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# Two Canadian Celebrities: Alice Munro and Leonard Cohen in Romania

**Monica Bottez and Adela Catană**

## Abstract

This article analyses the way in which two important Canadian celebrities – Alice Munro and Leonard Cohen – have been perceived by the Romanian public. Before winning the Nobel Prize in 2013, Munro had only one volume of short stories translated into Romanian – *Too Much Happiness / Prea multă fericire* (Litera, 2011). As her fame grew internationally, three more of her fourteen volumes of stories – *Dear Life / Dragă viață* (2014, 2017), *Runaway / Fugara* (2014) and *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage / Ură, prietenie, dragoste, căsătorie* (2014) – were issued by the same publisher. Cohen became known in the late 1960s, although his records were a rarity. It was only in the new millennium that Romanians could enjoy his concerts (2008, 2009, 2012), the novels *Beautiful Losers / Frumoșii invinși* (2003) and *The Favorite Game / Joaca preferată* (2008), both published by Polirom, and two books of poetry. Today, their presence is kept vivid through numerous essays devoted to their arts of story-telling, music and poetry.

## Résumé

Cet article a pour but de montrer la voie par laquelle deux célébrités canadiennes – Alice Munro et Leonard Cohen – sont arrivées à la connaissance du public roumain. Avant d'être couronnée par le prix Nobel de littérature en 2013, Munro n'avait qu'un seul recueil de courts récits traduit en roumain – *Too Much Happiness / Prea multa fericire* (Litera, 2011). Comme sa renommée a grandi à l'international, trois de ses 14 volumes – *Dear Life / Draga viata* (2014, 2017), *Runway / Fugara* (2014), et *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage / Ura, prietenie, dragoste, casatorie* (2014) – ont été publiés par le même éditeur. Cohen commence à être connu vers la fin des années '60, ses disques étant difficiles à trouver. Au cours des décennies suivantes, les Roumains ont apprécié ses concerts (2008, 2009, 2012), ses romans *Beautiful Losers / Frumosii invinsi* (Polirom, 2003) et *The Favorite Game / Joaca preferată* (Polirom, 2008) et deux recueils de poésie. Aujourd'hui, leur présence est maintenue dans de nombreux essais consacrés à leur art de la narration ou talent musical et poétique.



Alice Munro and Leonard Cohen are two Canadian celebrities that have captivated not only the attention but also the devoted admiration of the Romanian public. However, Munro, as a Nobel Prize winner, is mainly known by professors, students, journalists, publishers and fans of literature, whereas Cohen, due to his songs and concerts (which, surprisingly, have seldom been broadcast on Romanian TV and radio channels), extends his popularity to many other groups of people with whom his romantic music resonates, even when they do not understand his lyrics or language.

Before she became the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013 Alice Munro was little known in Romania as only one of her volumes of short stories had been brought out, in 2011 by Litera publishers – *Too Much Happiness* (*Prea multă fericire* in Ioana Opaîţ's translation). We have now three more volumes: *Dear Life* (*Dragă viaţă*, 2014, 2017, in Justina Bandol's translation), *Runaway* (*Fugara*, 2014, in Mihnea Gafiţa's translation), *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (*Ură, prietenie, dragoste, căsătorie*, 2014, in Justina Bandol's translation) issued by the same publisher, but this is still only about one quarter of her oeuvre (which runs to 14 volumes). To keep the presence of Alice Munro vivid among the reading public, the same publisher brought out a little bilingual volume (Romanian-English) entitled *Chipul/Face*<sup>1</sup> in 2016, inaugurating a new series called "Short stories – small masterpieces of Anglo-American literature."

Yet the Canadian writer's literary mastery was first signalled to the Romanian reading public by Dragoş Zeţu much earlier, in a 2007 review of *The View from Castle Rock*, then a newly published (2006) collection. His introduction includes the opinions that famous writers like John Metcalf, John Updike and Jonathan Franzen have of Munro's skills, as well as Cythia Ozick's calling her "our Chekhov" and Mona Simpson's prophetic wondering about how long the Nobel Prize jury would take to select her as a recipient.

It was not by chance that Dragoş Zeţu wrote the first article on Alice Munro. He was already working on his doctoral thesis on her oeuvre and the results of his research materialized in the first, and so far only, book-length study of her work, *Povestirile lui Alice Munro. De la Dance of Happy Shades la Open Secrets* [The stories of Alice Munro. From *Dance of the Happy Shades* to *Open Secrets*], which appeared in 2013.

When Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize all Romanian newspapers and journals published short portraits and biographical data, generally taken from the Nobel Jury Speech and her official site, while the most important literary and cultural journals such as *România literară*, *Observator cultural*, *Actualitatea literară*, *Vatra*, *Timpul*, *Contemporanul*, *Dacia literară*, *Romania liberă* and *Orizont* published well informed articles where critics amply explored, compared and debated her books, also making reference to her personal life and career.

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1) The short story "Face" appeared in *Too Much Happiness*.



Thus we find in *România literară* 42 three substantial articles on Munro. The first is Luminița Codreanu's "Lumile scriitoarei" [The writer's worlds], which discusses Dragoș Zețu's book and recommends it as a good introduction to the Canadian writer's work. She points out how Zețu's detailed text analyses lead to general conclusions about the evolution of Munro's narrative techniques and motifs, the regional aspect of her work, the female perspective and themes as well as the psychological depth of her protagonists' inner life. A second article, entitled "Alice în țara povestirilor" [Alice in storyland], is written by Dragoș Zețu himself, containing biographical data, an enumeration of the numerous prizes Munro received, and a discussion of her main themes and works. He singles out features that make her unique – her manipulation of narrative voices and her use of the bizarre (the second type of the fantastic according to Tvetan Todorov's classification), which only offers the suggestion of a supernatural dimension. He stresses that Munro identifies the extraordinary in the everyday life of her characters and brings to light multiple layers of secrets, lies and repressed feelings. She attempts to probe the worlds that are beyond what we think to be the reality, questioning "the truth" of our perceptions and evoking a grim atmosphere that is frequently described as "Ontario Gothic." Zețu also emphasizes Munro's constant preoccupation with the problematic relation between language and experience, the "truth" that her characters capture never being fixed and definitive, but personal and empirical. He concludes that although Munro uses the conventions of the realist tradition, accurately recording the details of everyday provincial life, she cannot be ranged among the realist writers because she subverts these conventions by resorting to the fantastic and suggesting that there are alternative worlds, thus opening the text to multiple possible meanings.

In the third article, entitled "Coroniță pentru Cenușăreasa" [Wreath for Cinderella], Elisabeta Lăsconi sees the Nobel Prize jury's selection of a Canadian short fiction writer as marking the magic hour when the short story, hitherto regarded as a poor relative of the regal novel, suddenly gets the royal crown, and correlates it with the additional significance of bringing the very interesting but less internationally known Canadian literature into the limelight.

In its 25 October 2013 issue *Observator cultural* published the article "Triumful prozei scurte" [The triumph of short fiction], penned by Ioana Opaț, the first translator of Munro into Romanian, who starts from her experience with Munro's text to emphasize its clear, fluid and apparently simple style. As an uncommon feature she singles out the sometimes abrupt and unexpected change of narrative tense, from the past tense to the present (as in "Free Radicals"), with the effect of suddenly making the reader share the character's perspective.

Ever since then new articles have come out every year. Some of them were reviews of translations when they came out or were reprinted. This was the case of Oana



Strugaru's review of *Too Much Happiness* in her article "What Hides behind Happiness." After mentioning Hans Christian Anderson's tale "The Little Mermaid" as Munro's interestingly confessed first source of inspiration, she underscores the writer's psychological realism in her explorations of the dark secrets hidden in the human soul under an apparently calm existence. With illustrative examples she shows that Munro reveals the hidden violence of characters that are victims of their own complexity. The author stresses that by not mixing narrative perspectives the writer preserves the unitary character of the narratives, which record non-judgemental snapshots of the characters' apparently banal peaceful lives and thus deconstruct the clichés of a comfortable provincial life.

Marius Chivu's presentation of the translations of *Too Much Happiness*, *Dear Life* and *Runaway* (in *Dilema veche* (Chivu 2014)) is also worth mentioning. Referring to specific short stories in the three volumes, he singles out the themes of women's need and struggle for emancipation by defying gender stereotypes, giving up religion, resorting to adultery, divorce and running away from home, as well as the cruelty of children. He also foregrounds Munro's use of techniques similar to those of the thriller and the outstanding subtlety of her style, where the reader can misunderstand what really happened just by a slightly superficial reading. In another issue of the same periodical, Cristina Sturza-Vidraşcu recommends Munro's *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, where the short stories provide an X-ray of apparently common incidents which trigger the workings of a destiny that takes the protagonists to unexpected places or places them in a totally new light.

In the October 2014 issue of *Timpul*, Mircea Gheorghie writes about "Alice Munro-pestivitoarea" [Alice Munro-the-story-teller], wherein he briefly reviews her works and biography, citing the Nobel Prize jury and the Man Booker jury statements and various well-known critics and writers such as Jonathan Franzen, Cynthia Ozick, John Updike and A.S. Byatt. He comments on her main themes, throwing into relief her refined but unostentatious literary style as well as personal style as a public presence.

Adriana Teodorescu analyzes Munro's presentation of a character that suffers from Alzheimer's in her story "The Bear Came over the Mountain" in a comparative perspective. She stresses the author's remarkable use of ambiguity as well as the originality of her outlook, which does not use the disease as a metaphor for man's loneliness and alienation but presents it as a possible, unhappy but normal facet of old age.

Another article, "Alice Munro sau povestirea ca monografie a liminalului" [Alice Munro or the short story as a monograph of liminality], by Ocavian More, offers an ample presentation of the Canadian writer's biography, of her oeuvre, which achieves a real anatomy of everyday provincial life, and of its reception in Romania. The critical essay is well documented, drawing on a wide range of references to examine the cen-



tral themes: the irreversible flow of time, the problems of growing up, the ambiguities of life and the coexistence of banality with the fantastic (which makes the writer a representative of the southern Ontario Gothic tradition). Defining the liminal as the confluence zone of the physical, material, and the spiritual, emotional, dimensions of existence, the critic underlines the moments of epiphany that throw a new light on this zone, usually by the efforts of memory to recapture the past. He remarks on the double articulation of Munro's creative act: its ontological dimension on the one hand, which relates to the reevaluation of the creator's own position and that of the others, and its epistemological dimension, on the other, that is the effort to discover, and rediscover, to grasp and understand the fluid, dynamic zone of the liminal. He also foregrounds how most Munro texts ("Menesețeung," for instance) transcend the immediate theme, becoming allegories of the creative act and of the interpretative reading experience.

The same literary periodical (*Vatra*) published Monika Koșa's "Explorarea sinelui: identitate și povestire în literatura canadiană" [The exploration of the self: Identity and narrative in Canadian literature]. Starting from the notions of the "garrison mentality" (Frye) and survival/victim positions (Atwood), the author investigates the exploration of the self in Thomas King's "A Coyote Columbus Story," Alistair MacLeod's "Summer's End" and "As Birds Bring forth the Sun," Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and Alice Munro's "Royal Beatings" (from *The Beggar Maid*), showing how literature becomes a map, "a geography of the mind" (Atwood) through narrative. The critic considers that "Royal Beatings" illustrates the silent self, capturing the "garrison mentality" in a domestic context focused on the relations between parents and children and between siblings.

An article by Ancuța Proca discusses *Julieta*, Pedro Almodóvar's free film adaptation of three of Munro's short stories from *Runaway* ("Chance," "Soon," "Silence"). Under the title "Metamorfoză tragică" [Tragic metamorphosis] the author foregrounds Almodóvar's exuberant woman-focused imagination by comparisons with some other films of his. The flamboyant vision grants his film a tragic key, in contrast to Munro's more austere style in her exploration of women's psychology at different ages. Her three short stories characteristically render Juliet's experience emphasizing the protagonist's inability to understand events, which thus acquire a mysterious aura and induce the same reaction in the reader, as we are never given an inkling of the daughter's perspective. References to Alice Munro's works continued to appear in the pages of cultural magazines in 2017. Thus in *Literatura pe tocuri* "Robertt" signs a review of *Dear Life* dealing with all fifteen stories in the volume. Elsewhere, Ancuța Proca picks out *Julieta* as one of the top films of the year, and mentions Munro in this connection (Proca Dec, 2016). With Munro being present in the bookshops, and reflected not only in cultural periodicals and literary reviews but also in online sites



dealing both with literature and with culture in general, she has clearly become a fixture on the Romanian cultural scene.

## Leonard Cohen

Leonard Cohen, “a writer with the weapon of a philosopher and the behaviour of a shy teenager [who] left the particular impression of a bizarre and reticent animal,” as Alex Vasiliu introduces him in *Convorbiri Literare*, became known to the Romanian public only after 1967, when he moved from Canada, his native country, to the United States in order to pursue a career as a folk music singer-songwriter. Cohen’s transition to music can be compared, according to Michael Barron’s article in *Vice* magazine, with “the intrusion of a composer into visual arts or acting, except that this was not a random transition. Cohen applies his tremendous talent for words in another medium of expression.” Music, “the twin sister” of poetry, helped Cohen “proclaim his lyrics in front of tens of thousands of people,” in a way similar to that of Bob Dylan (Dehelean, 301). It offered him the chance to freely express his ideas of love, passion, religion, loneliness, sexuality, and the complexity of human relationships, but also, as Andrei Marga stresses, the power of bringing listeners and readers back to the “unimpeded interpretation of the works of art, which takes into account their many historical, communicative, ideological, factual and visionary contexts.” In the end, it was also music that took him to all the corners of the world, and also brought him to the awareness of the public in Communist Romania at the beginning of the 1970s.

At that time, according to research conducted by the translator George Volceanov and published in *Observatorul cultural*, the pop-rock-folk music broadcasting in Romania relied heavily on the verses of classic and contemporary Romanian poets and included only a few foreigners such as Hugo, Heine, Goethe, Esenin and Shakespeare (qtd. in Chivu 2013). The truth, in Volceanov’s view, is that Romanian music had only “some versatile lyricists of sentimental clichés where only rhyme counted”; with only a few exceptions, it lacked ‘real lyricists’ who would write poetry for songs, thus contributing with “verse-mantras” to folk pop. Cohen’s songs were probably heard by Romanians for the first time on Radio Romania Liberă [Radio Free Romania] during the night shows of the early 1970s. In an interview for *Ramuri* magazine, Mircea Mihăieș, an expert on Cohen’s work, talks about the “total shock” he experienced when Florian Pittiș, the host of such a radio show, decided to broadcast two songs – “Joan of Arc” and “Famous Blue Raincoat” – performed by a “voice” which the public, at that time, knew absolutely nothing about (qtd. in Pătrășconiu). “The overwhelming sadness, the despair, the suffering, the loneliness that go beyond humanity,” all these emotional torments imprinted themselves in the mind and soul of the listener and transformed



him into a sincere admirer of Cohen's biography and work (qtd. in Pătrășconiu). Records and cassettes with his songs were largely unavailable during the Communist period, but the members of the "make love, not war" generation were somehow able to get hold of them. In fact, Cohen's music was listened to and the artist started to be compared to other Romanian counterparts. For instance, Aron Biro reveals in an article for *Dilema Veche* the similarity between Leonard Cohen and Alexandru Andrieș, stressing that both of them are "eternally valuable" poets who "did not fit into poetry alone and overcrossed its boundaries, finding their shelter in music," producing an "ironic poetry full of teachings" but also "songs full of friendship." Although in the 1990s the Canadian artist took a musical break, his albums continued to circulate more intensively than ever, especially due to the fact that the copyright law was not regulated in the post-revolution Romania until 1996. Today, Cohen's songs, in particular "Dance Me to the End of Love" and "Hallelujah," are often broadcast by Romanian radio stations such as Romantic FM, FM Radio FM, Magic FM, Kiss FM, Europa FM, Pro FM, Radio Romania International, Radio Romania Cultural, Romania Music, Vibe FM, in Bucharest and many other major cities of this country.

Romanians have also had the chance to attend three important concerts the famous artist presented while promoting his albums. Cohen's first concert in Bucharest was part of his world tour (his first in 15 years) and took place in Constitution Square, in front of over 10,000 fans, right on his birthday, 21 September 2008. The newspapers reported that although it was raining, the excited audience rewarded the artist with applause and ovations after each song. Moreover, after his first break, everyone in the stadium sang together "Happy Birthday," to the surprise of Cohen, who was visibly touched by the moment. The artist thanked the audience, taking off his hat several times and saying: "Thanks a lot, my friends. It's something I will not forget" (qtd. in Săndulescu). After nearly three hours and ten minutes, Cohen stepped off the stage, but not before expressing his gratitude to the audience for keeping his songs alive. A year later, on 4 September 2009, the 'troubadour of anguish' (his nickname in Romania) came back to Bucharest, this time to the Tineretului Iolanda Balaș-Söter Stadium, singing for thousands of souls, in an event linked to his new album, *Live in London*. A commentator on the leisure activities site Eventim pronounced his music "elitism for the masses; it is not for everyone." Cohen's last concert in Bucharest took place on 22 September 2012. The event was part of the world tour dedicated to the promotion of his twelfth album, *Old Ideas*, and the "old Canadian troubadour" offered Romanians, just as he did earlier, another "really magical evening" (Robu).

Cohen's image on stage is captured by Roni Căciularu in an article for *Clipa Magazine*, the oldest Romanian-language magazine in the United States: "Standing tall, respectful, modest, as though guilty of a good thing, treating his audience with deep respect, hat in hand, on his chest, head reclined and [looking] slightly spoiled – 'That's it', he





seems to say, smiling, 'I'm an artist - good, not so good, you like me, or maybe not, I'm yours and I'm glad you accept me, that you appreciate me, that you adopt me.' He thanks them for the applause, which makes him happy" (Căciularu 2016). The light in Cohen's concerts, Căciularu says, "comes gradually out of hiding, from the music, from the voice that sings as if reciting." His concerts "do not need special effects," Săndulescu underlines: "The fans came to listen to the poetry in Cohen's lyrics, not to see a show of acrobatics." And Cohen is a "musical genius, a poet whose music is not primarily commercial." To this, we can also add Paul Breazu's article "Portretul artistului la bătrînețe" [A portrait of the artist, as an old man], published in *DilemaVeche*. The author quotes some of Cohen's lyrics, "I'm slowing down the tune / I never liked it fast / You want to get there soon / I want to get there last..." stressing that at 80 years of age, the artist remains the same seducing and electrifying man that we have almost always known.

Cohen's songs are inevitably "a harmonious and distilled, essential and diurnal syncretism; the word and the melody and the idea and the feelings, the tears and the laughter, are in a simultaneous, serious combination, triggering an electrifying moment, full of pleasure and dream, of life and melancholy" (Căciularu 2010). In their 2008 contribution in *Jurnalul Național*, Loreta Popa and Alex Revenco view his songs as "a balm or venom, suffering or vice versa" and, as they stress, "No one can remain indifferent to Leonard Cohen." The Canadian artist's 25 musical albums were popularized by Romanian magazines and websites such as *Mediafax* and *infomusic.ro* every time one of Cohen's concerts took place in the country. However, the most important and thorough analysis of the discs recorded between 1967 and 2004 by "the penumbra singer" (another nickname for Cohen) was made by Mircea Mihăieș, university professor of English and author of several books, in his monograph *Viața, patimile și cântecele lui Leonard Cohen* [The life, passions and songs of Leonard Cohen], published by Polirom in 2005. The way the author presents Cohen's albums is compared by Alex Vasiliu in the literary magazine *Convorbiri Literare* with the discography abstraction technique, invented by Cornel Chiriac (the unforgettable commentator of the beat-rock-folk scene on the airwaves of Radio Free Europe between 1969 and 1975). Each record is placed in the socio-artistic context of the time it was released, and the analysis is accompanied by a translation of the lyrics, the opinions of the Romanian author sometimes keeping a distance from those of the Anglo-American critics (qtd. in Vasiliu). The only disadvantage of Mircea Mihăieș's book, according to Vasiliu, is that "it lacks Cohen's music itself." Another important observation made by Vasiliu is that Cohen's music is not necessarily folk and that producers and sound masters in the studios played their role (positive/negative) in its evolution, clinging to clichés or altering the spirit of Cohen's creation. Starting from the 1970s, as Diana Ilinca notes in *Qmagazine*, his sources of inspiration multiplied to include pop, cabaret and



a variety of other styles. Likewise, beginning with the 1980s, Leonard Cohen was frequently accompanied by synthesizers and a chorus (Ilinca, “A Murit Leonard Cohen” [Leonard Cohen has died]). This diversification makes Căciularu conclude that Leonard Cohen’s music is like “an unending sunset, a reversed sunrise, fascinating through its vigorous regression, its progress towards the imminence of anyone’s destiny. It is a slow, serene, self-contained, regrettable and dignified, fulfilled and haloed, sensible and weary sunset” (Căciularu 2010).

Above all, however, we should not forget that Cohen is and remains a poet. His poems – as Roni Căciularu states in *Clipa Magazine* – are, each one of them, a story on its own: “A sentimental and ingenious story, written with the ink of our souls” (Căciularu 2010). Although Cohen published sixteen volumes of poetry, only a small number of his texts have been translated and presented to the Romanian readership. Thirty-two of his well-known poems were translated by one of the most important Romanian contemporary poets, Mircea Cărtărescu, and published together with Mircea Mihăieș’s book on Cohen in 2005. (Three of these poems had been published two years earlier in a bilingual form by *Convorbiri Literare*.) Cohen’s texts, says Alex Vasiliu, “are clear, fluent, with a moderate expressiveness, deserving a place in a manual or dictionary of rock-pop-folk phenomenon (the author of such an edition must accept the implicit task of selection)”. In Tudorel Urian’s view, on the other hand, Cărtărescu’s translations are “true, and an event in itself”. And he adds “The reputation of the translator makes this translation impossible to go unnoticed but it does not produce a great revelation about the quality of the poet Leonard Cohen” (*România literară*, 2006).

One year later, *Book of Longing* appeared as *Cartea aleanului* in a translation by Șerban Foarță and Cristina Chevereșan, at the Polirom Publishing House. The book has a foreword written (of course!) by Mircea Mihăieș. The two translators are critically acclaimed for their works and Chevereșan is also known for translating for the magazine *Orizont* in Timișoara Leon Wieseltier’s brief and exuberant homage to Leonard Cohen “The Lace and the Grace.” The publishers of *Book of Longing* quote Mihăieș’s view that it has “the tone, scope and martial air of the end of a career. It recapitulates and looks forward in equal measure, giving the impression that it closes and opens, through the more than one hundred and sixty poems and forty-three drawings” (Polirom 2006).

Leonard Cohen’s novels *The Favorite Game* (1963) and *Beautiful Losers* (1966) had been published and reissued before the artist made his musical debut but they were not translated into Romanian until 2003, when Polirom bought the copyrights. The books were translated by Vlad A. Arghir and Liviu Bleoca and have a foreword signed by Mircea Mihăieș. As they proved to be very successful, the two novels were reprinted in 2008, 2015, as well as at the beginning of 2017. *The Favorite Game* is an atypical



novel due to its autobiographical elements and the way in which the author ‘plays’ with his characters, the Polirom editors claim in 2008. Numerous events, feminine figures as well as personal obsessions that can be found in Cohen’s poems are kept within the pages of this novel somewhere at the border between reality and fiction. The publishing house informs the readership that the novel “goes beyond linearity through an abyssal vision, where the author looks with a dark and gentle humour at his ironic character-writer-singer, talking about himself in the third person and writing or living a novel, perhaps based on a lucid diary of the real and fictional poet’s obsessions and quests” (2008). Arthur Suciuc makes a comprehensive review of this novel in *Convorbiri Literare*, focusing especially on the relationship of the teenager with his mother. The author informs us that the original text underwent several stages until it became a fragmentary novel with an autobiographical character. The book represents “the search for one’s own narrative formula, for its idiosyncrasy” but also “the need for a clarification of the author himself, for overcoming a stage in his life.” In this respect, Suciuc explains that “the massive presence of autobiography” should not be understood as “a proof of artistic immaturity” but rather as “the specificity of self-esteem, which is a novel, but a novel that tends to dissolve in the author’s life, sacrificing its own dialectics.” The self-esteem adds, in Suciuc’s view, “to the need to construct oneself, to overcome some problems in the past” and at the same time, helps shield “the underground suffering” in a “trembling lace of poetry.” At the end of his article, Suciuc stresses that Cohen has always defended his novel from sharp criticism: not only did he work very hard to write it, but it also helped him clarify the particular situation that lay at the root of his melancholy. The author finally concludes: “Cohen remained melancholy, but he understood his drama.”

*Beautiful Losers (Frumoşii invinşi)* continues to prove Leonard Cohen’s literary talent. It represents, according to Polirom, “one of the most famous novels of the 1960s and, at the same time, Leonard Cohen’s most criticised book.” We are invited to discover an existential game in which “the narrative levels abound in exacerbated sexuality and acute mysticism, an extremely bold association” and where “the author outlines with narrative talent and effervescence a world of suffering and ecstasy born out of love and frustration” (Polirom 2003). Moreover, the publishing house informs us – without spoiling the mystery of the novel – that the destinies of the three contemporary characters and that of the 17th-century Iroquois virgin intertwine in a strange way right to the end in a book about friendship and compassion, love and hate, faith and blasphemy. Furthermore, Mircea Mihăieş, the author of the “Foreword” to Cohen’s novel, claims that this is a book about the “confusing ecstasy of life and the often seductive agony of death” (Mihăieş 2003, 2).

Mircea Mihăieş’s *Viaţa, patimile şi cântecele lui Leonard Cohen* represents an impressive labour as well as a relevant opening towards the work of a foreign artist who has



been influencing the lives and minds of so many Romanians. The first two-thirds of Mihăieş's book are dedicated to Leonard Cohen's musical creation – each album is taken and analysed in part while the last third is devoted to his two novels and poetic creation, as well as to the context in which Leonard Cohen and Mircea Mihăieş met. As Tudorel Urian observes in his review, Mihăieş's book does not reveal the mystery of Leonard Cohen's personality, but provides multiple elements helpful for better positioning him in the North American cultural landscape of the past decades. In addition, the Romanian author offers a model of how to create a monograph of a first-class personality (Urian). This could be the “first volume in a collection which could very well include Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison, Frank Zappa, the New York underground elite of the 1960s,” Alex Vasiliu adds in *Convorbiri Literare*.

In addition to Cohen being a Canadian literary and musical celebrity, his ethnic identity, religious views and endless journeys have also fascinated Romanian reviewers. Describing Cohen as a “troubadour priest of his own religion” who has often retreated to monasteries and Buddhist temples, Roni stresses that the artist is, nevertheless, a Jew and a representative of the ancient priestly caste known as the Kohanim.

The fact that Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 led Romanian reviewers and readers, accidentally or not, to Leonard Cohen. The competition for the title of the best “lyricist” of contemporary music is not new, but on this occasion it was launched with powerful force in print and online literary and cultural journals. According to Mircea Mihăieş, the most frequent reproach was along the lines of “If they still wanted to award it to someone, at least they should have awarded it to someone who also wrote real books!” (Mihăieş 2006). Cohen's Romanian biographer continues: “I was glad that Cohen's name was brought into play, although I'm not in the camp of those who hate Dylan. On the contrary, I think the Nobel Prize jury has highlighted a fundamental shift in the current world: erasing the boundaries between ‘high culture’ and ‘folk culture’.”

The death of Leonard Cohen on 7 November 2016 was received with great sorrow by the Romanian public. Magazines such as *Click* announced “a black day in the history of high quality music” (Avram), and *Qmagazine* stated that “we have lost one of the most respected and prolific visionaries” (Ilinca). Numerous messages coming from Cohen's family, friends and colleagues were collected from foreign journals and translated in the pages of Romanian magazines. Among them, Romanian journalists also quoted one of Cohen's comments in the interview published in *The New Yorker* in October 2016, just three weeks before his death: “I am ready to die. I hope it's not too uncomfortable. That's about it for me,” but also his subsequent disclaimer: “I think I was exaggerating ... I intend to live forever” (Ilinca). If we are to think about it, Cohen was right. He will definitely live forever, not only through his prolific work, in



the myriads of pages written about him and in the hearts of his fans but also in the work of other artists who were influenced by him. Romania is no exception when it comes to such people. Take for instance, “Un schimb de priviri” [An exchange of glances], an article written by Daniel Cristea-Enache in which he states that the poet Robert Șerban is a “biological adherent to the ardent generation of opposites: sex and mysticism” and claims that his poem “Ce rămâne din viață” [What’s left of life], which contains the lines “without anybody telling them / people know that / poetry is what remains of life / after you live it” is “a reflection of Leonard Cohen’s existential-philosophical outlook” (Cristea-Enache).

This in-depth survey of the numerous Romanian articles devoted to Leonard Cohen’s life and work, from his first appearance to the present, shows how well-loved this artist is in our country and how important his role continues to be, although he is no longer among us, in the form of sounds, words, spiritual light.

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