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Canada – *Hic sunt bestiae*

Abstract
This article deals with the presence of animals in Canadian and Canada-related texts that were published in translation in the countries of Central Europe from the mid-nineteenth century until the year 2011. Drawing on a comprehensive database of translations created by the Central European Association for Canadian Studies, it examines the kinds of works selected for translation, the image of Canada they create, and changes over time in the proportion of the overall totals of translated works that these works represent.

Résumé
Cet article aborde la présence des animaux dans les textes provenant du Canada ou liés au Canada, publiés en traduction dans les pays de l'Europe centrale de la moitié du XIXe siècle jusqu'à l'année 2011. Puisant sur une base de données de traductions exhaustive, créée par l'Association d'Etudes Canadienne en Europe Centrale, l'article se penche sur les types d'oeuvres choisies pour la publication, l'image du Canada que celles-ci établissent, ainsi que les changements diachroniques de la proportion des chiffres d'ensemble des traductions représentées par ces ouvrages.

In 1605 the Sieur de Mons established what was to be the first permanent French settlement in North America, at Port-Royal in today's Nova Scotia. Eager to promote the new world that was opening up to France on the other side of the Atlantic and to obtain approval for his enterprise from the French monarch, Henri IV, he took back with him to France a number of unusual gifts. Prominent among them was a ten-metre-long birchbark canoe – what would appear to be the first ever seen in Europe – which was paddled along the Seine by the Louvre "at incredible speed", to the vast delight of the assembled crowd. Even more exotic, though, were such marvels as a six-month-old baby moose and a huge set of moose antlers, a caribou, a *rat musqué*, a living hummingbird – and a large collection of dead birds (Fischer 202). In a sense, these were a harbinger of things to come, for in the succeeding centuries, Canada was largely "about" animals. Cod in the Grand Banks, whales along the shores of Labrador and in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, fur-bearing mammals – fox, marten, mink – in the north and west, sea otter on the Pacific coast, and above all and everywhere, the beaver. It was this unassuming but devious and very determined rodent that in the course of two-and-a-half centuries drew European fur-traders and explorers inexorably across the continent, leading them to the "discovery" of

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its remotest extremities, a quest that found its fitting climax when the beaver itself was chosen as Canada's national beast.

The history of Canada, marked by this ongoing pursuit of animals, finds a parallel in the hold the local animals have had on outsiders' imaginations. This is reflected in translations of books by Canadians as well as of books set in Canada but written by non-Canadians, where until very recently the formula "Canada = nature + animals" seems to have been the guiding principle for selection, at least in Central Europe. This article, based on entries in the database of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies' Translation Research Project,[1] sets out to explore how this has played out over time and what variations can be observed across the region as a whole.

The picture in the period down to the end of World War I is fairly straightforward, especially since so few books relating to Canada were translated in the region at all. In fact only Bulgaria, Croatia (then part of Hungary), Hungary itself and the Czech lands (part of Austria at the time) show up in the database, with 1, 1, 2 and 27 entries respectively. What is significant, though, is how many of this small number of books deal with animals. Of books by non-Canadian authors, there is Jules Verne's ***The Fur Country*** (***Le pays des fourrures)*** and Jack London's ***White Fang*** and ***The Call of the Wild.*** The one Canadian author dealing with animals, however, Ernest Thompson Seton, dominates the field, with 11 Czech entries and 1 entry for each of Croatia and Bulgaria. If one adds up all the "animal entries", then, they amount to a full 60 percent of the total for this period.

Things become busier with the period from 1918 to the end of World War II. Many more books relating to Canada are being translated in the region, with the total number of entries mounting to slightly under 300 – roughly a tenfold increase. Again, the Czech Republic is in the lead, accounting for almost two-thirds of these. Rather surprisingly, Bulgaria is by far the most productive among the other countries – 48 entries – followed (with much smaller numbers) by the rest of the countries represented in the database. As in the pre-war period, Seton dominates the field: his animal books alone represent an amazing 30 percent of the total number of entries in the Czech Republic for this period, and an even more amazing two-thirds of the Bulgarian total. But he is present in respectable numbers everywhere across the region. In a similar way, Jack London's two Canadian animal novels are also widely translated. What is more interesting, however, is the appearance of works focused on animals by other authors. One such writer is Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, who along with Seton was the inventor of the modern animal story – the kind of story, in Roberts's own words, in which "a psychological romance [is] constructed on a framework of natural history" (Roberts 24). Roberts appears in both Czech and Bulgarian translation – in the latter case, with such a large number of entries that he and Seton taken together account for around 90 percent of the interwar total of all Canada-related translations for Bulgaria.

There are, however, other authors whose works are being translated, among them Grey Owl with ***The Adventures of Sajo and her Beaver People*** and Allen Roy Evans and his ***Reindeer Trek***. Among the non-Canadians, there is Helge Ingstad, the Norwegian author of ***Trapper Life.***

1) The database is accessible at korel.savana.cz/cecanstud/www; Login and Password, "guest" (without quotation marks).

But certainly the most prolific non-Canadian author writing about Canada and its animals is James Oliver Curwood. An American, he was one of the most prolific international best-selling authors in the interwar period. Back in 1909 his life had been utterly changed by a visit he made to Canada's Rocky Mountains; thereafter he returned annually to "the North" to gain inspiration for his novels. In several, the lead characters were animals, the best known being *Kazan, Baree: Son of Kazan*, *Nomads of the North* and *The Grizzly King*. In fact so compelling is the latter as a text that in 1988 it inspired the French director Jean-Jacques Annaud to film it as *The Bear,* which went on to be nominated for, and to win, a slew of international awards.

Not all of Curwood's novels dealt primarily with animals, but as was the case with many other best-selling non-Canadian interwar authors – H. Mortimer Batten, Ridgwell Cullum, Laurie York Erskine, William Byron Mowery, all of whom set many and in some cases most of their works in the Canadian North – this setting almost by definition meant that animals were essential elements in the background and sometimes played key roles in the plots. And in any case, animals could be used to sell the novels by being depicted on the covers. This practice had a long and respectable pedigree: for example, the title page of the original 1st edition of Verne's *Le pays des fourrures* depicts Lt. Jasper Hobson and a fellow employee of the Hudson's Bay Company [sic!] desperately trying to close the door of their wooden cabin on a huge and ferocious bear that is trying to force its way in. And on the covers of these "Canada North" novels, sled dogs can be depicted to set off the femininity of the heroines or, on the contrary, massive beasts in the background to authenticate the masculinity of the heroes. Nevertheless, even when these kinds of "animal-flavoured" works are set aside, the proportion of "animal-focused" works in translation remains formidable during this period – around two-thirds of all entries for the Central European region taken as a whole.

The Communist years – 1945 to 1989 – saw a slow-down in the average number of books translated per year, especially at the beginning of the period, not surprising in view of the economic situation throughout this era (which was characterized by a shortage of the hard currency needed to pay royalties) and, more importantly, political considerations in the choice of titles and authors to be translated. These years also witnessed a diminished presence of books about animals. One exception to this rule is Jack London's *White Fang* and *Call of the Wild*. In general London was a widely published author in Communist countries, an important factor in this being his political stance: many of his works reflect a socialist viewpoint, captured particularly well in his essay "How I Became a Socialist"; in addition, he was said to be one of Lenin's favourite authors. These considerations, coupled with the genuine readability of his stories, led to his being very widely published throughout the region.

However, though animal stories did decline in importance in the Communist years, they still had a respectable presence. The Czechs continued to favour Seton, London and Curwood, but smaller numbers of works by Evans, Grey Owl, Ingstadt, Batten and Ralph Connor were also published. Overall these animal stories amount to around 40 percent of the Canada-related books published in Czech during the period. Interestingly, for the first time considerable numbers of translations into Slovak appear – again London and Seton head the pack. In Croatia, London's and Seton's works account for exactly half the translations. Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia show lesser interest in this genre. Overall, books about animals account for something like 35 percent of the total in the region during this period, an impor-

tant segment of the market but a considerable drop compared with the two-thirds share they enjoyed in the interwar period.

In the post-Communist era, the picture morphs radically when it comes to translations of books by Canadians and of Canada-related texts. Three major changes can be observed. First, there is a tsunami of translations: the twenty-three years following the end of Communist rule saw more translations than the preceding century, amounting to almost 2,000 (the CEACS database goes down to the end of 2011). Second, there has also been a radical change in the authors' nationality, with non-Canadian authors writing about Canada dropping to an insignificant proportion – perhaps 5 percent. And third, translations by Canadian authors have spread across the whole literary spectrum, taking in "serious" or "canonical" writing in all its main aspects – the novel, the short story, poetry and drama – but also more popular genres: thrillers, detective stories, action fiction (best exemplified by David Morrell of *Rambo* fame, hugely popular in all countries in the region), science fiction, fantasy, romantic fiction, children's fiction. And there have also been many translations from beyond literature as such – literary criticism, religious writing, political philosophy, works in the social sciences. The picture of Canada Central Europeans are getting through translations nowadays is much closer to the picture Canadians themselves are producing.

In this abundance of Canadian translation, however, animal stories have become an endangered species, virtually on the brink of extinction. To take the Czech example, only about 5 percent of titles are now represented by animal stories. In several other countries, the proportion is even less; for their part, Bulgarian and Slovenian translators appear to have no interest in Canadian animals whatsoever. So it would seem that the era when Canada was viewed abroad as an empty space inhabited largely – or at least most interestingly – by animals, is now a thing of the past. *Requiescant in pace*.

When this history of Canadian animals in Central European translations is analyzed and placed in a wider context, four general conclusions can be drawn.

The first thing to note is that in this article the treatment of, and statistics concerning, "animal stories", have been based on a rather narrow definition of the term. But the line demarcating the genre is blurry. At one end, it merges with stories set in the Canadian outdoors, particularly the Canadian North – the real North as well as the North as imagined by its literary creators. In this category there are many additional novels by writers like Curwood and Cullum, Batten and Mowery – in most cases non-Canadians – and most of these serve up a good helping of animals to enliven the tale and keep it moving. The same is true of the sub-genre of Mountie novels – that is, novels in which the protagonist is a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These abound in animals, in particular the clever dog that is almost always portrayed as the Mountie's best friend. (For example, so prominent is this canine companion in Mounted Police lore that in the 1936 film version of the musical *Rose Marie* his dog actually accompanies the Mountie in his canoe as he paddles across a moonlit northern lake serenading the other passenger, his lady love.) At the other end, animal stories merge with stories focused primarily on Indians (First Nations and Inuit) and their way of life. And of course books dealing with woodlore, in particular those by Seton – titles like *Two Little Savages, The Twelve Secrets of the Woods, The Birchbark Roll, The Book of Woodcraft and Indian Lore* – all devote much space to animals and an understanding of their behaviour. If these other types of fiction

in which animals play an important, though not a leading, role, were included, the presence of animals in the body of translations would be even stronger, indeed overwhelming.

A second aspect of these translations is that the interest of the Central European public in these animal stories over time is frequently characterized by a "time warp" factor – that is, a fondness for writers no longer popular in Canada or elsewhere. To give one example, in Canada Seton had passed the zenith of his fame before World War II. Indeed the vast majority of his books were out of print after the war, and it was only in the 1970s, with the (re)birth/(re)creation of "Canlit", that he was "rediscovered" and some titles reissued. The same would be true of writers like Curwood and other popularizers of the Canadian North – their works continued to be reprinted and retranslated in Central Europe long after they were more or less (and usually more rather than less) forgotten in North America. And one can detect one particular aspect of this time lag in popularity that is a product of the specific history of the Central European region – the return to earlier norms after political changes. So, after the end of World War II, there are many reprints, and new translations, of authors popular in the interwar years, and again at the very beginning of the 1990s, of other authors popular before the Communist period. This resulted in the shelf-life of authors being prolonged long beyond their "sell by" date at home.

Third, there is the whole question of unevenness in the representation of the various authors. Individuals widely translated in one country in the region may be more or less unknown in others, or if known, then for very different books. Once again Seton is a good example. The huge number of entries for his Czech translations can be explained by two factors. The first is that he was discovered very early on by a Czech schoolmaster, Miloš Seifert, who not only began translating his books before World War I, but actually founded the first European group based on Seton's Woodcraft Indians movement, a precursor of the Scouting movement.[2]

Seifert was in direct touch with Seton, translated many of his books and promoted his ideas tirelessly. These were then taken up by the Czech Scouting movement, which, rather ironically – and perhaps partly owing to the popularity of Seton's work – was far more oriented towards life in the outdoors than its American and British models. And when the Scouts and Woodcrafters were outlawed after the Communist putsch in 1948, they went underground as "hiking divisions" of sports clubs – and continued to devour Seton. ***Two Little Savages*** in particular was their Bible, turned to for an understanding of the natural world, for the secrets of tracking, for such essential aspects of Indian lore as how to make a tepee. The popularity of Seton among Czech readers, then, is explicable. The reasons for his success with Bulgarians, however, are less clear. Why is it that the very first translation of a work by Seton in the Central European region (1906) was into Bulgarian, and what sustained the interest over time? Perhaps even more intriguing is that several of the early translations of his works into Bulgarian were based on Russian editions. Which opens up a whole additional line of research: how on earth did Seton come to take root so early in Russia?

2) I would like to thank my colleague Klára Kolinská for the loan of her manuscript article "'Oppositional betrayals': Translating English Canadian Literature into Czech", which contains a wealth of information on Miloš Seifert and the Woodcraft Movement in Czechoslovakia.

So, for known and – so far – unknown reasons, Seton was popular in the Czech lands and Bulgaria. But why, in Bulgaria's neighbour Romania, was he almost unknown? And why should he have been popular in Croatia, but not in Serbia? This one example sums up in miniature the complexity of the reception of Canadian literature and Canada-related texts in the Central European region, and the need for deeper research into its specific features in different countries as well as its regional variability.

Finally, to return to the title of this article: ***Hic sunt bestiae*** – "Here there are animals." In the end, the main reason for the decline in translations of books dealing with animals is the paucity of animals in Canada – or to be precise, the paucity of contemporary Canadian literature that deals with animals. There is, of course, children's literature of a popular but generic nature – in this connection the many books about Franklin the turtle are perhaps exhibit A – and niche-type books for young people like the endless stream of books about horses written by Angela Dorsey that have as their target teenage girls. But those dealing with animals in the natural world, with adventures involving animals in the wild, open spaces, are few and far between. And in many cases, those books that do exist employ animals in non-realistic ways. One has only to think of Marian Engel's ***Bear***, where the increasing fascination of the heroine with a bear reaches a climax in her very disastrous attempt to mate with him, or the animals – non-native, exotic – in Timothy Findley's ***Not Wanted on the Voyage*** or Yann Martel's ***The Life of Pi.*** These are not exactly works that give any insight into the world of (Canadian) nature. But perhaps this is not surprising. As a nation, Canada first became predominantly urban in the 1920s; now over 80 percent of the population resides in cities. It would seem that its literature is finally catching up with this reality.

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