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# Alice Munro and Leonard Cohen: Ambassadors of Canadian Culture in Slovenia

**Tjaša Mohar and Michelle Gadpaille**

## **Abstract**

In general, Canadian culture and literature have not (yet) gained great popularity in Slovenia. However, there are a few Canadian authors who are well-known to Slovenians, among them the poet and singer Leonard Cohen and the Nobel Prize winner Alice Munro. This article will investigate the reception of Munro's and Cohen's works in Slovenia over the last two decades, with special emphasis on the period following Munro's Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013 and Cohen's death in 2016. By analysing the reception as well as the popularity of these two authors in Slovene cultural space, this article seeks to answer the question whether they can be considered ambassadors of Canadian culture in Slovenia.

## **Résumé**

De manière générale, les littératures et cultures canadiennes n'ont pas (encore) rencontré une grande popularité en Slovénie. Quelques auteurs canadiens sont cependant célèbres auprès des Slovènes, parmi eux, le poète et chanteur Leonard Cohen ainsi que Alice Munro qui a gagné le Prix Nobel de littérature. Cet article examine la réception des oeuvres de ces deux auteurs en Slovénie au cours des deux dernières décennies, en mettant l'accent sur les années postérieures à l'attribution du Prix Nobel à Munro (2013) ainsi que celles consécutives à la mort de Cohen (2016). En analysant la popularité de ces auteurs ainsi que la réception de leur oeuvre dans le champ culturel slovène, le présent article tente de répondre à la question de savoir s'ils peuvent être considérés comme les ambassadeurs de la culture canadienne en Slovénie.



Canadian literature and culture have been underrepresented in Slovenia compared to, for instance, American culture and literature. The situation is probably similar in other Central European countries, and the reasons for this might be historical, political and economic in nature. However, there are several well-known Canadian authors who have managed to find their way into the Slovene literary space, among them Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Yann Martel, the Nobel-Prize-winning short story writer Alice Munro, and the recently deceased singer and writer Leonard Cohen. This article will investigate the reception of Alice Munro's and Leonard Cohen's works in Slovenia over the last two decades, with special emphasis on the period following Munro's Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013 and Cohen's death in 2016. By analysing the reception as well as the popularity of these two authors in Slovene cultural space, this article seeks to answer the question whether they can be considered ambassadors of Canadian culture in Slovenia.

## Alice Munro: "Late for the Party"

Similarly to other Central European countries, Slovenia became increasingly interested in Alice Munro only in the last decade or so. As Jason Blake established in 2012 in his article "Late for the Party: Alice Munro in Slovenian Translation," published in *Canada in Eight Tongues: Translating Canada in Central Europe*, Munro's work reached the Slovene literary space relatively late. Before 2010, only three of Munro's stories had been translated into Slovene: "The Office," "Chance" and "Forgiveness in Families." Two of these were published in 2003 in a literary magazine, and one was included in an anthology of Canadian short stories titled *Zgodbe iz Kanade* [Stories from Canada<sup>1</sup>], edited by Maja Kraigher and published in 2006. All three stories were accompanied by brief comments on the author, acknowledging Munro's exceptional writing aesthetic, her insight into the human psyche and her ability to create fresh characters and situations. However, neither the two literary magazines nor the anthology reached a large readership; in addition, the three stories failed to receive any review or mention in the media. It seems that Munro first came to the attention of the Slovene media in 2007, when she announced that she was planning to end her writing career, and then again in 2009, when she won the Man Booker International Prize. Slovene critics, on the other hand, became truly interested in Munro's work only after 2010, when Munro received the first two book-length translations into Slovene, of the short story collections *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* and *Too Much Happiness*. It was apparently sheer coincidence that the first two Munro short story collections appeared in Slovene in 2010, one year after Munro won the prestigious Man Booker

1) Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are by Tjaša Mohar.



International Prize. Irena Miš Svolfšak, the editor of Miš Publishing, which published the Slovene version of *Too Much Happiness*, says that she came across this book more or less by chance and decided to publish it in Slovene (Miš Svolfšak 2016). Similarly, the former editor at Litera Publishing, Petra Vidali (2016), explained that she was the one who chose Munro's *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* to be published in Slovene. Since Munro's winning the Nobel Prize, three other collections have been published in Slovene: *Dear Life (Ljubo življenje)* in 2014, *Runaway (Ubežnica)* in 2015, and *The View from Castle Rock (Pogled z grajske pečine)* in 2017. In the case of these three short story collections, their translator Tjaša Mohar confirms that the publisher, Celjska Mohorjeva družba, was clearly following the award.

## Munro reviewed

As we have seen, the number of translated collections has increased in Slovenia since Munro won the Nobel Prize, and so has the attention paid to her by Slovene critics and the media, as the following analytical survey of the reception of Munro's work will show. One of the first critiques of the Slovene edition of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* was provided by the Slovene poet and critic Anja Golob in the afterword to the edition. Golob (2010, 342) explains that the Slovene title of the collection (*Sovraži me, rad me ima, dvori mi, ljubezen da, mož in žena sva*) is an allusion to the teenagers' game "loves me, loves me not" and stresses the role of coincidence in the stories – which is something that the stories never directly problematize. Golob also argues (342–343) that the reader is able to recognize herself (note the female pronoun) in the situations in which the protagonists find themselves, and that the plot is of secondary importance in the text, for it is the atmosphere of the story, created by the details, that really matters. Another review of the Slovene edition of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* appeared in the Slovene magazine *Bukla*. This magazine is issued monthly, providing the Slovene readership with information on new publications. It is free of charge and available at all major bookstores and libraries, as well as online. In *Bukla's* online review, the critic Samo Rugelj (2011) describes Munro as a "master of details and psychological nuances in human relations," and adds that the stories in this collection deal mostly with the emotional dilemmas of middle-aged and aging women. The Slovene edition of *Too Much Happiness* was reviewed in *Bukla* in 2010, the year of its publication. The critic, again Samo Rugelj (2010), defines Munro's stories in this collection as psychologically elaborate and written in the "introverted" style characteristic of Munro. He also observes that the stories talk about everyday life and human relations, which are presented as complex.



Reviews of the Slovene edition of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* and of *Too Much Happiness* also appeared in *Delo*, a daily broadsheet and the most important Slovene newspaper. In the article titled “Alica v čudežni deželi ženskih zgodb” [Alice in the wonderland of women’s stories], published in the literary section of the paper’s Saturday supplement, the journalist and critic Valentina Plahuta Simčič (2011) observes that the protagonists of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* are middle-aged or older and that they find themselves in the different stages of love suggested by the title, as well as in a stage that is not mentioned – death. She dwells on the details of the last story in the collection, “The Bear Came over the Mountain,” the reading of which is, as she suggests, like peeling onions: each layer revealing something new. With reference to *Too Much Happiness*, she notes that the stories in this collection are shorter, yet somewhat more gothic, revealing the darker side of everyday life. She mentions the stories “Dimensions” and “Child’s Play.”

The reviews of the two collections by Plahuta Simčič form part of a longer article: a three-page profile on Munro and one of the most salient manifestations of Munro in the Slovene media. Particularly important for the analysis of the reception of Munro’s work in Slovenia is the subtitle of the article, in which Plahuta Simčič (2011) claims that “Alice Munro is a writer who, from a combination of female, personal and provincial, succeeded in creating world literature” (translated by Jason Blake 2012, 182), thus stressing the three important dimensions of Munro’s work: that the stories are about women, that they are to some extent autobiographical, and that they mostly describe small-town life in Ontario. Plahuta Simčič also notes that Canadian literature is a literature of multiculturalism, of landscape, particularly that of the north, and of great empty spaces – it is not a literature of heroes (like American literature), but one of the myth of disappointment. As regards the characteristics of Munro’s writing, she stresses Munro’s “regionalism and provincial sensibility” as well as the fact that Munro writes about the “world of our grandmothers,” which is slowly disappearing. In addition, Plahuta Simčič draws attention to Munro’s feminist concerns by pointing out that Munro writes about women “with great understanding and empathy,” and that her stories present a “women’s counter-narrative’ to the official history,” the one that is described by men in thick novels, and features men as the main characters; in other words, Munro writes “great stories about the lives of little women.” As regards Munro’s aesthetic of writing, Plahuta Simčič notes that the stories are relatively long, closer to novellas than to “proper” short stories, and that they often “carry the weight of a novel.” She also argues that Munro lets the reader wander aimlessly in a “no man’s land” for a long time before revealing where the story is going. In this way, as she observes, Munro shows how complex and multi-layered life is. As regards the language, Plahuta Simčič claims that Munro uses it “economically,” without “linguistic exhibitions.”



Another review of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* appeared in *Delo* in 2011, titled “Zgodbe za ostro bralsko oko” [Stories for a sharp reader’s eye] and written by the Slovene poet, writer, critic and translator Miriam Drev. According to Drev (2011), Munro’s stories are often characterized by a complicated plot and suspense, something that can usually be found in novels, but without the usual theatrical atmosphere. She also notes that the atmosphere of the stories, which are mostly set in Huron County, is similar to that of the American South in Faulkner’s novels. With reference to *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*, she points out that the stories in this collection all feature middle-aged or older women protagonists, who have “their dilemmas and retrospective insights” and who move through decades in order to put together the pieces to gain insight into the meaning of life – or into life’s absurdities. These women are neither strong nor weak, as Drev remarks; however, they are endowed with vital energy and can sometimes be quite crude, although they always appear to be critical of themselves and of others. She mentions the stories “Family Furnishings” and “Comfort,” as well as some others that, according to her, all talk about love in its different forms. Drev finishes the review with a comment on Munro’s ability to bring to light a person’s hidden thoughts and questions about love, relationships, and the role of destiny in our lives.

In his review of *Too Much Happiness*, which appeared in the Slovene magazine *Mladina*, the critic Matej Bogataj (2011) notes that the stories in this collection talk about everyday life in Canada in the recent past, featuring women who decide to answer the call of love, as well as men who love wood, and blended families and their “familiarities.” Bogataj also remarks that in Munro’s stories, the art of storytelling is more important than the topic itself, and argues that Munro has mastered the art of revealing things gradually, of introducing suspense, fatal turning points and surprises, while the protagonists’ motivations often remain unknown. It is perhaps interesting that the male reviewer values the narrative artifice over the topic of women’s mundane and old-fashioned lives. He compares Munro’s stories to labyrinths that are built around a certain situation and in which Munro’s narrators surprise themselves. He adds that Munro’s stories have an “old-fashioned feeling about them,” even when they talk about contemporary society, and that Munro prefers minimalism and likes to play with the reader’s expectations. The stories are, according to Bogataj, told in a classic (yet not traditionalist) way, which is visible in Munro’s careful use of words as well as in the absence of humour and exaggeration.



## The Nobel Prize winner

Munro's winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013 received at least as much attention in the Slovene media as Nobel Prize winners usually receive. In an article that appeared in *Delo*, titled "Običajno življenje kot univerzalna tema" [Everyday life as a universal topic], Jožica Grgič (2013a, 20) finds it surprising that Munro won the Nobel Prize, not in terms of the quality of her writing, but because of the short story genre being less popular than the novel. She notes that Munro's writing focuses on average women whose lives are shaken by dramatic events, and that her stories are written in a realistic way, which gives them an autobiographical feeling. Grgič also argues that Munro is a "chronicler of life" who successfully connects the reader with the protagonists and their feelings, so that the reader is able to recognize in the protagonists himself or herself, as well as his or her neighbours and friends. She notes that, although Munro writes mainly about women, her writing is not feminist in terms of political engagement and that, while the stories are set in rural Ontario, they are universal in feeling, like Chekhov's stories. Grgič is also the author of an article titled "V zgodbah nobelovke vrvi resnično življenje" [The Nobel Prize winner's stories are a hub of real life], published in *Književni listi*, the literary supplement of *Delo*, in 2013. In this article, Grgič (2013b) argues that Munro's works are marked by a clear style and by psychological realism, as well as by Munro's imagination and empathy. She observes that Munro writes about women's concerns and that the women in the stories tend to age along with her. In reference to Munro's winning the Nobel Prize, a two-page article was dedicated to her writing in the Saturday supplement of *Večer*, the central newspaper in the northeastern part of Slovenia, titled "Umetnost konca v pravem trenutku in druge prefriganosti" [The art of finishing at the right moment and other tricks]. The article includes a long excerpt from the story "The Bear Came over the Mountain," accompanied by an uncredited comment on Munro's narrative art and her skill in "ending the story at the right moment." On the national cultural radio service ARS on 13 October 2013, the show "Literarni portreti" [Literary portraits] was dedicated to Alice Munro as the Nobel Prize winner.

## Three new collections

The three short story collections that appeared in Slovene translation after 2013 received attention not only from the newspapers, but also on the national radio (*Runaway* and *The View from Castle Rock*) as well as on national television (*The View from Castle Rock*). The 2014 publication of *Ljubo življenje* (the Slovene translation of *Dear Life*) caught the attention of several critics. Matej Bogataj (2014) wrote a review for



the publisher, available on the publisher's website. In it, he notes that the stories in *Dear Life* are similar to labyrinths, built around a certain situation in which the protagonists might surprise themselves and the reader might get caught. He also observes that Munro tends to play with the reader's expectations; however, her writing is classic in terms of the absence of humour and exaggeration, and addresses a wide readership. A short review of *Dear Life* by the critic Samo Rugelj appeared in *Bukla* in 2014. He states that the stories in the collection are typical of Munro; they depict the life stories and relationships of the protagonists, who strive to realize their ideas and expectations and must face the consequences. He also observes that *Dear Life* can be considered autobiographical. A review of this same collection by Valentina Plahuta Simčič appeared in *Delo* in February 2015, in the section "Knjiga tedna" [Book of the week]. She observes that the stories in *Dear Life* are typically "Munroesque," yet somewhat simpler than those in the previous two collections translated into Slovene. She points out that the stories are mainly set in the Canadian countryside "in a world that is slowly disappearing," and that the protagonists are often average women, with the exception of one story that features a male protagonist. In addition, she notes that the stories begin without an introduction, without a "history" or background, and then move back and forth in time. She further argues that the stories are closer to novellas or even to the novel, and stresses the autobiographical dimension of the four stories that close the collection. A review of the translation of *Dear Life* by Matej Bogataj appeared in the *Mladina* magazine in February 2015. Bogataj notes that in *Dear Life*, Munro portrays the Canadian 20<sup>th</sup> century and "the people who live on the margin between the urban and the rural," on big farms or semi-urban houses, and it can be noted that this kind of life is gradually disappearing. He argues that Munro's Canada is depicted as traditional, as are her narrative techniques, although the stories are more novellas than short stories, owing to their length and the considerable period of time that they cover. Bogataj notes that Munro narrates her stories in a seemingly impersonal way and that her protagonists sometimes appear passionless, unemotional and rational. In addition, he argues that the unsaid appears to be more important in the stories than the actual events, and concludes that, although Munro belongs to the traditional world, her insight into human lives is relevant for the globalized world.

*Ubežnica*, the Slovene edition of Munro's *Runaway*, published in 2015, received three reviews. The first review appeared in *Bukla* in 2015, written by Samo Rugelj, who notes that this collection offers typical Munroesque stories about the complex destinies of (mostly) women characters. He points out that the stories often have an unclear beginning: they start *in medias res* and then unfold slowly and in a virtuosic manner. Rugelj also mentions that the story "Powers" is more a novella than a short story, given its length, while the three linked stories featuring Juliet Anderson could easily have been made into a novel. In the *Delo* (*Književni listi* section) review of





*Runaway* that appeared in January 2016, titled “Življenje, in kako ga preživeti” [Life, and how to live through it], Ana Geršak (2016) notes that Munro writes about the “intimacies of ‘small people’” and that in her stories there is a feeling of loneliness and melancholy similar to that in Chekhov’s writing. Geršak also mentions Munro’s predilection for women protagonists, who, “with their style, education and wish for a different, better world defy the expectations of the patriarchal society”; however, they do not always come out as winners. Geršak observes that Munro does not provide explanations in her stories or pass judgements; she merely relates, from a distance, yet not without a special regard for her characters. She additionally notes that the stress is not on the events but on the characters and their emotions, and concludes that, although Munro’s women resemble each other at first sight, their destinies unfold uniquely. In his review of *Runaway*, appearing in *Mladina*, Matej Bogataj (2016) compares Munro’s protagonists with those of Orhan Pamuk, arguing that they all live in worlds “that have not progressed” in some way. He argues that Munro’s Canada, like Atwood’s Canada, “has its own ‘cultural codes,’ which remain hidden under the surface”; however, everybody in Canada is familiar with these. Bogataj also sees the stories in *Runaway* as being closer to novellas, given their length and because they cover a longer period of time, and argues that Munro’s stories are somewhat old-fashioned, for they are set in small towns, almost rural areas, and can still recall the Depression era and the lack of goods. He concludes that Munro writes without sentiment about the destinies of “small,” average women and brings to life what has been lost in the history and what remained unsaid. On 31 October 2015, *Runaway* was presented in the radio programme *Sobotno branje* [Saturday reading] on the Slovene national radio Prvi programme. The radio presentation included an interview with Tjaša Mohar as the translator of the Slovene edition. Besides mentioning Munro’s long and successful career as a writer, the journalist Nina Slaček (2015) notes that Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize for her “masterly” short stories, which might at first sight seem simple; however, this is a false impression. She observes that Munro plays with the reader’s expectations and leads him or her on a false trail, which is why her stories are like detective stories. Slaček also notes that Munro usually sets her stories in small Canadian towns and that they depict everyday life, in particular that of women, in an almost timeless way. As regards the stories in *Runaway*, she observes that they are typically Munroesque. This introduction is followed by a detailed presentation of the three linked stories featuring Juliet (“Chance,” “Soon” and “Silence”), and the story “Tricks.” On 9 May 2016, a review of *Runaway* by the critic Katarina Mahnič was read on ARS on the radio show “S knjižnega trga” [“From the book market”]. Mahnič (2016) notes that it is difficult to define Munro’s unique writing style: she argues that it is characterized above all by the absence of the artificial and the redundant, as well as by open beginnings, by movements backward and forward, and by surprising end-



ings. She also notes that, although Munro's writing might at first seem simple and monotonous, it requires concentrated reading, and the final effect of the stories is considerably above the average. Mahnič concludes by observing that the stories in *Runaway* all revolve around some kind of running away, and that they will appeal mostly to women.

*The View from Castle Rock*, published in Slovene in September 2017 as *Pogled z grajske pečine*, received as much attention as the previous four Munro collections translated into Slovene. In the short review appearing in *Bukla*, the critic Renate Rugelj (2017) notes that interest in Munro has been increasing since she won the Nobel Prize, which is also visible in the growing number of Slovene translations of her works. She mentions that *The View from Castle Rock* has a special place in Munro's repertoire, for the author managed to make literature not only of her life, but also of that of her ancestors. Rugelj also notes that the stories are masterfully written in terms of style. *The View from Castle Rock* was presented twice on the official website of the Slovene National Radio and Television programmes (MMC, Prvi interaktivni multimedijski portal), first in September 2017, right after the Slovene translation appeared, and then again in November 2017. In the November review, the critic Simon Popek (2017) observes that *The View from Castle Rock* could also be called a novel, although it has a double-layered structure; it combines linked motifs from Munro's family chronicle, as well as events from Munro's childhood, youth (and maturity). Popek also comments that Munro is never sentimental, but rather brutally realistic in depicting the lives of her ancestors, without embellishment. Moreover, he argues that Munro does not pretend to own these stories; she simply tries to save them from oblivion. *The View from Castle Rock* was presented on the radio show *Svet kulture* [The world of culture] on the national cultural radio service ARS in September 2017. The presentation included a short interview with Tjaša Mohar as the translator (rtvslo. 2017a). In October 2017, *The View from Castle Rock* was also presented on national television (rtvslo. 2017b.).

## Munro overall

The analysis of the critical and popular reception of Munro's work enables us to answer the question of how Munro is read in Slovenia. At this point, it needs to be stressed that Slovene readers read Munro in a different way than Canadian or North-American readers in general, for they belong to a different interpretive community – one that it is strongly marked by its own social and political reality, such as the socialist past and the absence of a proper women's movement, and consequently the lack of women's literature until recently, as well as the late appearance of the short story genre. Some commentary reveals a predictable cultural unease with the elastic



nature of Munro's stories, their tendency to stretch genre parameters of length and complexity. A good insight into how Slovenians read Munro is provided by the journalist Valentina Plahuta Simčič (2011), who argues that Munro has created world literature of the female, the personal and the provincial, thus acknowledging the three important dimensions of Munro's work. However, by stressing the female and the personal dimensions of Munro's stories, Plahuta Simčič (2011) suggests that it may be of less interest to male readership. Anja Golob (2010) also suggests, in the afterword to the Slovene publication of *Hateship, Friendship, Courship, Loveship, Mariage*, that Munro's writing is intended for women, for, as she argues, women readers can easily identify with Munro's protagonists. As Plahuta Simčič (2011) also observes, the general idea that Slovene readers have of Canadian literature is that this is a literature of multiculturalism, of northern landscapes and of great empty spaces, features that are largely absent from Munro's writing. The lack of the "Canadianness" might be one of the reasons that the Slovene publishers did not decide to publish Munro's works in Slovene earlier. Comments on authorial style indicate that readers are both charmed and mystified by Munro's style, finding it unclassifiable, and resorting to paradox, or to adjectives such as "Munro-esque" to account for its unique combination of the limpid and the labyrinthine. Moreover, reviewers see Munro's fictional field as reflecting a vanishing reality, one encysted in the historical 20<sup>th</sup> century and, as such, susceptible to nostalgic reading modes. However, considering the attention that Munro has received in Slovenia over the last decade, even if from a limited circle of reviewers, we can conclude that she is well-received and that her readership will continue to grow. For, as Anja Golob (2010: 346) argues, Munro's stories may not charm the reader right away, but they do this gradually and unequivocally.

## Leonard Cohen: Psalms of spice and mercy

Leonard Cohen is another Canadian author whose literary works have been present in Slovene literary space only in the last twenty years or so, although his literary career started in the 1960s. So far, four of Cohen's works have appeared in Slovene translation: *Beautiful Losers*, *The Favourite Game*, *Book of Longing*, and *Book of Mercy*. Three of these titles have been republished or reprinted. Besides the four book-length translations, several of Cohen's poems have appeared in Slovene translation in various magazines: some poems from *Book of Mercy* were published in 1994 in the magazine *Razgledi* (Cohen 1994); several poems from *Flowers for Hitler* appeared in Slovene translation nine years later in a literary magazine for students of the Slovene language and comparative literature (Cohen 2003a); in the same year, several of Cohen's poems were published in the magazine *Vsesledje* (Cohen 2003b); and in 2011,



some of Cohen's poems were published in the magazine *Revija SRP: svoboda, resnica, pogum* (Cohen 2011). Besides these appearances of individual poems, an anthology of Cohen's poems, translated by Matej Krajnc, was published in 2004 by KUD France Prešeren under the title *Stolp pesmi* [Tower of song], the title taken from that of the final number in Cohen's 1988 album *I'm Your Man*. The anthology consists of verse from Cohen's nine poetry collections. The anthology was briefly presented in the literary magazine *Bukla* and in the magazine *Mladina*.

Cohen's first book-length translation to appear in Slovene was *Beautiful Losers* (*Lepi zgubljeni*), translated by Jure Potokar and published by Mladinska knjiga in 1996. This novel was republished in Slovene in 2009 by another publishing house, Modrijan, in a revised translation, as Potokar (2018) explains. In 2008, three book-length Slovene translations of Cohen's works appeared: the novel *The Favourite Game* (*Najljubša igra*), published by Modrijan, the poetry collection *Book of Longing* (*Knjiga hrepenenja*), published by Miš, and the poetry collection *Book of Mercy* (*Knjiga milosti*), also published by Modrijan. *The Favourite Game* and *Book of Longing* were translated by Matej Krajnc, while *Book of Mercy* was translated by Jure Potokar. *Book of Mercy* was reprinted in 2010, and *Book of Longing* in 2011. The translator of *The Favourite Game* and *Book of Longing*, Matej Krajnc (2018), explains that he was the one who suggested that Modrijan publish *The Favourite Game* in Slovene, while in the case of *Book of Longing*, it was Miš Publishing that offered to publish his translation. Krajnc (2018) mentions that the Slovene edition of *Book of Mercy* was published with the financial support of the Canadian government. The other Cohen translator, Jure Potokar (2018), explains that Cohen's announcement of his first European tour, followed shortly by the announcement of his first concert in Ljubljana, raised considerable interest in the Slovene media; consequently, the Slovene publishers were particularly willing to publish Cohen's translations. This explains why all the Slovene translations (with the exception of the first edition of *Beautiful Losers*) appeared in the period 2008–2011.

Reviews of Leonard Cohen's literary works that have appeared in Slovene translation are rather scarce. The 1996 Slovene edition of *Beautiful Losers* did not seem to garner much attention from the critics and the media. The publisher of the 2009 Slovene edition of *Beautiful Losers* wrote on their website that this novel is Cohen's greatest literary achievement as well as his most popular work. It is also, according to its Slovene publisher, one of the most important books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Modrijan 2009). *Beautiful Losers* was also presented in *Bukla* magazine, with more or less the same description as the Slovene publisher provided on their website (*Bukla*). The translation of *The Favourite Game* was briefly reviewed in *Bukla* and in the online magazine *Zurnal24.si*. In the *Bukla* review, the critic Maša Ogrizek (2008a) observes that *The Favourite Game* is a collection of framed, scarred memories that the 29-year-old protagonist has been collecting since his childhood; however, it is not only a story of



a young man's distress, but also an insight into art, in particular poetry. The novel is written in pure, melodic language, and although Cohen's works are usually considered to be melancholic, they often leave space for hope, says Ogrizek. The author of the *Zurnal24.si* review, Adela Vuković (2010), mentions the autobiographical elements of the novel, such as the neurotic mother, the Jewish origin, the poet and his home city of Montreal, while describing the novel as beautifully written.

About the Slovene translation of *Book of Longing*, the publisher wrote on their website that this poetry collection was distinguished from Cohen's other works above all by its interdisciplinarity: besides poems, the collection includes Cohen's sketches and drawings, which enrich the collection (Miš). *Book of Longing* was reviewed in *Bukla*, where the critic Tina Škrajnar (2008) mentions that Cohen wrote most of the poetry in this book while he was living at a Buddhist monastery in California, and observes that the themes of the poems are similar to those in other poems, such as melancholy, exploration of the dark essence of man and of life's brief duration, along with reflections on art. However, as she observes, Cohen seems to cope better with sadness and doubt in these poems than in his previous poems, for the poems in this collection also reflect a brighter side to life.

The publishers of the Slovene version of *Book of Mercy* wrote on their website that this poetry collection was sometimes considered among Cohen's best works. According to the publisher, the poems are written in the form of psalms and prayers that reveal Cohen's spiritual and moral renovation, as well as expressing his deepest sorrow, feelings of guilt and weakness (Modrijan 2008). In the brief *Bukla* review of the poetry collection *Book of Mercy*, the critic Maša Ogrizek (2008b) mentions that this is Cohen's most personal book, written after the artist's long period of crisis. It consists of poems in prose that are like meditations and prayers, according to Ogrizek.

Jure Potokar (2009, 257), the translator of *Beautiful Losers*, observes in the afterword of the 2009 Slovene edition of this book that, when Cohen became a pop star, his literary career was pushed aside, and reviews of his work began to appear mostly in music journals, not in literary journals, with the exception of Canada, where Cohen remained one of the most important writers. Slovenia is unfortunately no exception in this case; as we have seen, reviews of his literary works in Slovene translation are scarce, while newspaper articles about his musical career outnumber them by far. It can thus be concluded that in Slovenia, too, as in many other countries, Cohen is more widely known as a singer and a musician than as a poet. Matej Krajnc (2018), Cohen's other Slovene translator, agrees with this statement.



## Cohen's music

As a musician, Cohen has been much appreciated and evaluated in Slovenia, something that will be confirmed by the analytical survey of the newspaper articles and other media appearances that will be presented below. Both concerts that Cohen held in Slovenia during European tours, in 2010 and 2013, were a great success and undoubtedly contributed to his popularity. The first concert in October 2010 received considerable attention in the Slovene media. In a long article entitled "Poet naposled v Ljubljani" [The poet finally in Ljubljana], which appeared in *Delo* on the day of the concert, the journalist Zdenko Matoz (2010a) observes that Cohen can be considered one of the four world musicians of great importance (the other three being Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan and Nick Cave). Matoz (2010a) mentions Cohen's Jewish origin and provides detailed information on Cohen's musical as well as literary career, mentioning his two novels and the existing Slovene translations. In another article entitled "Leonard Cohen prvič v Sloveniji" [Leonard Cohen's first visit to Slovenia], which appeared in *Delo* immediately after the concert, Matoz (2010b) notes that Cohen's concert put Slovenia's biggest sports and concert hall (Stožice) in Ljubljana on the world map of popular music. Cohen's second concert in Ljubljana took place about three years later, on 25 July 2013, in the same concert hall. This concert too received much attention from the Slovene media. The titles that appeared in the newspapers included "Leonard Cohen se vrača v Ljubljano" [Leonard Cohen is coming back to Ljubljana], "Leonard Cohen navdušuje na evropski turneji" [Leonard Cohen sends his audience into raptures on his European tour], "Cohen danes v Stožicah: vaje iz gentlemanstva pri 78" ["Cohen in Stožice today: Acting gentlemanly at the age of 78]; "Leonard Cohen v živo: več kot zgolj nostalgija za nekdanjo veličino" [Leonard Cohen live: More than mere nostalgia for past grandeur], "Stare ideje na turneji" [Old ideas on tour]. A day after the concert, a long article by Nina Krajčinovič appeared in *Delo*, entitled "Mož, rojen z darom zlatega glasu" [A man born with the gift of a golden voice]; "I was born with the gift of a golden voice" is from Cohen's "Tower of Song"). Krajčinovič observes that the concert hall echoed with emotion and that the audience, consisting of women and men of all ages, came seeking nostalgia from the garden of memories that Cohen's songs had marked in their lives.

Several other mentions of Cohen and his music can be found in Slovene newspapers. When Cohen's biography *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* by Sylvie Simmons was published in Slovene translation in 2014, two years after the original, this was noted in *Delo* in an article by Jožica Grgič, "Leonard Cohen: pravi moški za vas" [Leonard Cohen: The right man for you]. Writing early the next year, Grgič (2015) reveals some details from Cohen's life as described in the biography, such as the Jewish origins of his family, the beginning of his musical career and his legendary charm.





Moreover, he describes Cohen as a phenomenon: a poet and a singer, whose songs have remained popular over decades and whose creativity did not diminish with age. He also notes that Cohen is more a preacher than a pop singer, for he whispers thoughts that become wiser with each year. In May 2015, Cohen appeared on the cover of *Pogledi*, a bimonthly cultural magazine. There is also a two-page article about him in the magazine, titled “Komandant Cohen in njegove odločitve” [Commander Cohen and his decisions], written by Matej Krajnc on the occasion of the release of Cohen’s album *Can’t Forget: A Souvenir of the Grand Tour*. The article talks mostly about Cohen’s concert discography (Krajnc 2015). Just before Cohen’s death, a long article about him was published in *Delo*, written by Jožica Grgič and titled “Cohenovo slovo bi bilo težko veličastnejše” [Cohen’s goodbye could hardly be more magnificent]. In this article, Grgič (2016) argues that Cohen would have been a more appropriate laureate for the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2016 than Bob Dylan, for his lyrics, which carry deep messages about love, politics, religion and the meaning of life and death, are almost without comparison. Moreover, he argues that Cohen is primarily a poet and a master of words, and only secondarily a singer and musician. He draws attention to Cohen’s habit of constantly saying goodbye; several albums had been proclaimed as his last, yet his recent years have been very productive. Grgič also mentions that Cohen released another album in 2016, at the age of 82, and notes that this album and the title song in particular (“You Want It Darker”) could be perceived as Cohen’s goodbye to the world. If this turns out to be a real goodbye, says Grgič, then Cohen’s “swan song” could hardly be more magnificent.

## Death of an icon

Cohen’s death in November 2016 echoed through all the important Slovene media. A short article published in *Delo* on 11 November was titled “Umrli legendarni kanadski glasbenik Leonard Cohen” [The legendary Canadian musician Leonard Cohen has died]. The official website of the Slovene National Radio and Television channels published a long article on Cohen on 11 November titled “Umrli je nepoboljšljivi kanadski romantik Leonard Cohen” [The incorrigible Canadian romantic Leonard Cohen has died]. The article mentions Cohen’s most famous songs and stresses his immense influence as a singer and songwriter, as well as the fact that he was one of the top Canadian literary personalities (rtvslo. 2016). The Slovene national radio service ARS presented a selection of Cohen’s poems on 12 November in a show called *Literarni nokturno*. A long article published in *Delo* on 11 November on the occasion of Cohen’s death was written by Cohen’s translator Jure Potokar. Titled “Cohen je bil in ostal predvsem pesnik” [Cohen was and remained above all a poet], it includes an



excerpt from *Book of Mercy* and a translation of Cohen's poem "Anthem." In the article, Potokar (2016) stresses that Cohen was primarily a poet and that his concerts were celebrations of words; his songs were like psalms accompanied by gentle music. He also notes that Cohen's words were powerful, that he had an excellent sense for melody and rhyme, and that although he never took himself very seriously, his songs speak about life with more seriousness than many scholarly works.

## Conclusion

As the reviews and newspaper articles have shown, Leonard Cohen is well known and very popular in Slovenia as a musician; however, he is less known as a poet and writer. Music has undoubtedly greater power to reach a large audience than literature; it can therefore be argued that Cohen is generally known in Slovenia more as a singer and musician, and can thus certainly be called an ambassador of Canadian culture. Judging by the number of articles that have appeared on Cohen in various Slovene media in the last decade or so, it cannot be concluded that his death in 2016, although reported in all the Slovene newspapers and other media, had a major impact on his popularity. Nor has it yet resulted in a new translation of any of his literary works. Nevertheless, although Cohen is no longer alive, it can be assumed that his music will remain popular in Slovenia and his name will not be forgotten. Alice Munro, on the other hand, has gained considerably in terms of recognisability and popularity in Slovenia since winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013, which can be seen from the increasing number of articles about her in the Slovene media as well as the increasing number of Slovene translations of her works. However, Munro is not yet as widely recognizable in Slovenia as to be called an ambassador of Canadian culture. In terms of literary personalities, this "title" should – at least for the present – undoubtedly be given to another Canadian writer, Margaret Atwood, whose *The Handmaid's Tale* was used as the obligatory literary text for the 2018 national high school competition in English.





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