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The Reception of Canadian Writing in Croatia

Petra Sapun Kurtin and Mirna Sindičić Sabljo

Abstract

This article will focus on the Croatian reception of what can be provisionally termed as 'quality' Canadian writing – specifically, Canadian authors whose full-length works of fiction (CanLit) and non-fiction have been translated into Croatian and published since 1990 and have garnered relevant audiences and received critical attention. We investigate how Canadian writing is perceived by the Croatian audiences and their critical reception, the various cultural and publishing circumstances of their publication and translation, reasons for the selection of particular authors and works, occurrence of potential trends or preferences, and how these can be understood and interpreted compared to the publishing trends of Canadian writing in other Central European countries. Our conclusions will be informed by investigation of critical and general reviews, texts accompanying anthologies, essays, special issues, guest readings and lectures by Canadian authors, as well as interviews with publishers and/or translators.

Résumé

Cet article analysera la réception croate des auteurs canadiens dont les œuvres de fiction et non-fictionnelles complètes ont été traduit en croate et publié en Croatie depuis 1990 et qui ont attiré un public pertinent et ont reçu un accueil critique favorable en Croatie. Nous étudions la façon dont l'écriture canadienne est perçue par le public littéraire croate ainsi que son accueil critique, les diverses circonstances culturelles et éditoriales de sa publication et de sa traduction, les raisons de la sélection d'auteurs et d'œuvres particulières et la façon dont elles peuvent être interprété par rapport aux tendances éditoriales de l'écriture canadienne dans d'autres pays d'Europe centrale. Nos conclusions s'appuieront sur l'examen de critiques littéraires, de textes accompagnant des anthologies, d'essais, de numéros spéciaux des revues, de lectures d'invités et de conférences d'auteurs canadiens, ainsi que d'entrevues avec des éditeurs et des traducteurs croates.



Introduction

As Philip Goldstein and James L. Machor noted in their introduction to the *New Directions in American Reception Study*, in the second part of the 20th century “Anglo-American literary study” was marked by formal method and interpretation, but the 21st should be marked by reception (2008, xi-xii). Our research period, the 1990s till today, marks a liminal period between these two approaches, as well as a period of transition for Croatia from communism to democracy and market-oriented capitalism. Beginning in 1989, when numerous geopolitical as well as cultural changes took place, especially in Europe, Croatia was just starting out on the path of independence, to be followed by the 1990s War for Independence that marked the fallout from the collapse of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. The transition was and still is not an easy one, and for the purpose of brevity, we shall focus only on those pertaining to our research, as we have already covered the specificities of the various turbulences and all-encompassing changes that were happening within the cultural and publishing sphere in previous articles on translations of Canadian authors in Croatia (Sapun Kurtin and Sindičić Sabljo; Sindičić Sabljo and Sapun Kurtin).¹

In the 1990s the publishing industry in Croatia underwent a radical transformation, one that, as Živković points out, “completely changed the publishing scene, ruined bookstores and the book market, multiplied the old publishing-related problems and produced new ones” (2001, 15). The publishing business was also influenced by such factors as the need for differentiating Croatian translations, as opposed to the pre-1990s Serbo-Croatian. The 1990s saw the privatization of large publishing houses and the emergence of new privately-owned publishers, whose number continued to grow regularly in years to come. At the very end of the 1990s, there were 2,736 registered publishing houses in Croatia and by 2000 as many as 3,182 (Stipčević 2008, 55). The ten largest of them published about 50 new titles per year (Živković 2001, 17), but after the economic crisis the number of published books started to drop. This was a consequence of several factors: the decline of overall purchasing power, high prices of books, the dismantling of the bookstore network, and the sale of books through newsagents (Tomašević 2008, 93). However, the Croatian government continued to subsidize publishers and to provide libraries with funds for purchasing books directly from publishers. Distortions within the publishing processes of the early 2000s were also influenced by the newly enforced taxation of books as goods, which some publishers counteracted either by increasing the prices towards the consumers, or by lowering other publishing costs, to the detriment of the quality either in translation, proofreading, paper quality, etc. All of these factors had some effect on the translation and publication of books by foreign authors, Canadians included.

1) For further information on the changing politics and society in Croatia see Goldstein 2011.



As noted in the aforementioned articles, where we explored the prevalence and reasons for the translation of Canadian authors, Canadian literature was emerging in Croatian translation with a steady rise since the early 1990s. The selected literary authors and works were translated primarily from English, and much less from French. Some are representatives of Canadian literary fiction, others of various genres (e.g. fantasy author Guy Gavriel Kay), authors acclaimed either globally or in what might be summed up under the ambiguous term ‘America,’ a combination of the imagological notion of what was once “British North America ... projection for European dreams of exploration and conquest” (Seifert) and what Maša Kolanović described as the “culturally rooted metaphor of the West” (Kolanović, 71).

An interesting trend was noted, one of emerging translations of Canadian female authors into Croatian as a result of the rise in the number of female editors on the Croatian publishing scene, which influenced an increased number in translated female authors in general. During this especially fruitful period since 1990,² several short story collections by Alice Munro were translated and published by the Croatian publisher OceanMore before Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. Before the Nobel, Munro was considered a ‘well-kept secret’ of editors, translators, critics and librarians, but they started to include her in their local book clubs selection, after her acclaim and publicity thanks to the Nobel. Her Croatian publisher OceanMore, a small private company that focuses on fewer books and is famous for commissioning high-quality translations, turned out to be an excellent judge of quality literary trends, since they translated two other female Nobel laureates, Elfriede Jelinek and Herta Müller, along with Munro, before they were recognized by the Nobel committee.

The intended goal of our research was to describe and analyze the trends and patterns of the reception of translated Canadian authors in Croatia, both fiction and non-fiction. Previously, no such all-encompassing study was conducted in Croatia, alongside our own research for the purposes of Translation Research Project (Sapun Kurtin and Sindičić Sabljo; Sindičić Sabljo and Sapun Kurtin), and various individual works (for example, Le Calvé-Ivičević).

The results were obtained by a comparison between the list of authors whose works had been translated in Croatia before and since 1990, those translated in Croatia compared to the national lists compiled for other Central European countries involved in the project, and an investigation was conducted into the type and genre of individual works, the authors’ background, and any other factors that might have influenced their translation and reception in Croatia. After mapping the potential patterns and

2) In terms of Croatian small-scale publishing (10–15 books a year), a print run of as little as 1000 copies of quality literary fiction that manages to sell out within several years is considered a moderate success. The numbers naturally grow exponentially with mass-market fiction, but still never over the lower tens of thousands.



characteristics, a list of potential interviewees was compiled (consisting of a selection of figures of the Croatian literary and publishing scene, including literary critics, librarians, translators, editors/publishers, and literary scholars who have been involved in the process of publishing or reception of the translated works).³ Finally, research was conducted into available articles, reviews, interviews, guest appearances and other forms of contact between individual authors and the Croatian audiences. This multifold process helped us collect relevant amounts of data in order to portray an overview of the reception of Canadian authors in Croatia.

Many factors seem to have influenced multiple translations of individual authors apart from their popularity among the wider audiences or financial viability. The selection, as well as the distribution and promotion of individual authors is conducted in various ways, and is not limited to Canadian authors. The choice of which translated authors to focus on was therefore only partly influenced by the sheer volume of translated works by a single author (e.g. Henri Nouwen, whose work and reception runs parallel in terms of audiences, genre and publisher in Croatia with that of Jean Vanier, who is also on our list, yet the latter has only 9 titles in the database, as compared to Nouwen's 16 titles in 24 editions). Also, quantity did not explain the existence of multiple translations, as we noticed some patterns and trends. We also included some additional authors either singled out by our interviewees or whose translations seem to have emerged at a specific time for a specific reason (e.g. Rawi Hage after winning the IMPAC Dublin award, etc.).

Our interviews with local representatives of the Croatian publishing and cultural scene resulted in as various information as reading tendencies of local library patrons, trends of SF fandom and readership in Croatia, endeavors to promote Croatian-born Canadian authors with public book readings, to personal readership passions of individual translators and critics who wished to see individual works appear in Croatian translation. This diverse approach has helped us understand individual aspects of the complexities of the Croatian reception of Canadian authors.

In terms of quantity, one of the first noticeable things is the actual volume of translated works into Croatian from 1990s onwards in comparison with the period before 1990 (over 440 works after, as opposed to less than 70 prior to 1990). This assessment should be taken with some precaution for several reasons: while still part of the former Republic of Yugoslavia, the official language was known as Serbo-Croatian so many translations that were published in Serbia were sold and read throughout the country (former Yugoslavia). Furthermore, after the proclamation of independence, efforts were made on the national level to establish a clear distinction between Croa-

3) We would like to extend our thanks to Evaine Le Calvé-Ivičević, Miljenka Buljević, Antonija Primorac, Mihaela Marija Perković, Vesna Kurilić, Roman Simić and other interviewees for supplying relevant information and context of various aspects of translation, publication, promotion, and general reception.



tian and Serbian language and culture, so translations into Croatian became an important step towards that goal. Also, there has been an increase in Canadian literature with the rise in popularity of various genre-specific authors popular across the globe, and therefore in Croatia as well (e.g. Guy Gavriel Kay, Henri Nouwen, etc.).

Of the over 440 Canadian works by a total of roughly 120 authors translated since 1990, only around 20 were translated from French, the rest from English (with an exception of a few isolated translations from German); one third of them were single translated works by individual authors; some 40 authors have had either two or three of their books translated into Croatian; around one half of all translated books have been written by a total of 24 authors with four or more translated books. Most of the translations are of literary authors, and less of inspirational or general non-fiction (such as Henri Nouwen, Jean Vanier, Malcolm Gladwell, Eckhart Tolle, Northrop Frye, Will Kymlicka, etc.). By far the most translations by a Canadian author are of the books by Henri Nouwen (24), followed by Guy Gavriel Kay (21), Michael D. O'Brien (20), Božidar D. Benedict and Roger J. Morneau (15 each), Margaret Atwood (10), Jean Vanier and Ross Macdonald (9 each), Douglas Coupland, Michael Ondaatje and William P. Young (8 each) and Josip Novakovich and Malcolm Gladwell (7 each).⁴ Even a cursory overview of this list reveals an eclectic mix – from authors of inspirational religious texts, philosophy and popular sociology, through Croatian-born authors and a major CanLit star to mass-market writers in fantasy and detective fiction. For the purposes of this analysis and providing further breakdown of the reception of individual authors, we have explored the following emerging patterns amongst some of the most translated Canadian authors in Croatia, using the database as a general guideline, and some additional authors singled-out by our interviewees:

1. CanLit classics considered either as representatives of the Canadian literary canon or as globally renowned authors (e.g. Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Leonard Cohen)
2. Spiritual authors writing religious inspirational non-fiction (e.g. Henri Nouwen, Jean Vanier)
3. Genre fiction (such as speculative fiction or crime novels) authors and/or mass-market fiction authors (e.g. Guy Gavriel Kay, Michael O'Brien, Ross Macdonald, William Gibson, Louise Penny, Scott R. Bakker, Cory Doctorow, Joy Fielding)
4. Croatian-born Canadian authors (Josip Novakovich, Božidar D. Benedict)
5. Contemporary authors gaining a reputation internationally (Douglas Coupland, Rawi Hage, Michael Ondaatje, Madeleine Thien, etc.)

4) Figures represent the number of editions. In the case of Atwood, Benedict, Coupland, Kay, O'Brien and Young audio versions are also available.



Canadian canonical literary authors

Since the 1990s and their steady rise in translating of Canadian authors, some of the most recognizable Canadian names considered to be Canadian literary canon in Croatia have been Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen and Alice Munro. Details on the Croatian reception of Alice Munro and Leonard Cohen are not included in this analysis because they have been elaborated in an article by the same authors, published in this volume (“Leonard Cohen and Alice Munro in Croatia,” pp. 147–159).

The best known author of popular children’s literature⁵ is Lucy Maud Montgomery with her serial *Anne of Green Gables*: she appears as the overall most translated Canadian author in the Central European countries. In Croatia, she is represented only with *Anne of Avonlea*, *Anne of Green Gables* (both published in 1997) and *Kilmeny of the Orchard* (2015), sometimes included in the required reading lists in schools, and is less well-known in Croatia than abroad, as librarian Vesna Kurilić⁶ noted, but nevertheless an excellent reading choice, especially for female readers (see Kurilić).

One of the best known and most translated Canadian literary authors, Margaret Atwood, anthologized in all relevant Croatian overviews of Canadian poetry (Paljetak 1972, Opačić 2011) and fiction (Primorac 2009), as well as general overviews (Koruga and Štiks 2001, Lovrenčić 2003),⁷ was initially introduced to the Croatian readership with her world-famous novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* in 1988 (only three years after the original appeared and two years before its acclaimed movie adaptation). The 1990s saw some more translations of works by Atwood: *Surfacing* (1991), *Alias Grace* (1996), and *The Robber Bride* (1999), all published by different publishers. These were followed by translations of *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Penelopiad* (2005). Atwood has been recognized as an inspiration to an array of Croatian authors, from Tatjana Gromača to Dubravka Ugrešić and Slavenka Drakulić, as well as researched by various scholars.

In Croatia, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, “a dystopia unsurpassed till today” (Gračan 2005), is considered a cult novel, and its author a standard to which other writers might get compared to in reviews (e.g. M.D. Waters [žena.hr, “Prijedlozi”]). The novel is widely read and relevant in its topic among the general audiences, especially

5) Another popular choice among library book clubs for young adults led by librarians is *A Complicated Kindness* by Miriam Toews. Alan Bradley’s amateur-sleuth story *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* is also read in book clubs, but receives mixed reviews as either too long (among pre-teens) or too trivial (older teenagers), according to the yearly questionnaire of the Rijeka Public Library supplied by Vesna Kurilić. Deborah Ellis’s book *The Breadwinner* was included in the required reading at Croatian schools.

6) We hereby thank Vesna Kurilić for her generous help in providing us with details on the reading habits of the patrons of Rijeka Public Library, the content of their library blog and the details on choices of book clubs, along with the reactions of attendees to individual authors.

7) For a detailed overview of Atwood’s work in Croatian translation until 2011, see Sapun Kurtin and Sindičić Sabljo 2011b.



in recent years with the new Emmy-winning Netflix adaptation into a mini-series in 2017. In 2015, a new publisher, Lumen, initially a part of Školska knjiga and later independent, acquired the rights for Atwood's novels, and has since published new editions of *Oryx and Crake* (2015) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017), keeping the same translations, as well as published for the first time *The Year of the Flood* (2016) and *MaddAddam* (2017), as well as a few other Canadian authors such as Michael Ondaatje and Louise Penny.⁸

With her rising popularity due to the new mini-series adaptation in the US, Atwood is also gaining more visibility in Croatian media outlets. A tremendous amount of them have concluded that the sense of threat of totalitarianism disenfranchising women similar to that in the novel and the accompanying series is very much perceived as real, and that Atwood's rise to prominence in the US bestseller lists in 2016 (along with other dystopian novelists such as George Orwell (1984) and Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*)) is directly linked to the emergence of "the age of Trump" (Ban 2017, Drakulić 2017, Jedriško 2017, Jurić 2017, Madunić 2017, Mlakić 2017, Ostojić 2017, Pavlić 2017, Plazonja 2017, Polimac 2017, Schmidichen 2017, Tolić 2017). These assumptions by critics seem to reaffirm an earlier less bleak 2011 review by Vesna Solar and the original introduction to the 1988 Croatian edition of *The Handmaid's Tale*, written by Slavenka Drakulić (Drakulić 1988). Even Atwood's Croatian publisher promoted the newest edition as a timely work and "required reading in 2017" (Školska knjiga); the cover proclaims "Read it while it's still allowed!" One of the recent reviews of *The Handmaid's Tale* stressed the necessity to differentiate between the adaptation and the novel itself, stating the nuances missing from the mini-series that shed a different light on the characters and the realities of the imagined world of Gilead, most notably the sense of doubt permeating the narration, and the fact that "patriarchy hates men" as much as women, so the point of feminism should not be oriented against men but for the equality of the sexes (Đudik 2017).

The renewed fame of her classic novel has also rekindled her popularity amongst the Croatian sci-fi fandom, some of whom have held against Atwood the fact that she famously distanced herself from the sci-fi genre (Mancuso), proclaiming that she was writing speculative fiction, unlike for example Doris Lessing, who embraced the genre.⁹ Atwood is also known in Croatia as the "forerunner of Canadian women's writing"

8) Lumen Publishing specializes in literary fiction, but also young adult fiction, crime, sci fi, romance novels and other genre fiction, with a strategy of reaching wider, especially younger audiences through their online presence, heavily promoting their authors with celebrity recommendations, as well as involvement in the local fandom of genre fiction. Their editorial board consists mostly of younger female editors, who focus on entertaining fiction, as well as award-winning authors, less so those topping bestseller lists (Mandić-Mušćet).

9) We would like to thank Mihaela Marija Perković, editor and PR representative from the largest Croatian sci-fi association SFera for her insights on the trends amongst Croatian sci fi fandom and circumstances of publishing, translating and promoting sci fi authors in Croatia and within the publishing scene



(Siničković 2013). One of her translators, Giga Gračan, an award-winning Croatian translator and avid promoter of Canadian literature and its translation, noted in 2005 that Atwood was a “pioneer feminist” who was not adequately recognized for her novel beyond Canada back in 1985, believing she should have been awarded the Man Booker Prize, for which she was nominated four times before winning (Gračan).

Gračan has also translated other Canadian authors into Croatian (among them Northrop Frye, Robertson Davies, Barry Callaghan and John Ralston Saul, none of which have reached Atwood’s fame) and promoted them in various ways, recording a series of interviews with the leading Canadian authors such as Margaret Atwood, Barry Callaghan, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Leon Rooke and others in the 1990s for the Croatian Radio (then Radio Zagreb), most of which were included in some form as supplements to their Croatian translations (Gračan). Gračan professed an unfulfilled ambition to see more works by Robertson Davies translated, which she assumed would not happen as Croatian publishers were weary of “yesterday’s titles ... and highly hermetic books” (Gračan, “Prevoditelj predstavlja”).

Catholic spiritual authors

Despite the popularity and positive reception enjoyed by the aforementioned Canadian canonical authors, it is interesting to note that the most translated Canadian author into Croatian of all is a non-fiction author, Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest and theologian of Dutch heritage, highly influential even in the US, an esteemed lecturer who taught at Harvard and Yale Universities, as well as the University of Notre Dame, and who writes on psychology, spirituality and social justice. Considering that Nouwen was dubbed the first choice by Catholic and Protestant preachers for inspirational literature (Carroll), it comes as no surprise that he was featured in numerous translations in other Central European countries such as the Czech Republic (19 editions), Slovenia (13), Slovakia (12), and Hungary (15), and even Romania (3). His primary readership in Croatia, and the primary source of his reviews, are clergy, as Nouwen often writes about the personal struggles of people and priests living spiritual lives in a secular contemporary world. He is not considered a regular choice in public libraries amongst general readership; due to the smaller format and relatively low price of his translated books, and the fact that they are intended to be reread as spiritual literature, it is safe to assume that the majority of his readership will be found outside libraries, i.e. people buying the books for personal use.

During Nouwen’s lifetime only two of his books appeared in Croatian translation – the first one in 1983 (*The Way of the Heart*), the second in 1994 (*Jesus meines Lebens*) – but only after his death in 1996 did Croatian translations of his books start to



appear more frequently (especially published by the publisher Kršćanska sadašnjost, specializing in Christian spiritual works), some of them in several editions, most notably *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Nouwen's books are often recommended as an "extraordinary gem of spiritual literature," as one reviewer (a Croatian friar) called it, to be "read in a single breath," and delivering "elementary truths of spiritual life ... in its asceticism" (Vlk). Another reviewer recommends Nouwen's work as writing that has changed his perception of God (Lučić). In Croatian reviews, as well as on book jackets, Nouwen is not always explicitly introduced as a Canadian author, but rather a world-class spiritual author who had taught at American Ivy League universities and had given up his academic career to pursue a humble life of servitude, and sometimes even as one of the leading European spiritual authors (thanks to his Dutch heritage)¹⁰. Nouwen is acknowledged as a relevant source of spiritual literature by Croatian scholars, among them Ivan Supičić, a member of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences (Supičić).

Similar to Nouwen, his colleague, another Canadian philosopher and theologian from our top-translated list is Jean Vanier, specializing in spiritual literature. This award-winning author, the son of Canadian Governor-General Georges Vanier, has garnered reputation for his work by helping marginalized people with developmental disabilities, and for founding in 1964 the world-renowned organization L'Arche that offers support networks for people with disabilities, including organizing programs and housing in over 35 countries. Although not considered an actual church organization, L'Arche is recognized by the Vatican, and its local branches are usually closely connected to the local Catholic Church. In Croatia, a country with close ties to the Vatican¹¹ and predominantly Catholic by confession, which has several such organizations for families of people with disabilities, Vanier is regarded as a highly respected Catholic author, an altruist, and celebrated as the founder of L'Arche, whose Croatian branches are supported by governmental institutions and the Catholic church. Although his publisher clearly introduces him as a Canadian, he is less perceived as such by the readers, sometimes even announced at promotions as Swiss-born. Vanier was invited to Croatia in 2007 to promote the second edition of his book *Our Journey Home*, translated as *Sveta povijest osobe* (meaning 'sacred history of a person'), and the first editions of *Finding Peace (Pronaći mir)* and *La communauté: lieu du pardon et de la fête (Zajednica i rast)*, as well as to preside over a round table discussing the integrating of disabled persons in society (Kršćanska sadašnjost). On that occasion, Mirko Kemiveš, a Franciscan monk, and reviewer of his book *La communauté: lieu du pardon et de la fête*, mentioned Vanier's several-decade-long influence on him, and its

10) As stated on the book cover of a collection *Blagotvorna riječ za svaki dan*, a selection of works by Anselm Grün, Anthony de Mello, Henri Nouwen, and Andrea Schwarz published by Verbum in 2008.

11) The Vatican was the first country to recognize Croatian independence in 1991.



inspiration throughout his monastic career, praising it for helping both believers and clergy to develop a more mature outlook on life in a community and its challenges (Kemiveš, 456). So far, six of Vanier's books (7 editions) have been translated from English into Croatian and two from French, once again popularized by the same publisher as Nouwen, Kršćanska sadašnjost, and in a similar format of affordable paperbacks, not primarily intended for library use. Interestingly, from the point of view of reception, Vanier's books are used as part of the teacher training and curriculum in Croatian kindergartens and schools.

Genre fiction

Another commercially successful category translated into Croatian includes various Canadian examples of genre fiction such as speculative, fantasy and sci-fi fiction (Guy Gavriel Kay, William Gibson, R. Scott Bakker), crime/mystery novels (Ross Macdonald, Louise Penny), history romance (Mary Balogh, Eva Stachniak), and various forms of commercial or mass-market fiction authors (Michael O'Brien). Their common thread is a substantial readership. They are usually found in Croatian libraries in multiple copies, and many of them also thank their popularity, as trivial as it may sound, to the appeal of their covers, as well as to the quality of the print (as testified by librarians).

Translations of Louise Penny's crime novels coincide with the ever growing popularity of Scandinavian crime fiction over the past decade set in characteristically northern scenery. Penny's narratives and settings appeal to the Croatian perception of a cold wintery Canadian ambience, e.g. her most recently translated novel *How the Light Gets In* (named after a line from Leonard Cohen) from 2015 (Pogačnik 2016), but also the detective style psychological case studies (Jerković 2017). Her books (five of them in translation, more than in other Central European countries) are a very popular choice in Croatian libraries.

Michael O'Brien, on the other hand, famous for religious writing and sci-fi, from essays to novels, similarly to Nouwen and Vanier, has become popular in Croatia thanks to the Catholic lens through which all of his writing is done, both fiction (including children's books and apocalyptic thrillers) and non-fiction. He is endorsed by the Catholic Church, he has promoted his fiction in multiple Croatian cities, often inside churches, sometimes attended by as many as 3000 viewers and his books routinely experience multiple editions (especially *Father Elijah: An Apocalypse*, with 9 editions), with numerous copies available at local libraries (one of the most popular being *Voyage to Alpha Centauri*). His book *Island of the World* was especially appreciated due to its setting in the Balkans, including Croatia, and its thematizing of the communist



regime. O'Brien has even been hailed as the "best Catholic novelist ... great friend of the Croatian people and the Croatian Church" (Božić 2015).

Similar in terms of popularity, with large print runs and multiple editions of his books, is Guy Gavriel Kay, as major a name in Croatia as he is on the global literary scene. With twenty-one editions of different works, he is one of the most popular Canadian fiction authors in Croatia and considered a fantasy fiction classic, often compared to J.R.R. Tolkien.¹² Kay has visited Croatia and his local fandom several times, attending book readings and local sci-fi conventions, most notably as guest of honor at Sferakon in Zagreb in 1997 and LiburniCon in Rijeka in 2011. Ties between Kay and Croatia go even deeper, as Croatian comic book artist Igor Kordej has illustrated all of Kay's novels in Canada. And finally, inspired by hearing of the Croatian Uskoks at Senj from his editor, Kay wrote his newest novel *Children of Earth and Sky* (2016) basing the story's world on them (Kay, "On the strengths"). With the recent bankruptcy of his long-term publisher Algoritam, it remains to be seen who will take on Kay's translation rights in Croatia.

Other popular Canadian sci-fi authors include Cory Doctorow (his novel *Little Brother* is a popular book club choice and a word-of-mouth recommendation, especially as young adult fiction; his rising popularity was helped by the fact that he was one of the first authors to allow his books to be freely distributed in ebook format in the early 2000s) and R. Scott Bakker (especially popular among younger sci-fi fans; he was guest of honour at the sci-fi convention Sferakon in 2009).

Croatian-born Canadian authors

Another parallel to be pointed out are Croatian-born Canadian authors, most notably Josip Novakovich (the original spelling Novaković is still used in Croatia for his publications and promotion) and Božidar (B.D.) Benedikt (appears as Benedict in Croatian translation). Though they greatly differ in style and background, both authors enjoy international success and write on topics of interest to the general Croatian audiences.

Božidar Benedikt was born near Varaždin in what is today Croatia into a Serbian Orthodox family. He grew up in Serbia, migrating to Canada in 1971, where he spent most of his life. Even though Benedikt's writing falls under the so-called mass-market fiction, since there is not one particular but rather various genres of his writing, we have included him in a separate category. Benedikt wrote scenarios for Hollywood movies, and his novels have been widely translated in countries of the former

12) At one point in his life, Kay assisted Tolkien's son Christopher with the editing of some of his father's unpublished work.



Yugoslavia (Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia) but not elsewhere in the region. The author is primarily recognized as a Croatian-born Canadian author, but he is also recognized as the most prolific Serbian diasporic author (Benedikt, Interview).

Benedikt is very outspoken about his writing success (proclaiming in his interview that he has held a decade-long record for having sold the most copies of books in the entire “Yugoslavia”), career and personal life, has a personal website, and appears in interviews, mainly in the Serbian media. In Croatia his works are widely available in libraries, but with declining popularity and a decreasing number of reviews, since such mass-market fiction is usually considered outdated after a few years. Benedikt is a very prolific writer, and is promoted as such by his Croatian publishers. Having written around 40 novels, some belonging to literary fiction, others to various types of speculative fiction, some with motifs or topics taken from religion, parapsychology and the paranormal, crime novels and ‘religious thrillers,’ which he himself claims to have invented as a genre.¹³ A total of 15 titles (among them *The Parallel World*, *Story of Karma*, *The Vengeance Is Mine*) have been translated into Croatian so far, and published by several different publishers. His works are praised for showing human redemption, the “author’s insatiable belief in the basic good of humankind” (from the book cover of his novel *The Nobelman*, translated into Croatian as *Plemić*; similarly on the cover of *The Projectionist*). His initial translations were published by a small family publisher, Stari grad, specializing in works on alternative histories and geographies, mysterious topics, etc.

Unlike the mass-market fiction of Božidar Benedikt, Josip Novakovich deals with topics far more embedded in the Croatian landscape, history and cultural heritage, but enjoys less commercial success. The case of Josip Novakovich is an interesting one. Croatian-born in 1956 in the city of Daruvar, Novakovich later studied medicine in Serbia, as well as psychology and creative writing at Vassar College, Yale University and the University of Texas, and ended up spending most of his adult life in the US with a reputable career in academia, migrating to Canada in 2009, when he was appointed a teaching position in fiction writing at Concordia University, Montreal, and taking up Canadian citizenship soon after. Ever since, he has been regarded as a Croatian-born but nevertheless Canadian author. Even during his US years, Novakovich enjoyed an international reputation as an author – he won the Whiting Writer’s Award, a Guggenheim fellowship, an American Book Award, two fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, and his works were anthologized in Best American Poetry, Pushcart Prize, and O. Henry Prize Stories.

In 2013, Novakovich was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize – his own response to the nomination was typical of his general attitude: “It was a total surprise and I still don’t have any idea who nominated me. This is a big boost for my work

13) See the author’s personal website, <http://www.bdbenedikt.com/en/>.



when I need it most, because I had difficulty finding a publisher for my new novel.” As is often the case with authors who are held in high esteem by literary critics, editors and translators, they are not necessarily a good choice for the publishers in terms of sales. In an interview for the Jane Friedman blog aimed at professional writers, Novakovich spoke honestly of the concurrent expectations placed on writers by their publishers in promoting themselves and establishing a visible digital presence. Moreover, he professed that, despite having a double-book deal with the acclaimed publisher HarperCollins, the “book sales ... haven’t been great and they have been low with my last publisher, Dzanc, but next round I will be a better promoter of my work” (Tsetsi).

The news of the Man Booker nomination reached Croatian literary circles, and Novakovich gave a candid interview to one of the major Croatian cultural magazines, *Vijenac*, on his own perceived “poor reception” in his homeland, his unfavourable position as an emigrant author who does not write in his mother but “stepmother tongue” – English – and his perception of the Croatian state of mind (Pavlović). Aware of his own minority position ever since his teens, being a Baptist in the former Yugoslavia, coming from a small town of Daruvar and not the capital Zagreb, which was the cause of his own “lack of cultural confidence,” one who rejected communism even at such an early age, later a Croat in the US, then a Croatian-American in Canada, Novakovich never felt comfortable around “the majority” that surrounded him. He explained he had “outgrown” the necessity to define himself by means of whether he is a Croatian or a Canadian author – to him politics and borders change, but the place where one is born or buried remains a strong biological bond, regardless of what that identity is currently called. Regarding the lack of his Croatian readership, he concluded this was partly due to writing in English, and not Croatian, because his translations appear written in standard variation, stripped of any vernacular that might give the writing required nuance. He nevertheless insists on writing in English and believes it allows him a necessary distance from the mystified places of his past, especially when writing on the 1990s war (still a difficult and often contested topic in Croatian art and public discourse). Novakovich stated he found Croatia unkind towards its emigrant authors, and sees it as a remnant from the former Yugoslavia’s ideological “xenophobia ... that reduces people living in diaspora to simultaneously internal and external enemy.”

Despite the acclaim he received with the nomination for the Man Booker in 2013, which has definitely influenced his visibility on the international publishing scene, Novakovich had been known partially to Croatian audiences since 2000, when the first Croatian translation¹⁴ of a selection of his stories from the collections *Yolk* and

14) Having spent his higher education and entire career in English-speaking countries, Novakovich writes his books primarily in English but is also vested in assisting his Croatian publishers and translators



Salvation and Other Disasters appeared under the Croatian title *Grimizne usne* [Purple lips]. It was translated by Jadranka Pintarić and Ljiljana Šćurić, and published by Edicija Meandar, which also published another selection of his writing in 2003 entitled *Grob u Clevelandu* [A grave in Cleveland], this time translated by Saša Drach, who continued translating and selecting Novakovich's work for other publishers as well. One of his earlier editors, Branko Čegec, introduced the author as being close to Croatian contemporary literary production with his array of ordinary flawed characters and original ironic style, despite no longer writing in his native Croatian.

The book covers of his Croatian translations are often adorned with positive reviews from both international and Croatian sources; e.g. the back cover of *April Fool's Day* (translated as *Prvi aprila*) states that the *Kirkus Review* proclaimed him one of the best short story authors writing in the US; the *New York Magazine Book Review* compares him to emigrant authors such as Brodsky and Nabokov; Toby Olson considers him one of the best authors in more recent times in the US; Croatian critic Delimir Rešicki of *Glas Slavonije* notes him as an “extraordinary writer”; and Rade Jarak of *Zarez* recognizes his importance, despite his “writing from the West, for the West.” The novel itself is described in the blurb on the back cover as a “grotesque tale” of the troubling socialist years in the former Yugoslavia and the “savage capitalism of the contemporary banana-republic of Croatia.” This approach to the often polarizing topics within the Croatian public discourse is a different approach from the prevailing perceived dichotomy of the public discourse between ‘Yugo-nostalgia’ for the communist era vs nationalist pride of the independent country (despite its crippling economy and deep-seated corruption).

Denis Derk praises Novakovich's book *Infidelities: Stories of War and Lust* (one of his most popular books in Croatian libraries) for its unexpected characters and the author's ability to “get under their skin,” his mature and refined style, using epithets such as “excellent,” “outstanding,” “unusual,” “very comical,” “subtle” to describe individual stories or parts, and the story *Hail* as the “creepiest thing written” on the 1990s war (Derk 2015). The novel was described in a review in the regional daily *Glas Istre* as a “Balkan version of Forrest Gump,” with an obvious attempt to appeal to US audiences with certain metaphors and political allusion, which to Croatian readers might at times seem banal (*Glas Istre*). A similar sentiment was expressed on *Booksa.hr*, which features a review by the Serbian critic Vladimir Arsenić, who finds many faults with *Infidelities* for offering a “typical colonial view... as if through binocular on a safari ... detached ... unusable locally, but obviously intended for other markets,” albeit admitting that some aspects might ring somewhat uncomfortably true to post-Yugoslav audiences (Arsenić). Other book covers feature his status as a Man Booker

with the translation process, and appears in readings in his homeland where he regularly interacts with his audiences in Croatian.



finalist, as well as comments by the well-known US author of Bosnian descent Aleksandar Hemon, calling Novakovich a “natural-born storyteller who never forgets the human heart” (from the cover of his novel *Infidelities*).

Novakovich enjoys a positive reputation among Croatian scholars, who study him as one of our emigrant authors, also among reputable translators and editors, and continues to be published by various publishers (such as Algoritam and Profil), despite modest book sales and relatively low numbers of library lendings. He is a frequent guest and promoter of his writing in Croatia, either individually or as a participant in literary festivals. He was also included as a Croatian representative in the programmes “Meet the Voices of Modern Croatian Literature” and “Contemporary Croatian Literature: Inside and Out” at The London Book Fair in 2013 (Svilar, “Engleski prijevodi”), and in the short story collection *Zagreb Noir* edited by Ivan Sršen, a Croatian contribution to the international Noir series of crime short stories (Novakovich’s story was translated from English by Duško Čavić). He was also presented in several interviews, especially after the Man Booker nomination and his participation in the ‘America’-themed 2015 European Short Story Festival (FEKP)¹⁵ in Croatia – the oldest festival of its kind in Europe (“Intervju”) – and his appearance in the Zagreb literary book club Booksa¹⁶ for book readings. In fact, *Booksa* regularly promotes Novakovich’s work and guest appearances in Croatia as well as publishing reviews and recommendations for his work on its website, along with any other new appearances of translated Canadian literary fiction. Novakovich was also featured in Croatian media with essays on life in Canada from his own immigrant perspective (Novaković, “Kako zapravo... (2)”).

His book readings in Croatia are always well-attended by appreciative audiences, as he is considered a popular author of Croatian origin with an international reputation who writes on topics relevant to Croatian audiences. Buttressing his renown as a fiction writer is that Novakovich’s text for creative writing courses, *Fiction Writer’s Workshop*, published in 2007, is used in universities around the globe. In Croatia, it was published under the title *Radionica pisanja fikcije* in 2007 in several editions, and is considered an “excellent book by one of the most distinguished teachers of literature” (Svilar, “Škole”). Translations of his books are regularly subsidised by the Croatian government as library purchases.

15) The festival regularly features Croatian and international short story writers, many of great international renown, and has also featured guest appearances by several Canadian authors, most recently Novakovich, Rawi Hage and Alberto Manguel.

16) Cult hangout on the Croatian cultural and literary scene that promotes literary fiction and authors among general audiences by organizing festivals, seminars, book clubs, criticism workshops, book readings, and maintaining a website with literary news and reviews; they have featured guest performance not only by translated Canadian authors, such as Alberto Manguel in 2015, but also those who have not yet been translated into Croatian, such as Mark Kingwell in 2016.



Recent tendencies in the translation of Canadian authors into Croatian

With the rise in the interest in postcolonial literature featuring marginalized figures as well as the tendency of publishers to pick authors that have been nominated or have won a relevant literary prize, new authors and names have been appearing in Croatian translation, most notably the Sri Lanka-born Canadian author Michael Ondaatje, who is held in high acclaim by both scholars and general audiences for his varied writing as one of “the best known and esteemed Canadian authors besides Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro” (Piteša). New translations of his books (to date, eight of them) are regularly welcomed with reviews and/or interviews (e.g. the translation of his *The Cat’s Table* received several nuanced reviews), as well as guest performances.

The same is true for most other recently translated authors, especially in the 2010s, with the rising trend of literary reviews available online. Examples include John Ralston Saul (*Dark Diversions* from 2015) and Rawi Hage, a Lebanese-Canadian author who gained international success by winning the IMPAC Dublin Award for *De Niro’s Game*, his intense novel on growing up in the divided city of Beirut. Hage’s other novels have also been translated into Croatian: most recently *Carnival* and the unique urban Muslim immigrant perspective of Canada in *Cockroach*, offering an entirely different perspective of Canada than Croats often imagine, that of the great outdoors and snow, as a reviewer noted (B.Š.). Hage was also invited to the FEKP to promote his work in 2013.

Other emerging authors (many of them winners of international prizes) are often represented with a single translated work, such as Madeleine Thien (winner of the 2016 Governor-General’s Award and shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize) who writes about experiences of the Asian diaspora in Canada. Her debut novel *Certainty* was published by Disput in 2010, signaling a continued global trend of admiration for postcolonial literature. Other examples include Man Booker Prize winner Yann Martel, whose allegorical book *Life of Pi* was adapted into a blockbuster movie, and published in Croatia in 2004 (Martel promoted the illustrated version of his book in Croatia with a Skype guest performance); Patrick DeWitt and his *The Sisters Brothers*, another Man Booker nominee, often compared to the Coen brothers, published by Fraktura in 2013 and garnering favorable reviews by Croatian critics as pleasantly shocking (Cenov 2014); and Nina Bunjevac, Serbian-Canadian author whose translation of her internationally acclaimed award-winning graphic novel on coming to terms with her father’s extremist nationalist past entitled *Fatherland* appeared in Croatian translation in 2014 with an afterword by the prominent Croatian author and critic Miljenko Jergović.



Another example of an internationally famous representative of Canadian literature is Douglas Coupland, whose work has seen 8 translations in Croatia. His eclectic writing ranges from novels of catastrophe, contemporary Decameron-style tales set in the digital age, to a biography of Marshall McLuhan. In Croatia, his name is primarily associated with the cult classic *Generation X* (1991), which was one of the first novels to deal with the new “lost generation,” and his publisher, Naklada Ljevak, promotes him as “one of the foremost satirists and critics of contemporary postmodern consumer society” (from the book cover of the *Worst. Person. Ever.*, 2014). His novel *Generation A* is a popular choice at Croatian libraries. His writing might be characterized as a form of speculative fiction (of alternative worlds), but he is not known among the Croatian sci-fi communities.

Conclusion

Since the early 1990s, the number of Croatian translations of Canadian authors has been growing exponentially. Initially, various endeavours by individual scholars, translators, authors, and editors personally passionate about Canadian literature contributed to a sparse but steady presence of Canadian authors in Croatia in occasional translations. These included either supplying book recommendations to publishers or providing translations and reviews to various media outlets such as the Croatian Radio, which did not necessarily result in a wide distribution of these authors, but helped raise awareness of Canadian literature. Some of the previously unknown authors appearing in such reviews, overviews and anthologies later appeared in collections of translated texts, e.g. Antonija Primorac’s anthology of Canadian short stories (Primorac 2009) featuring first translations of Miriam Toews, Yann Martel, and Alice Munro; complete books by these authors were subsequently translated into Croatian. These translations were predominantly positively perceived by reviewers, mainly as pleasant surprises and unusual choices made by true aficionados of Canadian literature (e.g. Giga Gračan’s choice to translate Robertson Davies’s *High Spirits* in 2004, or the translation of Anne Hébert’s *L’enfant charge de songes* in 2006, Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage* in 2011, and Nancy Huston’s *Fault Lines* in 2010, to name but a few; these were all reviewed as welcome novelties of quality non-commercial fiction) and subsequently thanks to the information and digital revolution that has brought about previously unimagined availability of information.

In addition to translating trends within Croatia, some parallels can be drawn to those of other Central European countries, such as the presence of works by Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje and Alice Munro. Other authors popular elsewhere seem to have bypassed Croatia in terms of popularity partially or entirely (David Morrell,



Arthur Hailey), whereas some are more present in Croatia than in other countries, among them Josip Novakovich and Michael D. O'Brien. Several authors have been recognized by Croatian editors, translators and scholars, and have been included in various anthologies, but never received a translation of a full volume, for example George Bowering (Gorjup and Lovrenčić 1991, Opačić 2011).

The past decade has been favorable towards Canadian literature and emerging new authors representing some new trends in CanLit. Numerous authors had been short-listed for some of the prestigious literary prizes, which has greatly contributed to their visibility on the global literary map. In recent years the Croatian publishing scene has been following some of the prevailing trends when choosing what to translate. Besides the obvious choice of mass-market and/or genre fiction with large fandoms (such as Guy Gavriel Kay), as well as heavily promoted popular non-fiction with global audiences (Malcolm Gladwell, Eckhart Tolle), when it came to literary fiction, they have been primarily vested in translating authors who have already garnered international acclaim and are promoted as such by rights agencies, including award-winning authors and/or those whose works are being optioned for movie/series adaptations.

With the rise and overall accessibility of digital content, as well as good general command of English among the Croatian readership, international trends and publications have become as accessible to them as to any other audiences. Another emerging trend is the author's own investment in maintaining a direct relationship with their readers; a good example is Margaret Atwood, who maintains a strong bond thanks to her online presence on digital media, social networks (an early adopter of Twitter) and private website,¹⁷ updating fans on her current writing and whereabouts, publishing opinion pieces and engaging in debates on current events, etc. Authors are often involved in participating in programmes and guest appearances since publishers tend to bring their authors as guests to book readings, organizing publicly subsidized festivals to reach wider audiences, funding and organizing promotional activities at genre-specific events (e.g. the FEKP festival promotes various authors, and its success runs parallel to the rise in popularity of the short story genre in Croatia,¹⁸ with the result being more and more translated short story authors). Even a country with as small a market as Croatia has enjoyed live interviews and guest readings by as diverse authors as Mark Anthony Jarman, Guy Gavriel Kay, Josip Novakovich, R. Scott Bakker, Alberto Manguel, Mark Kingwell, Nina Bunjevac, Jean Vanier, Rawi Hage and many others (some even multiple times). In order to further promote and raise awareness of their authors, publish-

17) Her website <http://margaretatwood.ca> includes regular updates, and an extensive list of credentials, bibliography, full list of awards (over a hundred) and honorary degrees, books written on her work, etc.

18) For more on the emerging Croatian short story authors, see interview with editor and organizer of the European Short Story Festival (FEKP) Roman Slmić at <http://www.kupus.net/roman-simic-bodrozic-stanje-u-hrvatskoj-kratkoj-prici-je-odlicno/>.



ers might also additionally provide libraries with quality hardcover copies of their books, featuring appealing and genre-appropriate covers, something that is harder to realize for smaller publishers of quality literature.

A significant rise in the number of literary events, genre-specific conventions, literary blogs featuring interviews and book reviews as well as the emergence of book clubs, especially those led by librarians selecting quality literature for both adult and children's audiences, have all contributed to an increased awareness of the more recently translated fiction. Still, the choice for book clubs is limited to authors whose books have been acquired in sufficient numbers to supply all the members of the group with copies of the book that will be discussed.

An increasing interest in postcolonial topics and books in general in Croatia has caused a rise in the awareness of Canadian postcolonial literature by authors of immigrant descent and their specific Canadian multicultural experience, which differs from that of Europe and the USA. As the Canadian author and critical theorist Steven Scobbie noted during his visit as guest of honour at the P.E.N meeting of the Istrian Book Festival in Pula: "Canada is both colonial and postcolonial" (Petlevski).

All of these trends and strategies have contributed to an increased awareness on the part of Croatian audiences of Canadian authors, particularly literature, as popular non-fiction (whether spiritual or general) is less markedly characterized as Canadian but rather recognized for its international relevance.

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