

Cvetković, Tanja

Serbian translations of English-Canadian literature and Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man*

In: *Canada in eight tongues : translating Canada in Central Europe*. Kürtösi, Katalin (editor). 1st edition Brno: Masaryk University, 2012, pp. 149-153

ISBN 978-80-210-5954-2

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.81927>

Access Date: 08. 04. 2025

Version: 20250404

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

Serbian Translations of English-Canadian Literature and Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man*

Abstract

This paper focuses on Serbian translations of English Canadian texts as a way of cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy in Canadian-Serbian cultural relations, Serbian now being the third most frequent language of translation within the Canada Council translation support programme.

The author of the paper, as a participant in the CEACS Translation Research Project and a translator, also analyzes the significance and the reception of her translation of Robert Kroetsch's novel *The Studhorse Man* in Serbia. The problem of connecting two different cultural contexts and transferring the meanings from the West Canadian prairie cultural context to the Serbian (Balkans) cultural context is just a starting challenge for the translator to further explore the significance of the translated book for the Serbian reading audience. The author stresses the contribution of the publishing house Nolit to the publication of the translation in 2009.

Résumé

L'article se concentre sur les traductions anglo-canadiennes en serbe comme moyen d'échange culturel et de diplomatie culturelle dans les relations canadiennes-serbes ; le serbe est actuellement la troisième langue la plus traduite au Canada dans le cadre du Conseil du Canada qui soutient le programme de traduction.

L'auteur de l'article, acteur du projet Translation Research Project et traductrice, analyse la signification et l'accueil fait à sa traduction du roman *The Studhorse Man* de Robert Kroetsch en Serbe. Le problème de rapprochement de deux contextes culturels différents et du transfert de sens du contexte culturel des Prairies de l'Ouest-canadien au contexte culturel serbe (des Balkans) ne représente, pour la traductrice, qu'un premier défi servant à explorer davantage la signification du livre traduit auprès des lecteurs serbes. L'auteur insiste sur la contribution de la maison d'édition Nolit à la publication de la traduction en 2009.

1. General overview

John Ralston Saul in his essay "Culture and Foreign Policy" (1994) recommends the exchange of Canadian cultural products as one of the most important ways of trade and of making Canada known in the world. Saul asserts that

Canada's profile abroad is, for the most part, its culture. That is our image. That is what Canada becomes in people's imaginations around the world. [...] It's a major problem for foreign policy. [...]



Both political and trade initiatives are dependent upon that image. [... literature is] the primary vehicle of export for Canadian culture (quoted by von Flotow in St-Pierre and Kar 2007, 192)

150

Canadian multicultural society, which rests on diversity and includes Aboriginal, British and French traditions as well as the heritage from many other immigrant groups, maintains cultural relations with other countries and cultures, spreading its own cultural achievements all over the world. The projections of Canadian values and culture abroad are part of the cultural policy, while the export of cultural products and translated literature for improving the image of the country is part of cultural diplomacy. The dissemination of literary culture enhances understanding between different cultures, resolves misunderstandings, and connects cultures. Thus, translated literature lies at the heart of cultural diplomacy, broadening the horizons and expanding knowledge between different nations. The Translation Research Project can also be considered as part of a cultural diplomacy initiative.

As a result, many translations of Canadian titles have been published in Serbia: Serbian has been the third most important language in the Canada Council's translation support program for the past several years. Many Canadian titles have been launched during the Belgrade International Book Fair, further promoting Canadian literature and culture to a larger reading audience in the region.

Among the numerous Serbian translations of Canadian titles that are included in the CEACS Translation Research Project database are works of different genres: fiction, poetry, non-fiction, political science, history, education, philosophy, children's fiction, biography, science fiction, literary criticism, educational theory and political philosophy. Most of the translated titles belong to the genre of fiction.

Surprisingly, as of 2011 Margaret Atwood, with 13 titles translated into Serbian, has been a less successful Canadian author than David Morrell, who with 18 translated titles, published between 1987 and 2008, emerges as the most successful Serbian translated Canadian author. William Gibson is the second with eight translated books, Yvonne Prinz has six translated books, while Northrop Frye has five and Michael Ondaatje and Alice Munro are represented by four translated books.

By explaining the export of culture for the purpose of trade, von Flotow claims that by telling stories and "engaging their clients through narratives closely related to literature and culture" (von Flotow in St-Pierre and Kar 2007, 193), marketers influence the readers by engaging them emotionally with their products, with which they can identify. That may be the reason why most of the titles translated into Serbian are the works of the most popular Canadian authors of mainstream literature such as Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Michael Ondaatje, Jane Urquhart, Carol Shields, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen, etc., but also titles of general interest referring to Canadian culture, history, philosophy, such as Charles Taylor's *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Will Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship*, Margaret MacMillan's *Peacemakers*, George Melnyk's *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* and Kenneth McNaught's *The Penguin History of Canada*.

Canadian multicultural literature, reflecting the diversity of Canadian society and written by immigrant authors, is also well represented among the Serbian translated literature. Many

titles written by Canadian authors born elsewhere, or of parents born elsewhere, who immigrated to Canada, have been translated into Serbian: for example, works by Alberto Manguel, Mary di Michele, Béa Gonzales and Eva Stachniak.

Translated literature, by way of connecting different cultures, becomes a cultural mediator and plays an important role in bridging the gap between cultural diversities. In the essay "Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation", Harish Trivedi confirms this fact by explaining that "the translation of a literary text became a transaction not between two languages, or a somewhat mechanical sounding act of linguistic 'substitution' as Catford had put it, but rather a more complex negotiation between two cultures" (Trivedi in St-Pierre and Kar 2007, 280). Similarly, Homi Bhabha asserts that "translation is the performative nature of cultural communication" (Bhabha 1994, 228).

In order to make the communication between two cultures possible, some items that are "culture specific" and that seem to be intractable in translation should be brought closer semantically to the language of translation (the target language). Additionally, it is not only some particular items that are culture specific, but also the whole language (the source language) is specific to the particular culture it belongs to. Hence, a problem for every translation is how to make a translated text convey a meaning of the culture specific terms from a source to a target language and culture. Overcoming this gap makes a translated text successful and the communication between different cultures possible. A large number of Serbian translated Canadian texts make the cultural communication between the two countries very successful, strengthening cultural relations between two diverse cultures.

2. Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* in Serbian

The translation of Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* was published in Serbia in 2009 by the renowned publishing house Nolit. One of the first challenges when starting to translate the book, for me as a translator and for the editor-in-chief of Nolit, was how to relate two very different and diverse cultural contexts: the Western Canadian prairie cultural context, where the novel is set, and the Serbian-Balkans cultural context, for whose reading audience the translated text was meant; how to make the broader Serbian reading audience, whose professional orientation is not related to Anglophone literature and culture, understand a Canadian prairie mythical story. The story is about Hazard Lepage and his Western search for a perfect mare for his horse Poseidon in order to prevent the horse's species from going extinct. Consequently, the first problem when translating *The Studhorse Man* was how to situate the source text within the Serbian target culture system, searching for its significance or acceptability.

The action of the novel *The Studhorse Man* takes place in the Canadian West at the end of World War II. The novel describes a period of Canadian culture and history which encompasses the transition from the Canadian rural agricultural period to the period of urbanization and industrialization when the horse, the symbol of the free prairie spirit, is replaced by cars and trucks and when natural impulses and sexuality, also embodied by the image of the horse, are starting to be controlled by the invention of the contraceptive pill. In the novel, the authentic story of Hazard's search for the perfect mare in the Canadian Western prairie has been turned



into a Canadian myth, a Canadian national story. Hence, the source text, coming from a prestigious culture into a small culture, had to be adapted to the target language and culture.

In order to bridge the gap and adapt the source context to the target context of the novel, I added an "Afterword" to the novel explaining the cultural context and the meaning of the novel within that setting. I also used footnotes beneath the text to explain necessary terms which are peculiar only to Canadian culture and which are unknown to the Serbian reading audience.¹

Linguistically speaking, the greatest challenge for the translation was the Canadianisms in the source text, and especially the terms for which there are no semantic equivalents in the Serbian language. Such are the names for birds, animals, plants specific to North American geographical region, e.g. *saskatoons* (*Saskatoon berries*), *tamarack*, *mink*, *chickadee*, *muskrat*, *gopher*, but also some geographical and cultural terms like: *coulees*, *mackinaw*, *ball diamond*, *pyrohy*, *snowshoes*, *holubci*, *corral*, *red eye*, etc. The problem was solved by finding the target language equivalents, by using the strategies of *domestication* or *foreignization*, where the instances of domestication prevail over those of foreignization,² or sometimes by explaining the meaning in the footnote when necessary. While many terms were domesticated on the insistence of the editor, still some of them like *corral*, *holubci*, *pyrohy*, were foreignized. For example, since the meaning of the words *holubci* and *pyrohy* was explained in the source text, I decided to use the foreignized terms in the target text. Some of the words like *corral* were foreignized because there are no exact Serbian equivalents.

All these strategies for bridging the gap between the source culture and the target culture helped the Serbian translation of Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* (*Vlasnik pastuva*) to be very well received among Serbian readers. The translation was published with the help of the Canada Council for the Arts. In order to promote the translation of the book, two book launches were organized. The first launch of the translation was at the Belgrade International Book Fair on October 31, 2009, with the support of the Embassy of Canada in Belgrade. The second book promotion was held on December 8, 2009, at the University of Niš, where critics, the editor-in-chief of Nolit and the author of the translated text talked about Robert Kroetsch's work and the published translation.

Kroetsch's novel represents the deconstruction of the male quest story in the West and as such is especially attractive to both a broad reading audience and a professional audience. Thus, one of the reasons for choosing this particular novel for translation was the attraction of the Canadian landscape and the story about the West. Since the story takes place in the Canadian West, different aspects of the Canadian prairie landscape are depicted in the text: the vast prairies, wooded coulees, poplar groves, the river carrying chunks of ice, lakes and fords. The depiction of North American wild animals – bobcats, jaybirds, gophers, chickadees, muskrats and coyotes – adds another interesting dimension to the text. By mythologizing the

- 1) The publication of the translation was followed by the publication of my book of criticism on Robert Kroetsch's *Out West Trilogy – Between Myth and Silence: Canadian Literature, Postmodernism and Robert Kroetsch's Out West Tryptich* (Beograd: Nolit, 2010). The book includes a detailed literary analysis of the novel *The Studhorse Man*, bringing the meaning and the whole cultural context of the source text closer to the target culture.
- 2) See the author's article "The Serbian Translation of Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man*". *Facta Universitatis: Linguistics and Literature*. 9 1 (2011): 59-64.

Canadian landscape and by using the quest story, the author turns the story into a new myth about the Canadian West, a Canadian epic, which was a more than worthy reason to choose the novel for translation.

Another reason for choosing this novel is the postmodern dimension of the text and the very fact that the author of the text, Robert Kroetsch, is one of the founders of Canadian postmodernism. As is obvious from the novel, Kroetsch's answer to postmodern silence and vacuum is story and myth. His generative approach to myths and stories rests on the idea that they can be turned into new ones when told in a different time and at a different place, because it is not the story that matters but "the *act* of telling the story" (Kroetsch 1989, 120). Such an idea reflects Kroetsch's deepest need for creation and his specific postmodern attitude toward literature.

Above all, the novel received a prestigious literary award, the Governor General's Award, in 1969, which makes it one of the most highly-regarded titles that have been selected for translation in Serbia.

Works cited

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London, New York : Routledge, 1994.
- Flotow, Luise von. "Revealing the 'soul of which nation?' Translated literature as cultural diplomacy". In *Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*. Paul St-Pierr and Praffula C. Kar (eds.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2007.
- Kroetsch, Robert. "For Play and Entrance: The Canadian Contemporary Long Poem". *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- , *The Studhorse Man*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2004.
- Krouč, Robert. *Vlasnik pastuva* (transl. Tanja Cvetković). Beograd: Nolit, 2009.
- St-Pierre, Paul and Praffula C. Kar (eds.). *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2007.
- Saul, John Ralston. "Culture and Foreign Policy". In *Canada: Report of the Special Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy. The Position Papers*. Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services, 1994.
- Trivedi, Harish. "Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation". in *In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations*. Paul St-Pierr and Praffula C. Kar (eds.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2007. 277-287.



