), our major concern was to secure external funding which could help us to gather pace and issue 10-12 titles per year.

The fact that the Canadian government has done much, particularly in the latter part of the twentieth century, to promote the works of noted Canadian authors, including Findley's works, abroad seems to have become one of the most decisive factors for choosing his works by Bulgarian publishers. As Tabakova says:

Generally speaking, every country has at least one major national sponsor – either a fund, a ministry, or a programme. The Canada Council for the Arts is very active in this respect. The three fiction books we have published were supported by it. The best thing is that the procedure is very simple and the money supplied allowed us to reduce the costs of publication. With other programs we have had some failures. When we really appreciate a certain book we publish it anyhow, with our own money, but this is much more difficult as often the whole process is delayed, even postponed indefinitely. But the opposite is also true – a particular Canadian book may be great, but if we are not sure that it would be liked by the Bulgarian audience and cannot get financial support, we would never publish it. Especially if it is a long book. What this institution does is to subsidize only the translation; however the amount of money needed for the editing and publishing is also considerable. I think this is a shortcoming of the programme, revealing a distrust in the publisher, a distrust that they really need support and will make proper use of the money. Frankly speaking, publishing Canadian literature in Bulgaria can't make you rich at present. If I were a member of the board of the Canada Council for the Arts, I would do my best to help publishers for many more years to come so that more Canadian authors would be published in Bulgaria.

The Canadian government's role in worldwide translations

The Canadian government and organizations such as the Canada Council for the Arts in particular have played a key role in the promotion of Canadian literature internationally. One of the major reasons for such support has been the aggressive American publishing policy, which has demanded the allocation of considerable public funding to the publishing and promotion of Canadian literature on the North American book market. That has been predetermined by the sheer size of the American book market, which has required intervention from Canadian private organizations as well to maintain the competitiveness of the Canadian arts in the largest English-speaking book market in the world and its chances to move beyond North American borders.



Canadian literature has met success in Europe, and that has shaped the view that Europe is a key market for Canadian authors. The irony is that Canadian writers are in many ways more well-received in Europe than they are even in Canada, and that has allowed the wide reception of Canadian authors translated into French and German, for example, as von Flotow and Nis-chik show in their book *Translating Canada*, something that has been true about Italian, Spanish and other European languages. The digital age has helped the growth of the book market of Canadian literature, with Canadian literature content distributed in several countries and the Canada Council for the Arts translation grants becoming more and more widespread. This is well exemplified in the January 2012 Translation Rights Fair, which brought together a great variety of book and online publishers, authors and translators in Montreal.

The reception of Canadian literature in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is by no means a leader in the publishing industry, with its small book market and readership. The gradual opening of the socio-political environment from communist to capitalist, however, as well as the evolving consumer state, seem to have made it a good market for the Canadian style of writing in the latter part of the century. Consequently, around 250 Canadian titles have been translated into Bulgarian since the 1980s. Once the political doors opened, Bulgarians developed a greater interest in North American literature, and the Canadian policy of multiculturalism and immigration, its values of community, openness, and welfare, all have struck a chord in the mind of Bulgarian readers.

In the modern decade, the adult book market in Bulgaria has seen tremendous growth, with fiction the leading category, holding 28.2 percent (Sofia Echo) of the total market. Bulgarians gravitate to character-driven literature that is popular worldwide, but the Bulgarian temperament is also partial to “more somber literature” (Sofia Echo), as well as scientific literature or what is called science fiction in North America. William Gibson, for example, who has had six of his “cyberpunk” works translated into Bulgarian, is a very good example in this sense.

Overall, in January-September 2010, 4,216 books were published in Bulgaria. Included in this figure is a strong demand for translated works, with foreign works that are translated into Bulgarian making up 23 percent (Sofia Staff) of the total number of books published. This is a significant figure, and while Canadian authors represent a small number within this percentage, the market for translated works is growing, so there is an opportunity for additional works by Findley and other Canadian authors to be translated. The Publishing House Lege Artis is a good example of this drive. As Sanya Tabakova says:

We have been offering Canadian literature to the Bulgarian book market since 2000 and have published five titles so far: *Pilgrim* and *The Piano Man's Daughter* by Timothy Findley, *Fifth Business* by Robertson Davis, *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels and *Jung Lexicon: A Primer of Terms & Concepts* by Daryl Sharp. The first two authors I chose from a Canadian journal dedicated to twentieth-century Canadian literature and presented at the 1999 Frankfurt Book Fair. These names were in the list of the 30 top Canadian authors. *Pilgrim* I chose for C. G. Jung's being one of the protagonists. Apart from publishing Jung's books, I am keenly interested in Jungian literature. I also believe this is the

reason for the book's success among Jung's adherents in Bulgaria. This year, 2012, *Pilgrim* will see its second edition. Anne Michaels was my personal choice as a translator. Daryl Sharp is a popular Canadian publisher as well as an author of Jungian literature with whom we have a long and fruitful collaboration.

The legacy of Timothy Findley

Findley's large body of divergent work is regarded very favorably in Canada, and he stands as one of the premier Canadian writers of the twentieth century. He is noted for his contributions to Canadian literature as well as his work to promote Canadian writing within Canada and to a wider audience. On the Canadian book market Findley, together with Alice Munro, is regarded as one of the world's great contemporary prose writers, along with Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje and Alistair MacLeod, to name just a few.

Timothy Findley was born in Toronto in 1930, where he originally sought a career in acting, but turned to writing later in life, after a moderate success on the stage in various Shakespearean plays (Meyer & O'Riordan 46). He continued being active on the Canadian and international stage, up until his death in 2002. Findley authored numerous works of fiction, all critically well received within Canada and many well received beyond Canadian borders. His publishing career began with his first novel, *The Last of the Crazy People*, in 1967. Findley, with his collected body of work, made an indelible mark both on the Canadian literary canon and as a key figure in the making of the Canadian literary sensibility. Findley received numerous awards for his work and his accomplishment and contribution to Canadian thought and literature.

In 1977, Findley received a Governor General's Award for *The Wars*, and another one in 2000 for his drama *Elizabeth Rex* (2000), the Canadian Authors Association Award, an AC-TRA Award for the TV drama *The National Dream*, the Order of Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Award. Earlier, in 1985, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada. Findley was also a founding member and chair of the Writers' Union of Canada, and President of the Canadian chapter of PEN International. In addition, Findley received a number of honorary doctorate degrees from Canadian educational institutions. He was also known in Canadian literary circles for being an active voice, through his work, in such areas as anti-censorship, openness toward homosexuality and gender issues as well as mental illness and the role of psychoanalysis in a person's life.

Findley's most celebrated work, *The Wars*, was published to great acclaim in 1977 and went on to win the Governor General's Award for fiction. Critics have called *The Wars* "experimental, self-conscious, destabilizing postmodern fiction" (Stacey 187) and "a very powerful, disturbing book . . . where the reader is brought close to the horrible violence of World War I and its devastating impact on a young mind" (Turmanov 107). Due to its great success, *The Wars* eventually was chosen to be adapted for film in 1981, with the screenplay written by Findley.

Regarding Findley's reception worldwide, he has had books translated into many languages, including not only all European ones but also most languages of the former Soviet Union. It is interesting that in Bulgaria his most popular work, *The Wars*, is still not translated. As has



already been mentioned, only two works of Findley have been published thus far. The first to be published was his novel *Pilgrim* (1999), brought to the Bulgarian book market in 2001.

The book revolves around a disturbed man, Pilgrim, and his experience working with Carl Jung, the psychologist, and the insights that are revealed as Jung carefully unravels Pilgrim's unconscious thoughts. The book deals with the various lines between madness, imagination and memory. One of the chief reasons for the success of the book seems to be exactly the connection to the psychoanalytic movement of the early twentieth century and the work of Jung, as Tabakova has pointed out. The translator of the novel, Marina Boyadjieva, who is also a Jungian scholar, also talks about this:

In my view Timothy Findley is a great writer, not only of Canada, but of the world as well, because:

- the themes of his books are realistic, but at the same time they are unusual, sometimes even strange, but always very interesting. Good imagination, complicated plots.
- A good psychologist, Timothy Findley's descriptions of characters and situations are thrilling and persuasive.
- The style and the language are deeply artistic, rich. He has a specific and distinctive way of expression, original.
- Very erudite with a wide cultural background, Timothy Findley and his books are a source of interesting information and scientific knowledge.

Findley's second book in Bulgarian, *The Piano Man's Daughter*, originally published in 1995, is about the generational dynamics of the Kilworth family, and how the personal and psychological legacies, both good and bad, are carried from generation to generation. The book was nominated for the Giller Prize and in addition in 2003 was the subject of a television movie for North American audiences produced by the American comic actress Whoopi Goldberg. It was translated for the Bulgarian market in 2005. Bulgarian audiences most likely gravitate to the sense of generational angst as well as the personal search for identity and family history. Charlie Kilworth, the protagonist in the story, narrates the story through tales of his mother and grandmother, with a larger mission to find out who his real father was. In many ways, this story is timeless and the Bulgarian sensibility, including the stark changes in political structures that Bulgarians alive today have witnessed, is matched in Kilworth's narrative.

Answering the question "What have the challenges been in translating Canadian writers into Bulgarian, if any?", the translator Marina Boyadjieva says:

As a translator I would say that Canadian English is quite specific and challenging. I believe that a dialogue between translator and author would be good if the opportunity occurred. As far as the translator reads and reviews several books by one author, s/he eventually gives an opinion on what would seem to be of interest to the reader. The translator's opinion may sometimes outweigh the decision of the publisher.

As this reply shows, translators are not only an inherent and indispensable part of the whole process, but they also need to be in a genuinely productive collaboration with the publisher (and/or the author) in choosing and publishing a high-quality book product. I can affirm that

Timothy Findley's books are very much in line with such good practices when it comes to their Bulgarian publishing history.

This seems to be one of the main reasons for Findley making a mark on the Bulgarian book market, which is also indicative of the general trend of Canadian authors gaining more and more popularity in the last five years in Bulgaria. This is supported by a steady rate of about 10 books by Canadian authors translated into Bulgarian each year, a very positive trend. It seems that the more popular Canadian authors become worldwide, the more they will be translated for the Bulgarian book consumer, making publishers turn as well to such classic works as the novels of Timothy Findley.

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