

Destiny of a Nobel Laureate in a Small Book Market: Alice Munro in Slovene Translation

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the representation of Alice Munro's writing in Slovenia, focusing on the issues of its late introduction to Slovene readers, and the low level of interest by Slovene publishers in her works even now that she is a Nobel laureate. To address these issues, two important features of her writing – that she is exclusively a short-story writer and that her stories deal mostly with women's themes – will be analysed against the background of the tradition of the short story genre and women's literature in Slovenia. Additionally, the specifics of the Slovene book market and publishing industry will be examined as another potential reason for the underrepresentation of Munro's works in Slovenia.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Slovene translation, publishing, Nobel laureate, book market

Usoda nobelovke na majhnem knjižnem trgu: Alice Munro v slovenskem prevodu

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek proučuje zastopanost literarnih del Alice Munro v Sloveniji. Posebej se osredotoča na vprašanje, zakaj je bila avtorica tako pozno predstavljena slovenskim bralcem in zakaj je tudi zdaj, ko je nobelovka, zgolj malo zanimanja za njena dela med slovenskimi založniki. V iskanju odgovorov na vprašanje bomo analizirali dve pomembni značilnosti njene pisave – in sicer da je avtorica izključno kratkih zgodb in da se v svojih zgodbah večinoma ukvarja z ženskimi temami – v sklopu tradicije kratke zgodbe in ženske književnosti v Sloveniji. Poleg tega bomo raziskali še posebnosti slovenskega knjižnega trga in založništva kot dodatni razlog za slabo zastopanost avtoričinih del v slovenskem prevodu.

Ključne besede: Alice Munro, slovenski prevod, založništvo, nobelovka, knjižni trg

1 Introduction

Alice Munro's first short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), won Canada's most prestigious literary prize, the Governor General's Award, and marked the beginning of her successful literary career. Publications of her stories in *The New Yorker* magazine soon brought Munro recognition and popularity among American readers. Of fourteen short story collections (and a few compilations) that Munro published in her long writing career, several received prestigious literary awards. In 2009, Munro won the Man Booker International Prize (now the International Booker Prize), which consolidated her international fame. Her first, very modest introduction to Slovene readers happened in 2003, when the Slovene translation of the story "The Office" was published in a literary magazine. It took seven more years for the first Munro collection to appear in Slovene translation. In 2010, two collections were published in Slovene: *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* and *Too Much Happiness*. Following Munro's award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013, three more translations of her short story collections followed: *Dear Life* in 2014, *Runaway* in 2015, and *The View from Castle Rock* in 2017. Although all Slovene translations received favourable reviews, interest in further translation of her works has waned since 2017. The questions that arise here are why Munro was introduced to Slovene readers so late, and why – after a short period of increased interest in her works following her winning of the Nobel Prize – Slovene publishers are no longer interested in publishing her works.

Munro's late arrival to Slovenia is not an isolated case in this part of Europe. The results of a project launched by the Central European Association for Canadian Studies (CEACS) show a similar situation in other Central European countries participating in the project, those being Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovakia. Among these countries, Serbia was the first to translate a short story collection by Munro; this was *Runaway*, which was translated into Serbian in 2006. The Hungarian translation of the same collection followed in 2007, while Munro first appeared in Croatian and Czech in 2011, and in Slovak only in 2014. A comparison with European countries that have a larger readership¹ suggests that Munro's late introduction to these Central European countries is connected with these countries' small book markets. However, the situation is more complex than that, for despite Munro's late arrival to Hungary, Serbia and the Czech Republic, she is now quite well represented in these languages (eleven collections have been translated into Hungarian and eight into Serbian and into Czech), while in Croatia, as in Slovenia, five Munro collections have been translated thus far, and in Slovakia only four.² Since the sizes of the book markets in these last three countries are comparable, the reasons for the low level of interest in Munro's works among the publishers might be connected with these countries' translation and publishing policies. This paper will focus on the case of Slovenia only and will investigate the dynamics of the Slovene publishing industry (section 4) as one possible reason for the modest interest in Munro's works among Slovene publishers. Additionally, it will analyse two other potential

¹ Munro first appeared in Spanish in 1971, in French in 1979, in German in 1981, and in Italian in 1989. Almost all her short story collections are now available in these languages.

² Data on translations of Munro collections into these Central European languages has been obtained from the Translation Research Project Database of the CEACS (<http://www.cecanstud.cz/index.php/en/translation-research-project-database>).

reasons for Munro's late arrival to Slovenia and the underrepresentation of her works in the Slovene book market: the author's predilection for women's themes (section 2) and the fact that she is exclusively a short-story writer (section 3).

2 Munro as a Representative of Women's Literature

Alice Munro declared in 1972 that she was "generally sympathetic to the Women's Liberation Movement" (Nischik 2007, 207); however, she was never actively engaged in feminist activism and always tended to avoid "public causes, controversies and arguments" (Sheldrick Ross 1992, 84). Nevertheless, Munro's writing clearly testifies to her gender awareness and offers a female perspective on life, which, as Nischik (2007, 207) observes, has made Munro popular among feminist readers and critics. Munro's second short story collection, *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) even became "a 1970s feminist *cri de coeur*" (Thacker 2011, 11) because it addressed several feminist themes. However, Munro has not been popular only among declared feminists but among women in general, for her writing "has the potential of speaking to many kinds of women" (Redekop 1992, xii). Critics have identified multiple women's themes in Munro's writing, such as problematic communication between the sexes, and the nature of romantic love (Gadpaille 1988), mother figures within the patriarchal society (Redekop 1992), women's bodies, and women's romantic fantasies (Howells 1998), restrictive patterns of socialization for girls, and gendered issues regarding professions (Nischik 2007). Additionally, Munro's narrative technique has been identified as forming a feminist meta-narrative that displays the woman's way of thinking (Elliott 1996), and as a "subversive tool for exposing and undermining rigid patriarchal structures" (Löschnigg 2016, 62).

Munro explored the restrictive patterns of socialization of girls particularly in her early stories, such as "Boys and Girls" and "Red Dress" (*Dance of the Happy Shades*), and stories published in the collections *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* She returned to this theme in stories published in later collections, such as "Meneseteung" (*Friend of My Youth*), "Lying Under the Apple Tree" (*The View from Castle Rock*), and "Haven" (*Dear Life*). Romantic relationships represent a common theme in Munro's stories throughout her career. In some of these stories, women's romantic fantasies are – at least partly – fulfilled ("How I Met My Husband"), in others the fairy-tale plot is reversed ("The Beggar Maid", "Passion") or spoiled by fate ("Simon's Luck", "Tricks"). Several stories feature wives and mothers from the period of the 1950s to the 1970s, women who feel trapped in the limited roles society ascribes to them. They are unhappy in their marriages ("Miles City, Montana") and sometimes commit adultery ("Oranges and Apples", "To Reach Japan"), or divorce their husbands and go with another man ("The Children Stay", "Gravel"). A few stories set in the 1950s to 1970s period problematize gender issues related to professions, for instance those that feature a woman trying to follow a profession of which her family or the society disapproves ("The Office", "Haven"), or a woman who is required to quit her job once she marries ("Friend of My Youth", "Chaddeleys and Flemings").

Munro's writing clearly reflects what the place of women was in the patriarchal Western society of the second half of the 20th century (particularly stories set in the 50s, 60s and 70s) and thus strongly resonates with issues that the second feminist movement addressed. In the communist

and socialist countries of the East, women's position in society was different from that of women in the West, and there was no feminist movement like that in the West. Women in the East thus could not easily identify with Munro's heroines, since they did not share their experiences. To be able to consider Munro's portrayal of women within the Western society as one reason that her works were not introduced to Slovene readers earlier, we need to consider the tradition of women's literature in Slovenia in the second half of the 20th century.

Silvija Borovnik argues that one cannot analyse Slovene women's literature from the period after World War II until 1990³ without considering the position of women in society in this period (1995, 12), particularly within the framework of communist ideology as the official ideology in Slovenia and Yugoslavia at the time (1995, 21). As Vlasta Jalušič (1998, 118) observes, in socialist countries that emerged after World War II, a women's movement outside the Communist Party was not allowed; women's associations could be established only within the existing Communist Party, where they propagated the image "of the female worker as a liberated woman" (1998, 118). Milica Antić Gaber (2004, 80) reports that women's endeavours within the Communist Party in Slovenia were quite successful because the efforts for improving the position of women in society were viewed as part of a larger struggle for improving the position of people in society in general. However, as Antić Gaber (2004, 82) further points out, this kind of 'state feminism' ended in the second half of the 1980s, when the liberalisation of social relations enabled the emergence of various civil groups, including those representing women's cause. Jalušič (1998, 61) reports that after the fall of socialism, there was a tendency in all Eastern European countries to reject feminism, for it was seen as only another form of unification. However, as Jalušič (1998, 82–83) further explains, in all Eastern European countries that became democracies, gender discrimination was constitutionally prohibited and was therefore no longer considered an issue that needed to be addressed.

The absence of a proper feminist movement in Slovenia under the socialist regime explains the lack of interest in women's literature in Slovenia in this period, for, as Borovnik (1995, 9–10) points out, women writers were much fewer than male writers, and little was known about their writing until recently. It was only after 1980 that the number of female novelists increased significantly, and at that point they distanced themselves from fixed literary patterns to include new, previously taboo topics, such as the notion of the female, women's behaviour patterns, and stereotyped images of women in the media (Borovnik 2012, 47). However, Slovene literary criticism still focused primarily on male authors, even after the further increase in the number of female writers at the turn to the 21st century (Borovnik 2012, 73). Katja Mihurko Poniž explains that feminist literary criticism in Slovenia emerged with a two-decade delay in comparison to the West (2005, 89); however, nowadays it represents a legitimate part of literary criticism (2013, 210) and testifies to a growing interest in research on women authors (2013, 212).

Literature by Slovene women authors was thus underrepresented in Slovenia during the socialist regime. What was the situation with Slovene translations of literary works by prominent foreign female writers? Data obtained from COBISS (the central on-line

³ Slovenia gained independence in June 1991 and at that time entered a transition period from socialism to a market economy, which lasted till 1999.

catalogue of Slovene libraries) shows that translations of literary works dealing explicitly with feminist concerns were also scarce in the period between World War II and 1990. Simone de Beauvoir's gender study *The Second Sex* (*Le deuxième sexe*) was first translated into Slovene only in 1999, half a century after it was written (and was republished in Slovene in 2013 and 2014). However, two translations of de Beauvoir's works did appear earlier: her novel *Les mandarins* was translated in 1971 and her autobiography *La force de l'âge* in 1986. Hélène Cixous's feminist essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" ("Le rire de la méduse"), originally published in 1975, was translated into Slovene only in 2005. Virginia Woolf's works were somewhat better represented in Slovene translation in the socialist period. *Mrs. Dalloway* from 1925 was translated into Slovene in 1965 (and republished in 1987). This novel was also included in the "Sto romanov"⁴ collection, which consisted of the best one hundred novels of world literature. Woolf's *Orlando* was translated into Slovene in 1974 (republished in 2004), *The Waves* in 1986, and *To the Lighthouse* in 1988. However, Woolf's most feminist text, *A Room of One's Own*, appeared in Slovene only in 1998. More novels by Woolf have recently become available in Slovene, such as *Jacob's Room*, *Between the Acts* (both were translated in 2013), and *The Years* (translated in 2014). Doris Lessing, another famous British feminist author, received her first Slovene translation in 1980 (*Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, originally published in 1971), followed by the 1987 translation of *The Grass is Singing* (originally published in 1950). After 1990, more works by Lessing became available in Slovene. The feminist manifesto by the American writer Marilyn French, *The Women's Room*, written in 1977, was translated into Slovene only three years after its publication; however, this remains the only translation of this author's work, apart from an essay on Shakespeare. The American poet and writer Sylvia Plath has been well represented in Slovene translation since 1990; however, none of her works was available in Slovene during the socialist period. Similarly, the American poet Adrienne Rich was first translated into Slovene only in 1996, while the works of the British author Angela Carter were not available in Slovene until 2013, when *Nights at the Circus* was translated. Interestingly, several works by the American author Erica Jong were translated into Slovene almost immediately after their publication: her controversial feminist novel *Fear of Flying* appeared in Slovene in 1978, followed by translations of *How to Save Your Own Life* in 1980, *Fanny, Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* in 1984, *Parachutes & Kisses* in 1987, *Serenissima – a Novel of Venice* in 1989, and *Any Woman's Blues* in 1993. Margaret Atwood is the Canadian writer most translated into Slovene; however, only *Lady Oracle* (translated in 1987) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (translated in 1990) were available in Slovene during the socialist period. Several more novels by Atwood were translated in the first two decades of the 21st century: *Surfacing* in 2003 (written in 1972), and more recent novels, such as *Oryx and Crake* in 2004, *The Penelopiad* in 2005, *The Blind Assassin* in 2010, *The Year of the Flood* in 2012, and *The Testaments* in 2019. Alice Munro received her first book length translation only in 2010, more than four decades into her writing career; as for other salient Canadian representatives of women's literature, such as Margaret Laurence and Mavis Gallant, they are still waiting for their début in Slovene.

⁴ The works within the collection were published in the period 1964–1977. Besides Woolf's novel, there were only seven works by other female authors included in the collection, including Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*.

As shown by this analysis of the data on Slovene translations obtained from COBISS, foreign works by women writers were underrepresented in Slovenia during the socialist period, particularly before 1980, and those that were translated into Slovene mostly arrived with a major delay. However, there are exceptions, such as Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*, which were translated into Slovene almost immediately after their original publication. The data (although limited to a selection of women authors) additionally shows that since 1990, literature by prominent women authors is better represented in Slovene translation, which is in line with the finding about Slovene literature by women authors being much better represented in the post-socialist period than before. These findings speak in favour of the hypothesis that one of the reasons that Munro was overlooked by Slovene publishers for so long was her status as a woman author writing about women's issues. It is interesting, however, that some women authors (such as Erica Jong) received almost immediate attention from Slovene publishers, while others, like Munro, were side-lined. The question of the selection of authors and texts that are translated into Slovene will be dealt with in section 4, which will focus on the dynamics of the Slovene publishing industry. In the following section, I will investigate Munro's place in the Slovene literary space against the background of the popularity of the short story genre in Slovenia.

3 Munro as Exclusively a Short Story Writer

That Munro is exclusively a short-story writer has possibly contributed to her late introduction to Slovene readers, as has been observed by Jason Blake (2012, 182), who also points to the fact that short stories do not sell as well as novels do. Besides the general lesser popularity of short stories among readers in comparison to novels, we also need to consider that the short story genre has a much shorter tradition in Slovenia in comparison to Canada. Its early beginnings in Canada date back to the first sketches and stories written by Thomas McCulloch and Thomas Chandler Haliburton in the 1820s and 1830s (Weaver 1997, 1058). As Michelle Gadpaille (1988, 3) explains, Canadian short fiction writers started producing short stories proper in the late 19th century and found a market for them in American magazines; however, they did not follow the American short story tradition but developed "in two other directions: the naturalistic animal story and the local-colour story" (Gadpaille 1988, 4). The first short story anthology appeared in Canada in 1928 (Gadpaille 1988, 18). The author who stands out during the period of the consolidation of the Canadian short story is Morley Callaghan, who began to publish his stories in the European literary magazine *This Quarter*, thus marking the beginning of a period "when the short story became simultaneously serious and profitable" (Gadpaille 1988, 25). After World War II, two literary magazines that later combined into the *Northern Review* played a major role in the development of the Canadian short story (Weaver 1997, 1059). In the 1950s, the Canadian radio CBC became another important medium, besides literary magazines, "for popularizing the developing Canadian short story" (Gadpaille 1988, 34). Robert Weaver claims that in the 1960s, the short story became "one of the most interesting and varied literary genres" (1997, 1960) in Canada. This was also the period when Alice Munro's first book-length publication appeared. According to Geoff Hancock (1997, 1061–62), the short story flourished in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, also owing to creative-writing workshops, university programmes, and literary competitions. As Nischik (2007, 1)

points out, the number of short story anthologies published per year proves that the short story genre remains lively and productive in Canada.

While short fiction has a long tradition in Slovenia as well, going back to the 19th century, with writers such as Janko Kersnik, Ivan Tavčar and Ivan Cankar, (Štuhec 2001, 75), the rise of the short story as a form happened in the 1980s (Bošnjak 2005, 204; Žbogar 2005, 17). According to Tomo Virk (1998, 291) the intensive development of the short story in Slovenia in the 1980s was influenced by postmodernist short fiction and the American meta-fictionists. However, Virk (2004) points to the problem of the definition of the short story within Slovene literary theory, for there existed several names for short fiction written by older generations of Slovene authors. According to Alenka Žbogar (2005, 18), the term *kratka zgodba* (short story) became increasingly used in Slovene literary theory in the 1990s, while in the 1980s the term *zgodba* (story) was more often used. Žbogar (2009) also notes that there was a considerable increase in the production of short stories in Slovenia between 1980 and 2000 and that they became market oriented. The increased interest in the short story was also accompanied by the publication of several short story anthologies after 1990. Andrej Koritnik (1997/1998, 167) argues that the first anthology of short stories titled *Čas kratke zgodbe*, published in 1998, represented an important milestone for Slovene literary theory, which previously had no clear idea of the short story form. The short story is nowadays widespread in Slovenia, a fact confirmed by the number of short-story contests organized, the one with the longest tradition being the annual contest of the Third Programme (ARS) of the National Radio, which has been taking place for 30 years. Short story contests are also organized by the literary journals *Sodobnost* (in the past together with the Slovene Writers' Association) and *AirBeletrina*, among others. Many Slovene writers nowadays lend their pens to the short story; however, in comparison to the genre's long tradition in Canada and its stage of maturity and perfection, the short story is still a young genre in Slovenia. Andrej Blatnik (2010, 21), the Slovene author of several short stories and a manual on how to write a short story (*Pisanje kratke zgodbe*), argues that the short story's tendency to experiment with narrative techniques is one reason that this genre is less popular with readers than the novel. In a small book market like Slovenia, the fact that short story collections sell less, along with the plethora of domestic short story writers, undoubtedly contributes to publishers having less interest in producing translations of short story collections. Additionally, Blatnik's remark about experimenting with narrative techniques undoubtedly holds true for Munro's short stories, which are characterized – particularly those written in the late period – by cryptic openings and narrative gaps (Gadpaille and Mohar 2014), multi-layered structures (Löschnigg 2014, 25), and “suggestive, deliberately fragmentary representations and open endings” (Nischik 2007, 206), all of which make them complex reading and therefore less suitable for a large readership.

4 The Slovene Translation and Publishing Industry

Jason Blake has argued that the Slovene translation industry seems chaotic in terms of the choice of authors and works that are translated, for this choice is often “an eclectic mix of personal initiative, market concerns and pure chance” (2012, 177). There seems to be no national strategy about which foreign authors get translated into Slovene; therefore,

the choice of authors and works depends on the individual publishing house. Blake also observes that until recently, only “a handful of leading authors from a given country” (2012, 187) were translated into Slovene, and claims that Munro’s work was long overshadowed by other, more famous Canadian authors, such as Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje. A survey on the popularity of Alice Munro in Slovenia, conducted within the Canada Consumed project that was launched by the CEACS, has shown that Atwood is still more widely recognizable in Slovenia than Munro, even after the latter won the Nobel Prize (see Mohar and Gadpaille 2019), which seems logical – one reason for this being that Atwood has worked hard on building an international profile, the other that she has been available in Slovene translation for more than twenty years longer than Munro.

That the Nobel Prize is no guarantee of an author’s popularity with the Slovene readership has previously been shown by several researchers who have dealt with the reception of Nobel laureates and other widely popular authors in Slovenia. Tomaž Onič (2007) and Urša Gavez (2016), for instance, report that the works of the Nobel Prize winning British playwright Harold Pinter were mostly translated into Slovene before he won the prize (which happened in 2005), and despite his unique and engaging style (see Onič 2016), there have been few re-translations of his works since. Polona Ramšak (2021) finds that this might be characteristic particularly of contemporary Nobel Prize winners, because older generations of laureates still present strong competition for contemporary authors. Simon Zupan (2020), for example, points to Hemingway’s continuous popularity in Slovenia and to the fact that library loans of his works available in Slovene have increased by 20% in the last two decades. On the other hand, as Ramšak (2021, 109–10) notices, there are also cases when an author who has not won an important literary award nevertheless becomes very popular in Slovenia, such as the case of Karl May (see Trupej 2020), or that of Edgar Allan Poe, who, according to Zupan (2015, 121), was very popular in Slovenia in the period between the two wars despite his low popularity in the USA.

A survey conducted for my PhD thesis in 2016, within which I contacted several Slovene publishers, including those who published one or more translations of Munro, offers insight into how publishers choose foreign authors and works to be translated into Slovene. The survey included the following publishers: Mladinska knjiga, Celjska Mohorjeva družba, Beletrina, Sanje, Miš and Litera. All publishing houses included in the interviews reported that they followed a yearly plan in their choice of works to be published; however, the smaller publishing houses felt more freedom to adjust their plan to current market conditions. The then editor-in-chief of the leading Slovene publishing house Mladinska knjiga, Andrej Ilc (2016), explained that literary agents and book fairs played a key role in their choice of literary works to be translated; however, they also considered which works were being translated into other languages. The oldest Slovene publishing house, Celjska Mohorjeva družba (Petrovčič Jerina 2016), provided a similar answer to the question of how they chose foreign works to be translated; additionally, they also emphasized the importance of literary awards and of the need for the chosen work to be compatible with the publishing house’s general concept. While Mladinska knjiga found literary awards less important in their choice of titles to be translated, since they strived towards a balanced representation of literatures and genres (Ilc 2016), both publishing houses mentioned that translators sometimes played a

critical role in the choice of literary works, as did subsidies (Ilc 2016; Petrovčič Jerina 2016). Beletrina's then editor Anja Kovač (2016) explained that translations represented one half of all books they published per year and that literary awards as well as longlists and shortlists for literary awards played an important role in their choice of authors and works to be translated, as did subsidies, on which the publishing house depended considerably. The Sanje publishing house reported that it was mostly the editors who decided which books to translate; however, sometimes a translator's enthusiasm for a certain work as well as literary awards played a decisive role (Koprivec 2016). Representatives of the Miš publishing house explained that they often translated authors who were not yet internationally famous, and that literary awards and subsidies were not a decisive factor (Miš Svoljšak 2016). The editor-in-chief of Litera, Orlando Uršič (2016), explained that their publishing house focused on translations of foreign literature written mostly by European authors – preferably living – and those dealing with problems affecting contemporary society, and that it was usually the translators and sometimes also the editor who proposed a literary work for translation.

The three publishing houses that published translations of Munro's work were additionally asked to explain their decision to publish this author. Litera's 2010 translation of *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* was the first book-length Slovene translation of Munro (by Katja Šaponjič), which was followed by Miš's translation of *Too Much Happiness* (by Jana Ambrožič), appearing in the same year. That the first two translations were published in the same year is merely a coincidence, as is the fact that they appeared only a year after Munro won the Man Booker International Prize. In the case of Litera's translation, it was the then editor Petra Vidali (2016) who selected the book because of its high quality. In the case of Miš's translation, it was also the editor, Irena Miš Svoljšak, who selected the title. She was introduced to Munro's works during her travels in the USA and Canada, and when contacted by a book agency in 2009, she opted for this title based on the book's favourable reviews (Miš Svoljšak 2016). The following (and so far last) three Slovene translations of Munro were all published by Celjska Mohorjeva družba, whose decision to translate the collections was influenced by Munro's winning the Nobel Prize in 2013, as well as my proposal as the translator, for I already had a longstanding cooperation with this publishing house and was working on my PhD thesis on Munro at the time she received the award. I also proposed the titles to be translated: *Dear Life* as the most recent collection seemed a logical choice (the translation appeared in 2014), while *Runaway*, which was translated a year later, and *The View from Castle Rock* (translated in 2017) were suggested by my PhD mentor Michelle Gadpaille. For the purpose of this paper, I have contacted the three publishing houses again to discover how well their translations of Munro's collections have been selling and whether they would be willing to publish another volume by Munro. All three publishing houses, Celjska Mohorjeva družba (Ozvatič 2022), Miš (Miš Svoljšak 2022) and Litera (Uršič 2022) replied that they had signed a five-year contract for the publishing rights, and while Miš and Litera managed to sell all the copies of their volumes, Celjska Mohorjeva still has several copies of all three titles; among these, *Ljubo življenje* (*Dear Life*) has sold the most copies and *Pogled z grajske pečine* (*The View from Castle Rock*) the fewest. The Miš publishing house (Miš Svoljšak 2022) would not consider publishing another title by Munro, because they are a small publishing house and do not focus primarily on books for adults. Neither is Litera (Uršič 2022) considering publishing another volume by Munro; they have limited their publication of translations, because translations

have flooded the Slovene book market, and readers are now increasingly looking for original works. Celjska Mohorjeva, on the other hand, is willing to consider publishing another title by Munro after they manage to sell all the copies of the translated collections, for they believe it is important that Munro's works be available to Slovene readers (Ozvatič 2022). Like Litera, Celjska Mohorjeva (Ozvatič 2022) also claims that sales of translations of literary works are declining, because people prefer to borrow books from libraries than buy them. If a publisher is unable to sell all the copies within the five-year contract, the contract needs to be renewed and additional payments made to be able to continue selling the book (Ozvatič 2022). This explains the low print run of Munro's books – all translations of Munro's works were printed in 500 copies each, which seems to be sufficient for the book market in a nation of two million like Slovenia. However, the low print run consequently makes the books more expensive and thus less accessible to readers.

The deterioration in the situation on the Slovene book market concerning translations of literary works, as has been observed by Celjska Mohorjeva and Litera, partly explains the lack of interest in publishing additional Munro collections in Slovene. The COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the already fragile situation on the Slovene book market, as Blaž Mazi (2020) observes in the article titled “Knjige so poražene. Zmagale so uteži za domači fitnes” (English: “Books are defeated. Weights for home fitness have won”), referring to Miha Kovač's statement that during the first wave of the pandemic, sales of books decreased by 90%, which caused a collapse in the Slovene publishing business. The closure of bookshops during the pandemic, and the absence of live book fairs and book launches have negatively impacted Slovene publishers, for, as Ozvatič (2022) explains, books sell the most at book launches, particularly original literary works which are promoted by the authors themselves. Mazi (2020) also points to the fact that the current crisis in the Slovene publishing business is connected to a reading crisis that predated the pandemic: according to a recent survey, the number of non-readers in Slovenia has lately increased to reach a similar level to that of forty years ago. The current situation in Slovenia is not an isolated case; similar trends have been observed in other countries. However, small book markets like Slovenia are undoubtedly more vulnerable in case of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The prospects of getting more Slovene translations of Munro are thus not promising at the moment, since, as we have seen, the decision to publish an author is not entirely in the hands of the publishing houses, for they are dependent on the situation of the book market, over which they have little control.

5 Conclusion

There is no single reason why Munro was not introduced to Slovene readers earlier and why there is but little interest for her works among Slovene publishers, even now that she is a Nobel Prize winning author. The fact that she is exclusively a short-story writer partly accounts for this, since the short story genre has a short tradition in Slovenia compared to Canada, and since short stories are generally less popular with readers than novels. Munro's writing about women's lives as seen from the feminine – occasionally also feminist – perspective is another reason for her late arrival in Slovenia: a large percentage of current Slovene (female) readers grew up under the socialist regime, which propagated gender

equality; thus, they could not easily identify with the restricted social roles of Munro's heroines from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. It is therefore unsurprising that the five Munro collections available in Slovene are from the author's later period, in which she moved away from the early female/feminist themes towards more contemporary settings and more universal human issues. As is often the case with foreign authors translated into Slovene, the first two Slovene translations of Munro were the result of an editor's personal initiative. Munro's winning the Nobel Prize resulted in an additional three Slovene translations of her works. With five translated volumes out of fourteen, Munro has embraced the destiny of other (contemporary) Nobel laureates in Slovenia, who are represented in the Slovene language only by a boutique selection of their works.

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