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Hungarian Responses to Canadian Literary Works and to Leonard Cohen's Death

Katalin Kürtösi

Abstract

The article deals with three layers of the reception of Canadian writing in Hungary, offering a survey of reviews about the translations of some Canadian books, remarks about special issues of journals and their impact, and a summary about how the death of Leonard Cohen was commented upon in the media. In general, the reviews and studies about Canadian literary works are of high intellectual quality; however, these reactions concern mainly the novels of Margaret Atwood, although books by Lucy Maud Montgomery came out in far more publications and editions than those by Atwood. Québec authors are practically absent as far as translations of books are concerned – but they are present in special issues of journals. Comments on the translations of Leonard Cohen's two novels appeared only as part of obituaries.

Résumé

L'article présente trois aspects de la réception des textes canadiens en Hongrie. Elle offre un aperçu des critiques des traductions de quelques livres canadiens, des commentaires sur des numéros spéciaux de revues et leur impact, et un résumé des réactions dans les médias à la mort de Leonard Cohen. En général, les écrits critiques et académiques sur les œuvres littéraires canadiens sont de haute qualité intellectuelle. Cependant, cette réception se concentre sur les romans de Margaret Atwood, même si les œuvres de Lucy Maud Montgomery ont été publiées dans un bien plus grand nombre que celles d'Atwood. Les auteurs québécois sont pratiquement absents en ce qui concerne la traduction des livres – mais ils sont présents dans des numéros spéciaux de revue. Les traductions des deux romans de Leonard Cohen n'ont été commentées que dans le cadre des notices nécrologiques.



1. General survey

The CEACS database of translations of Canadian writing in the Central European region reveals that, for the period 1990–2017, 85 Canadian authors have at least one book in Hungarian, with almost 400 editions, but only 34 of them can claim four or more individual works. Looking at the list of authors, highly reputed ‘quality’ writers dominate, and, like in the rest of the region, writers with roots in this country also get translated. MATARKA, the site of journal articles (weeklies, monthlies and academic journals), shows only one entry for Lucy Maud Montgomery, who has 33 entries in the database, a few for Yann Martel, Douglas Coupland, Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry – and dozens for Margaret Atwood!¹ The majority of the articles about Atwood’s novels (only one appeared about her poetry) were written before *The Handmaid’s Tale* was made into a series. These facts suggest that the fame and recognition of a given author does not depend on the number of books translated: Mistry has four works available in Hungarian, but they received only a few reviews. Looking at the sources, *Élet és Irodalom*, a highly respected and popular weekly, has devoted most space to Canadian authors by publishing not only reviews, but interviews and obituaries, too, and often mentioning translations of Canadian works in the “books of the week” section. The great majority of reviews and articles are about writers who publish in English in Canada. The articles about the Hungarian translations of Canadian literary works can be grouped into longer analyses of the novels, traditional reviews and blog entries. In some cases I could obtain approximate print run numbers from the publishing houses.²

1) Since Alice Munro’s works in Hungarian are the topic of another article in this volume, I omit references to them. During the time-frame of the present research no significant lexicon of world literature was published in Hungary (however, the series *Világírodalmi Lexikon* [Lexicon of world literature], published by Akadémiai Kiadó in the 1980s, did mention some Canadian authors, e.g. Stephen Leacock and Margaret Laurence). The leading historical survey of world literature, *Világírodalom*, edited by József Pál (Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005) does not mention any author from Canada, not even in the context of postmodern fiction. Bényei (June 2007) is most upset by this attitude, rejecting the dominant Eurocentric approach of critics in Hungary: “It is high time that we realize that twentieth-century Canadian literature can lay claim to ... several authors of the highest quality ... It is a big mistake not to appreciate remarkable and rich literatures like that in Canada which ... produced excellent authors in the twentieth century.” He misses translations of works by Robert Kroetsch, Timothy Findley, Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, George Bowering, Mavis Gallant, Janette Turner Hospital, Marie-Claire Blais, Hubert Aquin, Gabrielle Roy, Nicole Brossard, Bharati Mukherjee, Joy Kogawa, Frank Paci, and M. G. Vassanji. The chronology of twentieth-century literature *A XX. századi irodalom kronológiája 1901–1980* (Vajda, György Mihály, Katalin Kürtösi, and József Pál (eds), Szeged, JatePress, 1991), on the other hand, does mention Margaret Atwood and Mordecai Richler with three entries each and Anne Hébert with one. As far as literature in Quebec is concerned, Árpád Vigh published a literary history in 2007 (*Kék mezőben fehér liliom. A francia-kanadai irodalom története* [White lily on blue. A history of French-Canadian literature]. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó. 267 pp.

2) Most translations came out in about 1500 copies – except for Alice Munro (5000–7000 copies after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature) and Margaret Atwood (even the small publisher Lazi could sell 3000 copies of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, while Jelenkor brought it out in around 20,000 copies after the series).



The database reveals the inexplicable absence of Quebec authors: the sad fact is that a very small number of their works were translated. In 2000 Lazi Publishing House (the first publisher of *The Handmaid's Tale*) ventured to break the ice with Roch Carrier's *La guerre, Yes, Sir!* – the translation was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts – but it was not followed by other novels. Kelemen in *Kő* wrote a review about the novel, mentioning some facts about Canadian culture and the writer himself, emphasizing the similarities of rural culture in Carrier's novel to that of Hungary. An anthology of contemporary Canadian plays contains three works from Quebec (*Incendies* by Wajdi Mouwad, *Les fraises en janvier* by Évelyne de la Chenelière and *Le ventriloque* by Larry Tremblay) and Csáki in her review of the volume mentions each of them, pointing out the quality of the translations, the good choice of works, and common features in the plays with situations in Hungary. In the conclusion she mentions the contribution of the afterwords (by Péter Szaffkó and the writer of this paper) to a better understanding of Canadian drama in our country.

Although many of Lucy Maud Montgomery's novels have been translated into Hungarian, and print runs have been large, only one article (Szócs) was published about her, giving a short biographical survey about the author and offering a note about the site of the stories as well as another one about her Hungarian fan-clubs: www.avonlea.hu – founded in 1998 – offers regular meetings (the most recent one was on 24 November 2018), has a forum (often with very naive remarks, e.g. about online publication possibilities of probably amateurish translations), has advertised a competition of compositions based on Avonlea experiences, etc.³

Two reviews (Bazsányi 2004, Nagy) were published about *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, both in prestigious literary journals, claiming it on the one hand to be a “captivatingly exciting, sometimes brutally cruel, at other times a poignantly beautiful novel” (Nagy), underlining its philosophical and religious implications, and on the other hand drawing attention to its marked self-interpretation qualities and its pleasing the reader, supported by several passages quoted from the novel and urging readers of the review to read the book (Bazsányi 2004). Moving on with other Canadian novels serving as sources for feature films, Horváth wrote an extensive essay on *The English Patient*, elaborating on its writerly technique, the use of self-reflection, its imagery and metaphors, the importance of the senses, and Ondaatje's stylistic mastery. He compares Ondaatje to the Hungarian author Géza Ottlik in the sense that both writers manifest a similar use of repetition, mentioning events in short sentences first, then giving a longer description, finally proving that these small details are crucial in the texture of the novel. For Horváth, *The English Patient* is a book relying on other books, taking place in a library room, i.e. the home of books. Although *Anil's Ghost*

3) The site has 4191 registered members; during the period between 2001 and 2012 they had almost 600,000 visitors.



also features Ondaatje's 'trademark' deep knowledge about the given subject matter, Anna Gács considers it less convincing than *The English Patient*. Her main objection is that in *Anil's Ghost* the writer becomes too didactic and creates cliché-like characters. Comparing the work of the Hungarian translators, she thinks that Imre Szász and Anna M. Szász did a brilliant job with *The English Patient*, while Endre Grekovits could not render the poetic qualities and elegance of Ondaatje's text into Hungarian.

Of the four Hungarian translations of Rohinton Mistry's works, two received special attention. *India, India* (the Hungarian translation of *A Fine Balance*) was reviewed both in *Szépirodalmi Figyelő* (Tárnok 2007) and *Élet és Irodalom* (Bényei, August 2007). The two reviewers do not agree about the novel's qualities. Although Tárnok admits that Mistry – like some other representatives of contemporary world literature – is underrepresented in the book market of Hungary, this novel is not convincing enough for him: he finds it too lengthy, and the situations are often schematic, in contrast with *Tales from Firozha Baag*. Tárnok agrees with the Hungarian title, although he thinks the change was done mainly for marketing purposes. Bényei, however, thinks differently: while Mistry's title covers a recurring image of the novel, *India, India* is "horribly pretentious ... as if wishing to discourage readers." For Bényei, this is an excellent novel, ranking among the masterpieces of contemporary world literature and a joy to read. The issue of how to translate the title was raised also in the case of *Family Matters*, in a different sense: while the English title has double meaning, the translator had to decide for one of these, opting for 'family cases'. In her review, Elekes places Mistry's novel in the tradition of realist sagas as well as that of postmodern fiction. She also refers to the larger context of postcolonial writing:

Reading all these outstanding works of former colonial literatures, one has the impression that the remarkable success of these English-language authors of frequently double identities from the peripheries of political power can be – at least partly – explained by the fact that they are still able to create valid texts ... carrying on the tradition of European realism, they are able to give valid statements both about the often traumatic conflicts of European culture and the former colonial cultures, and about the European novel genre itself.

Among Canadian writers of Hungarian descent, Pablo Urbányi can boast the most translations (four titles, six editions). The Hungarian-Argentinian-Canadian author – writing 'of course' in Spanish – has been a frequent visitor to the 'old country' (although his native town is now part of Slovakia, and one of his publishers, Nap Kiadó, is also located in that neighbouring country), giving interviews (Csanda), and participating in book launches. The reviews (Kiricsi, N. Tóth) highlight Urbányi's satirical approach and the exciting stories, which are easy to read even if the structure is complicated or tricky. He often elaborates on rootlessness, on being a stranger. N. Tóth praises the



writer for raising delicate issues like euthanasia in the case of children, the clashes of different cultures and the negative side effects of consumer society – all these, without moralizing or exaggerated pathos.

Translations of Canadian authors had been shown in the framework of the International Book Festival Budapest (held annually in the spring) before Canada was invited as the first non-European country to be guest of honour in 2007,⁴ stimulating newspaper articles, reviews, interviews (also on television) in Hungary⁵ and reports in Canadian dailies, as well. A small delegation of Canadian authors (some with Hungarian roots, but also Joseph Boyden and Sharon Pollock) had press conferences, visited universities in Budapest and provincial towns, gave interviews to local media. Still, Béneyei in his survey pointed out that “the quantity and visibility of the books could not reach the critical point to observe Canadian literature as such.” He chose four titles to review and later devoted a separate review to Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (see the previous passage). Béneyei found that Hungarian-born Anna Porter’s *The Storyteller. Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* is rich in didactic historical references, showing paternalistic views about history and society besides whitewashing the role of the Hungarian aristocracy. Turning to ‘real’ Canadian books, Béneyei underlines that they are a “pleasant surprise.” Speaking of Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, he stresses that it belongs to the group of novels offering a re-reading (and re-evaluation) of the Great War. This strong and powerful story was published in a “correct translation by András Hajdu.” In the general book festival review, Béneyei devotes a short passage to Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* (a few weeks previously, Dóra Elekes wrote a more exhaustive review in the same weekly – see below) and to Alice Munro’s *Runaway*, referring to the eight stories in the volume as masterpieces written with incredible economy.

Before turning to the reception of Margaret Atwood, a few words about comments on Douglas Coupland’s works. The database contains five titles, of which three were evaluated in reviews or blog entries. About *Generation A*, Ternovác says that Coupland tries to call the reader’s attention to several problems of modern society, sometimes in a direct and relentless way, at other times with humour, but toward the end of the book it loses its initial intensity. All in all, the reviewer considers Coupland’s book a contemporary version of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Of *Girlfriend in Coma*, Benedek remarks in a blog entry that the jackets of Coupland’s books in Hungarian often verge on unacceptable ugliness. The blog writer points at the mystic-dystopic-apocalyptic features of the book, which treats issues like growing up, friendship, life

4) As far as individual authors were concerned, that year the Italian author Umberto Eco was invited and given the festival’s Grand Prize. In his survey of the book fair, Béneyei (June 2007) noted that “the presence of Umberto Eco received more media coverage than introducing the literature of a continent-size country.”

5) The then still existing daily *Népszabadság* came out with a special cultural section, including an article by Takács about Canadian literature, illustrated by photos of Pablo Urbányi, Roch Carrier, Sharon Pollock and Anna Porter.



in the eighties, the meaning of life, but ends in a simple and superficial way. *The Gum Thief*, in sonnyK's view, only partly justifies the fame of its author, owing to its being a very heterogeneous text as well as to the lack of credibility in Roger's paternalistic advice, which cannot be compensated for by the frequently used self-referentiality and other postmodern features. For this reader, *The Gum Thief* is a typical example of how a novel with a promising start can be spoiled thanks to its hasty ending. The publishing house receives some positive comments, like offering translations of this 'cult-writer' with a relatively short delay, but there are problems with editing, not to speak about the ugly covers.

As noted at the beginning of this article, Margaret Atwood is the Canadian author receiving the largest number of reviews and academic papers.⁶ Following the 1984 edition of *Surfacing*, seven more titles were published in Hungarian translation during our period of research, some of them in more than one edition (*The Blind Assassin* in two, *Alias Grace* in three, *The Handmaid's Tale* in seven). These invited more than a dozen reviews and articles and several blog entries in the new millennium. In considering the Booker Prize award for *The Blind Assassin*, Tárnok (2003) expresses his view that it was high time Atwood was a winner (this was her fourth nomination). In a Hungarian-language cultural review published in Transylvania he gives a short analysis of the novel, calling it a profound intellectual experience and declaring that Atwood has played an important role in the international recognition of Canadian literature. Gács (2004) praises Márta Siklós for the translation and calls it a "really great novel" featuring fascinating writerly skills, a celebration of novel writing as techné. A year later M. Nagy in *Jelenkor* analyses the novel's complex structural layers, elaborates on the use of competition as a metaphor, ranks Atwood among the great writers, but does not like the idea of three mottos and finds some detailed descriptions superfluous. *Oryx and Crake* was also found a novel of uneven qualities, Gatz calling it a "witty but basically journalistic representation of the fears of Western leftist intellectuals," but praising the translation by Zsuzsanna Varga and the jacket design by Gábor Gerhes (Gács 2012). *The Penelopiad*, launched in Hungarian at the 2007 International Book Festival Budapest, received several mentions. Elekes recognizes the merits of British publisher James Byng's idea for a series of well-known myths in new adaptations and – after summing up the main events in Atwood's book – draws attention to the subversion of traditional hierarchies and the frequent descriptions of Penelope smiling enigmatically as signs of twenty-first-century reinterpretation of the Greek story. Bazsányi (2007) finds the references to contemporary phenomena confusing and the whole book too artificial.

6) Only one entry (Fisli) was found about Atwood's poetry, pointing out that the author often rewrites myths of antiquity. *Surfacing* came out in Hungarian in 1984 (before the starting point of this project) so I am not dealing with Georgina Bozsó's comparative article on it.



Within the numerous mentions of Margaret Atwood's work, those about *The Handmaid's Tale* dominate. Shortly after the first translation by Enikő Mohácsi, Béneyei published an essay in *Műút*, a then brand new journal of literary and arts criticism,⁷ published in the town of Miskolc in northeastern Hungary, putting the novel in the tradition of dystopias and claiming that it became a world classic within years after its first publication. He considers the novel a "typically 'female' text," elaborating on the multiple uses of the female body, which is under complete control, thus becoming a prison cell in the physical and symbolic sense; seeing is obstructed by the bonnet, so the heroine is deprived of full perspective. The only remedies left for her are memories of the past and language itself, featured in scrabble. Atwood is a master of playing with words, making the translator's job harder, and Béneyei is basically satisfied with Mohácsi's solutions (except with regard to distorted citations from *Doctor Faustus* by Marlowe and a Milton sonnet – these were corrected in the revised editions). In his summary about the novel itself, the reviewer thinks that the first part is far more powerful with its fragmented structure than the second part, including the 'appendix'. Ten years later, following the revised translation and the Hulu television series, Novák wrote an article for *Alföld*, a literary, artistic and critical journal published in the eastern Hungarian city of Debrecen, comparing the original novel and its adaptation – noting, for example, the stronger representation of protest in the latter. Speaking about the revised translation, Novák acknowledges the corrections with regard to the citations, but could still spot a few mistranslations; in general, she thinks that the translator often uses a more eloquent Hungarian than the vocabulary and phrasing of the original but finds the philosophical and lyrical passages excellently done. More recently, *Látó*, a literary journal published in Hungarian in Csíkszereda, Romania, brought out a discussion about Atwood's book (Dánél et al.), pointing at the Biblical implications and the difficulties of translation (e.g. Offred).

The series on HBO spurred reviews and blog entries alike. *HVG* (*Heti Világgazdaság*, a leading national weekly devoted to economic, social and cultural issues), first cited a Hungarian critic's standpoint about Atwood deserving the Nobel Prize for Literature, claiming that she can present issues on the highest intellectual level but still appeal to a wide group of readers, and also highlighting that 2017 was Atwood's year.⁸ The article – illustrated by Atwood's photo and an image from the series – gives a short but knowledgeable survey of the Canadian writer's career, adding a section about the Hungarian translations of her works (Horeczky). A leading Hungarian writer, Krisztián Grecsó, puts the series in the context of today's Hungary, comparing the situation with Slovakia and Romania and declaring that the series is exciting, threatening

7) The journal published traditional reviews about Atwood's novels, e.g. about *Oryx and Crake* (Ureczky) and *The Year of the Flood* (Balajthy).

8) The journal's database gives 59 hits for Atwood.



and addictive. He observes several parallels between Atwood's fictive world and the very real public atmosphere in Hungary, referring not only to the practice of informers but also to the statement of a leading politician of the ruling party saying that the future can be won by "fully populating the country with babies." Grecsó draws attention to the dangers of a frequently occurring phrase ("Truly amazing, what people can get used to") in the series. The blog entries emphasize the importance of sisterhood (konyves.blog.hu/2017/12), while Eni Rostás thinks that "Atwood's book does not function as a novel. It became a symbol of the oppression of women, a social and political manifesto, compulsory reading about feminism ... a reference." After mentioning several political allusions to the USA, she thinks that the book itself is "good but not perfect," some of the characters are not convincing, and – echoing several other reviewers – the ending is problematic.

2. Special issues of journals

A few years after the first Canada-related courses were offered at Hungarian universities – the pioneering work was done by Anna Jakabfi (Budapest) and Árpád Vigh (Pécs) in the late 1970s, followed by Péter Szaffkó and Judit Molnár (Debrecen) and myself (Szeged) in the early- and mid-eighties – a special double issue of *Helikon*,⁹ an academic journal of world literature, offered papers by Canadian scholars in translation together with some by Hungarian Canadianists. Unlike in the case of translations, this collection showed a balance between English-language writing and Quebec literature. The special issue was filling a gap, since (as noted earlier) histories and encyclopedias of world literature did not include chapters or entries about writing in Canada. Almost fifteen years later, in a new political climate, the same journal (with a new subtitle, defining it as a journal of criticism) brought out a special issue (2002/4) focusing on multiculturalism.

During the past twenty years, three major literary monthlies in Hungary have devoted considerable attention to Canadian and Quebec literatures, one of them on two occasions. In 1999 *Magyar Napló*, the journal of the Hungarian Writers' Union, introduced Quebec authors: the short texts and poems were selected by Éva Martonyi and

9) *Helikon Világirodalmi Figyelő*, 1988/1–2. Guest edited by Stéphane Sarkany (Carleton University, Ottawa) and Katalin Kürtösi. The 280-page issue offered a translation of Northrop Frye's "Conclusion," papers by David Staines, W. H. New, George Bizstray, Jacques Allard, Patrick Imbert, Pierre Gobin, Patricia Smart, Jean-Louis Major, Réjean Robidoux, Jean Fisette, James Steele, Anna Jakabfi, Tibor Fabiny, László Tarnay and Katalin Kürtösi and obituaries of Margaret Laurence and George Ryga. Most of the translations were made or checked by already dedicated or would be Canadianists (Anna Jakabfi, Judit Molnár, Katalin Kürtösi, Árpád Vigh and Zsuzsa Simonffy, Éva Martonyi, respectively).

Five years earlier, the same journal had published literary theory texts by Mario J. Valdés, Pierre Laurette and Linda Hutcheon (1983/1).



poet János Lackfi. Martonyi wrote short notes about the authors and a concise survey about Quebec literature before serving the readers with works by Paul Chamberland, Gaston Miron, Jacques Ferron, Michel Beaulieu, Réjean Ducharme, Geneviève Amyot, Monique Proulx, Raoul Duguay, Marie Uguay, Gaëtan Brulotte, Juan Garcia and Pierre Morency.

Nagyvilág, a monthly of world literature in translation, had published several short stories by Canadian writers (e.g. two stories by Mavis Gallant, ten by Alice Munro, more than a dozen poems by Margaret Atwood) before devoting a double issue (2003/3–4) to them. András Imreh and János Lackfi selected stories by Mordecai Richler, Roger Lemelin, Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, Anne Hébert, Susanne Jacob and Roch Carrier, an excerpt from Michel Tremblay's *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte*, and poems by Margaret Atwood, Anne Michaels, Marie Uguay, Todd Swift, Michael Ondaatje, Pierre Morency, André Roy and Gilles Hénault. The last section of the special issue contained interviews with Michael Ondaatje and Paul Ricoeur, notes by Richler, and essays by Atwood, Heinz Weinmann and Daniel Defert, and concluded with bibliographical data about the authors.

In July 2009 *Magyar Napló* featured Canadian multiculturalism in its 'world literature' section, selected and introduced by the writer of the present article. In some cases, excerpts from novels were chosen (*Halfbreed* by Maria Campbell, *L'autre* by Pan Bouyoucas, *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa), followed by short stories by Marco Micone and Jean Marcel and essays on writing (Antonio D'Alfonso) and on multiculturalism (Beverly Rasporich and Tamara P. Seiler). There was a short biographical note about each author. The translations were made by Éva Martonyi, Árpád Vígh and myself.

The latest special issue of Canadian writing came out in *Tiszatáj*, a regional monthly with a high reputation, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation (2018/1). This was guest edited and introduced by myself. In this case, the main editorial concept was to introduce the research being done by Hungarian academics about Canadian culture: Fruzsina Kovács shared her findings about the translations of Alice Munro's works in Hungary, Judit Molnár wrote about the main features of English-language writing in today's Quebec, János Kenyeres about Hungarian characters in Canadian works, Mária Palla about Hungarian-Canadian writers, and Zsuzsa Simonffy about past and memory in Inuit culture. As if to illustrate some of the statements in the articles, the special issue included the translation of a short play by Michael Cook (translated by Péter Szaffkó), passages from Larry Tremblay's *L'orangerie* (translated by Éva Martonyi), ten poems by Leonard Cohen (translated by Péter Domonkos) and an interview by Éva Zsizsmann with poet Endre Farkas about the avant-garde in Montréal. Ramona Pál-Kovács wrote a review of *Rhapsodie québécoise: itinéraire d'un enfant de la loi 101* by Hungarian-born Akos Verboczy. The Canadian special issue of *Tiszatáj* amounted to 110 pages.



Briefly summing up the special issues of journals, we can safely state that they were well-selected showcases of Canada's literature and academic output, offering a wide variety of approaches and topics, manifesting a far better balance between English-Canadian and Quebec authors than the publication data of books. Still, as guest editor in some of these collections, I have to admit that the follow-up cannot fill me with total satisfaction: by presenting excerpts from novels, one could hope that at least some of them would be 'seized' and fully translated by a publisher. This has not yet happened.

3. Reflections on Leonard Cohen's death

On the eve of Cohen's death, the biggest auditorium¹⁰ in Budapest hosted a concert of his songs in Hungarian,¹¹ and two weeks after it the Hungarian translation of a thick volume of interviews with Leonard Cohen was launched. What coincidences! As if the 'Bard's' Hungarian admirers had a sixth sense ...

As was the case all over the world, the news about Leonard Cohen's death prompted an avalanche of articles about his oeuvre in Hungary, too. Newspapers – no matter whether liberal or conservative – published obituaries of various lengths, online forums came up with evaluations of his work (mainly as singer-songwriter), and bloggers shared their experiences related to him, so the sad occasion offered many journalists and Cohen fans an opportunity to evoke their memories about how and when they first heard his songs and what their top list was. The flow of news followed the international pattern: on 10 or 11 November the news of Cohen's death (sometimes of his burial, too) was announced in brief articles, almost always inserting the family's note on Leonard Cohen's Facebook site. Most of these brief articles had 'neutral' titles stating that Leonard Cohen had died, while *szabadfoldonline* (*Szabad Föld* has always targeted the rural population of the country; now it is called a 'family weekly'

10) The capacity of Patria Hall is 2000.

11) "Halleluja – Best of Leonard Cohen magyarul." Budapest Kongresszusi Központ, 8 p.m., 6 November 2017. <https://www.koncert.hu/koncert/halleluja---best-of-leonard-cohen-magyarul-november06-21705>. The Müller Péter Sziámi and His Friends band and their guests toured the whole country in subsequent weeks: they performed again in Budapest at Kongresszusi Központ and the Dohány Utcai Zsinagóga (the city's major synagogue), followed by appearances in large concert halls (in Miskolc, Szeged and Pécs) as well as at two festivals in western and northwestern Hungary (Őrség: Virágzás Fesztivál; Mosonmagyaróvár: MediaWave Fesztivál). Péter Müller himself translated and sang several songs by Cohen (he was active in the interview volume, too, as writer of the introduction and translator of songs and interviews). For the concert he invited national stars like jazz singer-actress Mariann Falusi, actress-singers Judit Hernádi and Hella Roszik, actor-singer-songwriter Péter Novák and composer-Klezmer-musician Ferenc Jávori. The poster of the concert named Cohen as one of our days' most significant singer-songwriters, who features "the personal and the cosmic – the two basic elements of songs." The series of concerts became an occasion for paying homage after Cohen's death, which occurred the day after the first performance.



with a readership of around 340,000) used the terminology of yellow journalism: “The World is Shocked by Leonard Cohen’s Death.”

One day after the announcement of Cohen’s death, Bálint Kovács summed up the Canadian artist’s life story and achievements using ten of his songs (giving the links to listen to them) in *Index*, an independent (and not pro-government) online newspaper – the ten songs were “Night Comes On,” “So Long, Marianne,” “Suzanne,” “Take This Waltz,” “Avalanche,” “Chelsea Hotel #2,” “You Want It Darker,” “Democracy,” “On That Day,” and “Anyhow” – adding a list of singer-composers who directly or indirectly referred to Cohen as well as the statistics of international rendering/reworking songs by Cohen, including the CDs in Hungarian. *Origo*, the other (and pro-government) leading online newspaper, also presented a list: “Traveling Light,” “Lover, Lover, Lover,” “Diamonds in the Mine,” “In My Secret Life,” “The Future,” “Dance Me to the End of Love,” “I’m Your Man,” “Chelsea Hotel #2,” “If It Be Your Will” and “Famous Blue Raincoat.”¹² Gábor Apats added a very personal remark, saying that “If It Be Your Will” had been played at the burial ceremony of his own father.¹³ Several weeklies remembered Cohen in the list of “the losses of 2016”; they ranged from the oppositional weekly *Magyar Narancs*¹⁴ to the women’s weekly *Nők Lapja*. The articles and blogs almost always included photos of Cohen, taken at various points of his life.

All obituaries and blogs reviewed the career of Leonard Cohen the singer-songwriter, and a surprisingly high proportion of the articles (and even of the blogs) devoted passages to his literary activities, using superlatives in both fields. Some of them also mentioned that the recently deceased artist reached out to more than one generation in Hungary (his live concert in a fully packed Budapest sports arena on 31 August 2009 attested to this, too¹⁵). Cohen’s last interview, published a few days before his death in *The New Yorker*, was mentioned, with passages quoted from it by about half a dozen journalists, and at least a dozen sites published a short article about the up-

12) These two online papers devoted altogether a dozen articles to Cohen.

13) A song by Cohen was played at another burial I myself attended – “Anthem” accompanied the ceremony when Hungary’s leading actors, theatre directors and critics said good-bye to a leading theatre and opera critic, Tamás Koltai, in August 2015. And that same year, Cohen songs were played at mass anti-government demonstrations demanding improvements in health care and public education.

14) “Hungarian orange.” The title of the weekly refers to a cult-film, *A tanú* [The witness], 1969, a strong satire by Péter Bacsó: in one scene, a lemon is presented to Party officials as the ‘Hungarian orange’ saying that it is “a bit small, a bit bitter, but ours.”

15) The title and subtitle of Gazda’s article in *Index* stated that Cohen could make a theatre out of a sports arena and that he had received a standing ovation. The indoor stadium was fully packed with an audience of 10,000, people of all generations. The review pointed out that Cohen’s songs would have invited a more intimate space, e.g. a concert hall, but the singer and the band could transform the sports arena into one: “Seldom can we hear such a refined, clear sort of music in live performance; each note of each instrument as well as each word could be heard. The musicians were in top form ... ‘Boogie Street’ sung by longtime partner Sharon Robinson was one of the peak moments. There are not many artists who can pride themselves on such an oeuvre.”



coming volume *Flame* and the list of his unfinished work, pointing out that Cohen himself was quietly preparing for the end. Surprisingly, however, only one short online article included a few remarks by a Hungarian musician, namely the singer Zorán Sztevanovity, who also sang three of Cohen's songs in a selection of these in Hungarian translation: "Take This Waltz," "Closing Time" and "Dance Me to the End of Love." The Hungarian version of the texts was the work of Zorán's brother, Dusán.¹⁶ The Hungarian singer claimed that Cohen's voice itself was music and that he was a unique artist of the second half of the twentieth and first decade and a half of the twenty-first century (Farkas).

Given that the Hungarian translation of the Cohen interviews came out just two weeks after his death, the reviews and comments on this volume often offered a blend of obituary and book review. Valuska's 1200-word entry in "Könyves Blog" [Book blog] is a typical example of this: she picks out interesting notes and data from the interviews and quotes passages from Cohen's songs in translation; obviously she had read several articles about the Canadian artist. One blogger, PZL, started by asking who on earth would choose to read a more-than-500-page volume of interviews, but had to add immediately that learning about Cohen's ideas and the creation process of his songs was a true reward for going through the thick volume. This blogger was charmed by Cohen's style and his observations about life, love and war: "He can say something wise about everything, reaching his best form when speaking about faith or the Bible ... His shows are 'package tours' into our interior landscapes; in reality these are not concerts proper but poetry readings with musical accompaniment, the instruments are tools of energy-transfer. ... Cohen himself is the song." The summary of the entry is a true appraisal: "It is a rare experience in pop culture that an artist's interviews are as valuable as the text of his songs. Cohen is one exception" (PZL).

Leonard Cohen's popularity in Hungary was not truly reflected in critical discourse either on his albums or his novels, as Kelemen pointed out less than a decade ago. However, when he was "leaving the table" and "out of the game," both printed and online media devoted several detailed articles and blogs to his art, often with separate passages about his poetry volumes and novels.¹⁷ The interview volume was reviewed in highly reputed weeklies and online as well.¹⁸ Let us hope that in the near future

16) Jeff Burger's collection of interviews given by Cohen was slightly modified in the Hungarian edition: not all interviews and notes were translated. On the other hand, nineteen songs were included in the volume both in the original and in Hungarian. Out of these nineteen texts, only one, "Closing Time," was Dusán Sztevanovity's translation.

17) Cohen's verses are evoked and remembered in the most astonishing ways: on the eve of International Women's Day, the solution of the crossword puzzle in *Nők Lapja* (a women's weekly) was four lines about how "Canadian poet and singer Leonard Cohen saw women" (7 Mar 2018, 106).

18) I myself published an obituary and a review about the translation of the interviews in the most



a full volume of Cohen's poetry in Hungarian translation will come out so that we can 'catch up' with neighbouring countries that can boast such publications.

Conclusion

Although Canadianists in Hungary often complain about the lack of translations and visibility of Canadian works, both the CEACS database and the above pages do show many activities. The majority of the reviews and articles reflect reliable research in the field and give critical remarks as well. It is often mentioned that the choice of works to be translated seems to be random, that several important books are still unavailable in Hungarian translation, and that even in the case of existing translations the reading public is not aware of the nationality of the authors. It is also worth noting that international prizes and film adaptations – not to mention television series – often encourage new translations and reflections about these translations. The overall balance is not as good as it could be – but nothing to be ashamed of, either.

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