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Translation of Canadian Women Authors in Croatia

Abstract

The paper will focus on translations of Canadian women's writing in Croatia, taking into consideration translations from English and French, primarily translations published in books, anthologies and literary magazines, but also volumes of poetry and other genres. The findings of our research include the search for patterns that occur in the translation of specific works and authors, as well as determining which authors and literary genres have been translated most frequently, what the (inter)national publishing and specific cultural context was at the time of the publication of individual works, and what circumstances might have influenced the selection of particular Canadian women authors for translation. They were first translated into Croatian in 1970s, but the majority of works were published in the past two decades, and especially in the past ten years.

Résumé

Cet article a pour sujet les traductions de l'écriture féminine canadienne en Croatie, publiés dans les livres, dans les anthologies et dans les magazines littéraires. Les traductions de l'anglais et du français sont pris en considération. Le but est de déterminer quels genres littéraires et quels auteurs féminins ont été traduits le plus fréquemment et dans quelle époque. Les premières traductions des textes écrites par les écrivaines canadiennes ont été publiées en Croatie pendant les années 1970, mais la plupart des traductions n'étaient publié que pendant la première décennie des années 2000. Ce travail présente aussi le contexte culturel dans lequel les traductions en question ont été faites et publiés.

One of the first questions to which we were hoping to find an answer during our research was whether Canadian women authors were translated into Croatian and presented specifically as representatives of so-called "women's fiction" or as representatives of Canadian literature. As it turned out, we could surmise that some of the first translations actually featured Canadian women authors as representatives of various kinds of genre literature. This also seems to be the case with the first translations of Canadian authors in general, which featured even at the beginning of 20th century (when the first translations in Croatia appeared) primarily adventure novels set in the Canadian wilderness (by authors such as Allen Roy Evans and Kenneth Conibear), followed in subsequent decades by science fiction works.

Le Canada en huit langues

Traduire le Canada en Europe centrale



Another point of interest, or rather challenge, was determining which works should be considered, due to the turbulent history of Croatia in the past century and beyond, especially with respect to the context of being a member state of the former Yugoslavia for decades, when the Croatian language was considered an integral part of a common Serbo-Croat language and not a separate language. Owing to these circumstances, as well as the fact that Belgrade was the main Yugoslavian publishing centre, numerous works of world literature remained translated primarily into Serbo-Croat or Serbian (in the Cyrillic alphabet), and much less into the Croatian language. For easier distinction, the focus of this article is works which have been published during the 20th and 21st centuries within the limits of Croatia's state boundaries or more specifically by publishers based in Croatia.

The political context of Croatia's recent history offers some explanation concerning its publishing and translation trends. In order to understand the historical context, it is important to note that during the decades of Cold War and as a member state of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia's geopolitical situation was unlike that of other communist countries in Europe. The politics of the then ruler of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, showed independence from Moscow's centralism in the aftermath of World War II, which brought on exclusion of Yugoslavia from the Eastern Bloc in 1948. Because of the poverty that would result from such independence, as well as the possibility of a Soviet military attack, Tito decided to seek financial and military help from the West, primarily from the US, Great Britain and France, who had hoped that the case of Yugoslavia would become exemplary for other communist countries interested in detaching themselves from Moscow (cf. Jakovina, 2002; Jakovina, 2003; Goldstein, 2008). Yugoslavia also began allowing cultural influence from the West after years of being oriented to Moscow, which brought on a number of translations of canonical authors from Great Britain, the US and France (cf. Župan, 2007).

It came therefore as no surprise that the turbulent decades of the two World Wars offered fewer translations than the second part of the 20th century, when Yugoslavia opened itself to the West, reaching its peak in the past two decades, starting with the 1990s, when Croatia formed its own independent republic state by separating itself from Yugoslavia, and experienced the need to form its own language and re-establish its national identity and culture. The past two decades thus produced numerous translations of canonical works into Croatian and published by Croatian publishers for the very first time. This is also the period when we find most translations of Canadian women authors, a result of yet another context – that relating to the position of women in Croatia and the rest of the Balkans. Sabrina P. Remet explained the position of women in the region (in the past hundred or so years) in the introduction to a publication she edited, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*:

The history of South Slav women in the twentieth century is in part, the history of their struggles within the frameworks of ... rival ideologies. ... In the course of the twentieth century, Yugoslav women have lived under six different systems: dynastic monarchy (in the years up to 1918), constitutional monarchy (most of the years between 1918 and 1941), fascist occupation (1941-45), communist one-party rule (1945-90), ... and nationalism (Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia since 1990). ... Although politicians in all of these systems developed elaborate notions as to what was best for

women and for gender relations, only Tito's system actually adopted gender equality as a central and explicit goal of policy. (Ramet 1999, 5)

Ramet then continues underlining that Tito was no feminist, as his notion of gender equality was within the scope of the socialist programme.

Such a context helps explain the overall prevalence of translations of male authors into Croatian, including Canadian ones. This article features individual titles and authors because the fact is that only some 35 full-length books written by Canadian women authors have been published in Croatia in the past century (of a total of some 160 works by Canadian authors), which will be discussed in loose chronological order, depending on the context. Of these 35 books, over half of them were published in the past twenty years. The list includes authors as diverse in genre and style as Cynthia J. Alexander, Marie de l'Incarnation, Linda Hutcheon, Margaret Atwood, Mary Lawson, Margaret Millar, Anne Hébert, Margaret Trudeau, E. Pauline Johnson, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Monique LaRue, Nancy Huston and Alice Munro.

The first translations of Canadian works of fiction appeared in Croatian at the beginning of the 20th century (e.g. Ernest Thompson Seton's first translation appeared in 1917), and even though they were primarily adventure novels about the Canadian outback and wildlife, in the case of Canadian women writers, one of the first examples of a translation was Edna Mayne Hull's short story *The Patient*, which appeared as much as 60 years later (in 1977) and was published within the series "Sally and other Best Science Fiction Short Stories", and then again in the series "Female Masters of Science Fiction" in 1979 by the same publisher.

Probably one of the first books by a Canadian female author translated into Croatian was Margaret Trudeau's *Beyond Reason*, an autobiographical account of her life and her years as the wife of the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, which was published in 1980. It was followed by a few further translations in the 80s, namely those of works by Aritha Van Herk and her novel *Judith* as a part of a "Bestseller Series", four years after its publication in Canada and after winning the substantial Seal First Novel Award from McClelland and Stewart, which subsidized its international distribution. Another translation that appeared during that time was Margaret Millar's mystery novel *A Stranger in My Grave*, published in 1984 as a part of the series "Crimebus: Crime Pearls of the World" (which featured authors such as Mary Higgins Clark and Patricia Highsmith). The first translated book by Margaret Atwood – her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* – was published in Croatia two years after winning the Man Booker Prize, in 1988, as one of the examples of less censored publishing at the time. Its translation within the collection "Woman" by the publishing house Globus was received as a feminist version of George Orwell's *1984* (Maras, 2003), as well as a science fiction novel. Starting from translations in various periodicals in the past two decades (*Dubrovnik*, *Mogućnosti*, *Forum* and *Quorum*), anthologies of short stories and poetry, as well as book length fiction and non-fiction, Atwood remains consistently one of the most translated Canadian authors in general in Croatia.

Before the 1990s, Canadian literature was not well known in Croatia due to the lack of Canadian Studies at Croatian universities (Grubišić 1994, 93.). The year 1991 seemed to mark a positive start for Canadian translation in Croatia: Atwood's *Surfacing* was published, along with the first *Anthology of Canadian Short Stories*, edited and translated by Branko Gorjup



and Ljiljanka Lovrinčević. Finally, the Croatian-Canadian Cultural Association was founded in June 1991, as an example of potential development of Canadian Studies in Croatia. However, within a few months, with the start of the Homeland War for Independence, aggression began on Croatia, and the Association's activities were stopped, as was the majority of the publishing market in the coming war years. The *Anthology of Canadian Short Stories* was published just before the war and featured a total of 16 authors. Five stories were by women authors: Margaret Atwood's *The Bluebird's Egg*, Margaret Laurence's *The Loons*, Alice Munro's *The Stone in the Field*, Mavis Gallant's *My Heart Is Broken* and Ethel Wilson's *We Have to Sit Opposite*. Gorjup provided the translation of Munro's short story and Lovrinčević of the other four authors. The publication also features an introduction by Frank Davey and ends with an overview of Canadian authors, written by Gorjup. Even though women authors are less represented in the anthology, the selection is quite diverse, featuring widely anthologized short stories. As Davey stated in his introduction:

Even if this anthology seems to group authors as well as short stories, I believe its compiler tried to put together a great deal of regional values, and of capricious and anti-realistic innovations which are characteristic for Canadian short stories of our century. They are more or less liberated from the international market and they are distanced by at least one half step from commercial intentions. (as cited in Grubišić 1994, 94)

Another *Anthology of Canadian Short Stories*, this one edited by Antonija Primorac in 2008, featured, besides Atwood and Munro, a different selection of Canadian female writers, including stories by Sheila Heti, Jessica Grant, Lisa Moore, Carol Shields, Zsuzsi Gartner and Dionne Brand, giving them equal representation in the anthology with their male colleagues. In her introduction to the publication, entitled "On the Multicultural Life in the North", Primorac starts from the general understanding of Canada and preconceptions of the broad Croatian public, as well as some notes on translation of Canadian fiction into Croatia, stating that in her selection of the stories she strived to give a broad overview of Canadian short fiction by dividing the selected stories into four groups, each represented by works by both male and female authors (Primorac 7-14). The first group, "In Search of Belonging", features Dionne Brand's "At the Lisbon Plate"; "Let Me (Re)Tell You a Story" features two stories by Margaret Atwood ("Nightingale" and "Gertrude Talks Back"), and Sheila Heti's "The Girl Who Was Blind All the Time"; "Through the Landscape" features Jessica Grant's "Plow Man", Alice Munro's "The Jack Randa Hotel", and Lisa Moore's "Meet Me in Sidi Ifni"; "Inner Voices" features Carol Shields's "Good Manners" and Zsuzsi Gartner's "Anxious Objects".

Considering other genres, Canadian female authors in Croatian translation found their representatives for example in Linda Hutcheon (primarily translations of essays and papers in periodicals), who, along with Northrop Frye, is considered one of the most important Canadian literary theorists at Croatian universities and whose books are taught as part of the curriculum at various departments. Another interesting example is the award-winning book by journalist and documentarist Erna Paris, *Long Shadows: Truth, Lies and History* (published in Canada in 2000), which was translated and published by Prometej in 2003 as a part of the series "Nota bene"; it was a timely publication on the subjects of nationalism, war crimes, historical justice

and collective memory, at a moment when Croatia as a post-war country was and still is dealing with the question of war trials. The book features various examples of complex post-war issues in different countries around the world, including the situation in the Balkans in the aftermath of the war period of the early 1990s. The author herself annotated the Croatian translation about her experiences in the region and her vision of the Croatian situation. During her visit to Croatia, Paris was hosted by the then President of Croatia Stjepan Mesić.

Furthermore, poetry was featured in two anthologies of Canadian poetry (1972 and 2007), both published in the periodical *Mogućnosti*, with poems by authors such as Dorothy Livesay, Anne Wilkinson, Phyllis Webb, Margaret Atwood, Gwendolyn MacEwan, Robin Blaser, and Daphne Marlatt. The former was edited and translated by Luko Paljetak, the latter by Petar Opačić.

There seem to be no printed or published translations of plays by Canadian female writers. Nevertheless, they are performed on Croatian theatre stages, for example, 2010 featured a Croatian production of Carole Fréchette's play *Jean et Béatrice*, translated as *Ona, on i vi* (She, He and You). It was directed by Zijah A. Sokolović in collaboration with Teatar EXIT and Osijek City Theatre as a part of the cycle "Small Shows – Unusual Topics". Croatian critic Igor Ružić introduced the playwright in his review as the "Canadian, or rather Quebecoise dramatist" (Vijenac 2010).

As with the rest of the publishing market, the first half of 1990s was marked by Croatian Homeland War for Independence and, as previously mentioned, the struggle to establish the new grammar and spelling of the Croatian language. Finally, the end of 1990s proved to be fruitful in the renewal of translations of Canadian women writers, primarily with the works of Carol Shields, whose novel *The Stone Diaries* was published within the series of best world literature, edited by one of Croatian most renowned living editors, Zlatko Crnković, who introduced numerous international authors to Croatian readers over several decades. Lucy Maud Montgomery's canonical *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne of Avonlea* were both published in 1997, and later featured in a Canadian exhibition of the books' translations from all over the world. And finally, Atwood's *Alias Grace* was published in 1998.

Many of these translations occurred thanks to the efforts made by smaller independent publishers who wanted to profile themselves as publishers of high quality literature, offering excellent translations. One such example would be OceanMore, a small Croatian publishing house, with less than ten translated titles per year. The publishing house was founded and is run by Gordana Farkaš-Sfeci, who is also the editor of most of the works published. As an independent female editor, Farkaš-Sfeci managed to keep up her preference and choice of high literature by also periodically publishing books with high sales. Farkaš-Sfeci tries to include many female writers in her selection. Her affinity for both highly acclaimed and sometimes less exposed but equally excellent writers, along with the quality of her selection, were definitely confirmed when two of the authors she had published and introduced to Croatian readers in recent years (both female authors) received Nobel Prizes for Literature, namely Elfriede Jelinek and Herta Mueller. OceanMore is famous for offering high quality translations and allowing its translators enough time for each translation (sometimes over a year for a single work, as was the case with Jelinek's translation), unlike some other larger and more exposed Croatian publishing houses. Farkaš-Sfeci published two Canadian female authors (and one



male – Gaetan Soucy), Nancy Huston and Alice Munro, who surprisingly had never been translated into Croatian before. Both Huston's and Munro's works in Croatian translation were financially supported by the Canada Council for the Arts. Huston's novel *Fault Lines* was originally written in French (*Lignes de failles*, Actes Sud, 2006), but the Croatian version was translated by Vjera Balen-Heidl in 2010 from its English version, which Huston herself made in 2007. The novel received praise from Croatian critics as a successful social critique through the subject of *Lebensborn* children.¹ Huston is presented as an Anglophone Canadian writer who lives in Paris and writes in French as well, with disregard to the fact that her reception in France (where she has been rewarded with several prestigious major prizes such as the Prix Femina) is much more favourable than her reception in Anglophone Canada (Davey, 2004). On the other hand, Alice Munro's publication in Croatia should probably be attributed to the fact that she was the recipient of The Man Booker International Prize in 2009, which is a common guideline (as are some other prestigious international prizes) for contemporary Croatian publishers when it comes to choosing which titles to translate. Munro's Croatian translation of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* appeared in 2011 and was received with unanimous praise from Croatian media and critics, many of whom emphasized in their reviews that a translation of Munro's works was long overdue, since she is generally regarded not only as one of Canada's best authors, but also as one of the world's best short story authors, whose stories had already appeared in Croatian anthologies and periodicals. The Man Booker International Prize, which is awarded biannually to a living author for lifetime achievement of fictional work of worldwide literary value, had additionally strengthened Munro's position as one of the most highly praised authors by critics and colleagues alike, and it secured her wide acknowledgment in Europe, since numerous magazines, reviewers and critics reported on her well deserved prize, for which she had in fact been previously nominated. The Croatian translation of her book received the 2011 Kiklop award, the most prestigious Croatian literary award, which is given based on the votes of Croatian publishers, editors and translators, in the category of Best Book by Foreign Author, and its translator Maja Šoljan received a Kiklop award in the category of Best Translation of the Year.

Another small publisher, Vuković-Runjić, whose annual publishing plans rarely exceed 15 titles, published Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* thanks to the owner and editor Milana Vuković-Runjić. It seems that she was encouraged to publish Atwood's book as one of the participants in the international project The Myths. The Myths is a long-term global publishing project involving 40 publishers from around the world, and basically allows some of the world's most respected authors to re-tell myths in a manner of their own choosing, giving them a contemporary version. The project was initiated in 1999 and launched in 2005 by the award-winning Scottish independent publishing house Canongate Books² as one of the

- 1) It is interesting to note that this particular topic, *Lebensborn* children, received a lot of media attention in Croatia in 2007 because a distinguished Croatian author and scholar, Daša Drndić, had published her award-winning novel *Sonnenschein* on that particular topic, and Drndić herself is one of the few Croatian authors who had set her work in Canada, writing about her experiences in Toronto during her stay there in the 1990s, at the time of the war in Croatia (*The Black Madonna*, 1997; *Canzone di guerra*, 1998).
- 2) Canongate books is also famous as the publisher of another Canadian author, Yann Martel, and his Booker Prize bestselling novel *Life of Pi*.

most ambitious publishing events in the world, and has so far featured fourteen authors from various countries, including Margaret Atwood as its Canadian representative. Each country featured representative publishers, who chose which of the announced titles they would translate. Owner and founder of the publishing house Milana Vuković-Runjić is an ambitious editor in Croatia and known for her carefully chosen titles, as well as for introducing Croatian readers to translations of works by such authors as Roberto Bolaño, A.S. Byatt, Orhan Pamuk and Haruki Murakami. Along with Atwood, she also published Leonard Cohen's *Book of Mercy*.

Another interesting publication of a work by Margaret Atwood appeared in 2003, when her novel *Oryx and Crake* (translated as *Gazela i kosac* by Marko Maras) was translated and published by the publishing house Profil as a part of the small publishing series "Femina", which featured three other great world authors presented as modern classics: Christa Wolf, Angela Carter and Marguerite Duras. The series was edited by another female editor, Alicia Gracin, who noticed in one interview that there had not been a publishing series with such a profile (meaning translations of high quality books written by female authors) in Croatia since the 1980s (Simić 2006). *Oryx and Crake* was later on nominated by Rijeka City Library for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2005 as one of its best titles of the year. Margaret Atwood's literary values are highly recognized in Croatia, and she is perceived as one of the leading authors in the whole Anglophone world (on the book cover of the *The Robber Bride*, 1999) or as a world famous author (on the book cover of the *The Penelopiad*, 2005), but also as the foremost representative of Canadian fiction, and finally, a globally renowned female author. This becomes especially apparent if we consider how her novels chosen for Croatian translation are characterized by Croatian scholars, reviewers, media etc. For example, Slavenka Drakulić, one of Croatia's foremost and most widely translated authors, writes in her afterword to *The Handmaid's Tale* that the novel deals with the female search for identity (Drakulić, 1988, 341-348). Some reviewers have characterized it with much praise as an example of a dystopian science fiction novel (Sumpor 2004). Her literary and other artistic activities are regularly reported on in the Croatian media. Atwood's works are widely taught at Croatian universities, not only as part of the curriculum for courses on Canadian literature but in various departments and courses concentrating on comparative or world literature.

The year 2005 in general was a particularly interesting year for the Croatian publishing market, not only in terms of several Canadian translations, but also concerning female authors and women in the publishing business in general. Concerning Canadian translations, this year was especially fruitful and brought us publications by various publishing houses (as many as some nine translations of Canadian authors in a single year): from works by Leonard Cohen, Douglas Coupland, Malcolm Gladwell, Thomas King, Rohinton Mistry, Iain Lawrence and Guy Gavriel Kay, to finally, works by two female authors: Margaret Millar's short suspense novel *Beast in View* and Margaret Atwood's aforementioned *The Penelopiad*. Millar's psychological thriller was published as a representative example of genre fiction within the series "Best Crime Novels" of the publisher V.D.T., alongside authors such as Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr and Patricia Highsmith.

That same year, an interesting pattern appeared at the most renowned Croatian literary and publishing award Kiklop, because it turned out that almost all of the novels that had received awards that year in all the major categories, as well as for translations and publishing



series, were edited by women (Simić 2006). Female editors had picked out some of the best publications in 2005, and many of them are the same editors who introduced various Canadian authors to the Croatian readership, or more specifically Canadian female authors, such as is the case with Milana-Vuković Runjić, who participated in The Myths project and published Margaret Atwood, Gordana Farkaš-Sfeci, the editor of OceanMore, who published Alice Munro and Nancy Huston, and Jadranka Pintarić, one of the editors of a series of modern classics *On the Trail of Classics* (initiated by award-winning editor Irena Lukšić and published by Disput and the Croatian Philological Society), who featured Canadian female writers such as Anne Hébert, Madeleine Thien and several other Canadian authors. The weekly *Nacional* published an article entitled “The Best Books in Croatia Are Published by Women”, praising the aforementioned editors, as well as also other successful female editors like Irena Miličić (Simić 2006). Over the years Irena Lukšić’s endeavor with the modern classics series has become one of the most appreciated book series in Croatia and was awarded a Kiklop award in the category of Best Book Series three years in a row (2007, 2008, and 2009). *On the Trail of Classics* features over seventy primarily first time translations of quality fiction, featuring an impressive number of translated authors who are often overlooked in translation because of lesser commercial success, and filling the gap of translations from often neglected languages when it comes to the choice for translation into Croatian. The series also brought a lot of French translations, and the fact that Lukšić chose a francophone Canadian female author can also be thanked in part to her collaborator, the translator and scholar Marija Paprašarovski, a long standing member of the Croatian-Canadian Academic Society and promoter of Canadian Studies in Croatia, who translated from French some ten novels within the series, including Hébert’s novel *L’enfant chargé des songes* (Dječak pod teretom snova). Hébert is presented as one of the best known and most translated francophone Canadian women authors. Madeleine Thien’s novel *Certainty* was translated by Damijan Lalović, and she is promoted as a representative of a younger Canadian generation of writers.

The past decade, starting from the mid-2000s, presents a fruitful period for Canadian Studies in Croatia. In 2004, the Croatian-Canadian Academic Society was finally founded in Zagreb as a result of efforts of individual scholars and university professors from various departments (from law to literature) interested in Canadian Studies, which enabled the Society to function as an interdisciplinary academic platform from the very start, not limited to the humanities. Another important incentive for establishing the Society was the efforts of the Embassy of Canada in Croatia and its continuous collaboration with the Society in promoting Canadian Studies in all of its segments, including organizing events such as conferences, lectures and book promotions. The Embassy’s role is also crucial in the area of the promotion of Francophone Canadian culture, especially through events surrounding the *Days of the Francophonie* organized every spring throughout Croatia, often promoting Francophone Canadian literature, mostly through guest lectures.

To conclude, in general there have been far fewer translations of works written by Canadian female authors than those by Canadian male authors. Even though the first Canadian novel appeared in Croatian translation in the early 20th century, the first novel written by a Canadian female author appeared some 60 years later. Female authors became more present in Croatian translations in the past twenty years, after the proclamation of independence of Croatia with

the appearance of new smaller independent publishers. Most of these translations were chosen by female editors – as most of them said in an interview following the Kiklop award in 2005, their choices were influenced by the fact that women in Croatia make up most of their readership. Furthermore, the promotion of Canadian female writers in Croatia was also usually initiated and supported by women scholars and translators, such as Marija Paprašarovski in her translations and scholarly work, Ingrid Šafranek in her academic work, Giga Gračan as a translator, Evaine LeCalve Ivičević in her academic work and as the former President of the Croatian-Canadian Academic Society, during which she also supported Croatian publications of Canadian authors, among others by initiating the translation of the book *La Gloire de Cassiodore* by the award winning author Monique LaRue, and many others. Nevertheless, we believe that for example Margaret Atwood remains an author that is the first author Croatian readers associate with Canadian literature, and that with continuous support from not only national and regional Canadian Studies associations but recognition through generous translation grants from the Canadian government, Canadian female authors will continue to interest Croatian readers and positively contribute to the image of Canada that the Croatians have.

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