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"Canada" in the Czech Lands

Abstract

Of all the countries in Central Europe, the Czech lands have the longest and richest tradition of producing translations of works by Canadian authors and works by non-Canadians that take Canada as their theme or setting. Beginning with a translation of the British author Frederick Marryat's *The Settlers in Canada* (1875) and the first work by a Canadian, May Agnes Fleming's *Anglický roman* (original title unidentified – 1900), these works have grown in numbers and represented increasingly varied genres. The present article deals with the changes in the composition of these texts and their authorship over the past 135 years (focusing on works translated from English) as well as the shifting "image" of Canada they have created.

Résumé

De tous les pays de l'Europe centrale, les Pays tchèques ont eu la tradition la plus longue et la plus riche dans la production des traductions des œuvres écrites par des auteurs canadiens et des œuvres créées par des Non-Canadiens chez qui le Canada constitue un sujet ou un décor. A partir de la traduction d'un œuvre de l'auteur britannique Frederick Marryat, *The Settlers in Canada* (1875) et la première œuvre d'un Canadien, *Anglický román* par May Agnes Fleming (titre originel non-identifié – 1900), ces ouvrages ont augmenté en nombres et sont venus à représenter des genres progressivement variés. Le présent article aborde les changements de la composition de ces textes et de leur paternité sur les 135 années passées (en se concentrant sur des œuvres traduites de l'anglais), ainsi que l'« image » en mouvement du Canada qu'ils ont créée.

Canada has taken up residence in the Czech language in odd ways. "Canada" (***Kanada***) itself, in now outdated sports jargon, was a synonym for hockey – "He's a brilliant canada player" (***Hraje skvele kanadu***) – just as hockey (that is, ice-hockey) used to be termed "Canadian hockey" (***kanadský hokej***) and ***kanadky*** ("canadians") designated a particular kind of hockey skate. All this seems quite appropriate. Not quite so explicable, though still understandable, are two recent additions to the language: ***kanadský srub*** ("Canadian log cabin" – in fact a kind of slightly upscale home made entirely of logs – rather weirdly, including even balconies) and ***kanadský dům*** ("Canadian home" – a house employing the 2x4 technique and faced with wood). But the link between a "Canadian sled" (***kanadské saně)*** – a special kind of sled for conveying injured persons, heavy loads, etc. – and Canada itself is somewhat opaque. Even more baffling is the fact that a "canada" (***kanada***) – now usually in the form "a Canadian joke" (***kanadský žertík***) – is a kind of rough and ready practical joke. And why

should peace-loving Canada have lent its name to high, black, lace-up army boots (the current standard meaning of *kanadky*)?

Like every country, Canada is both a real place and a mental construct. One important way in which the notion of "Canada" has been created in the Czechs' minds is through translations. This article sets out to analyse the presence of Canada in the Czech lands for roughly the past century and a quarter as viewed through books by both Canadian authors as well as non-Canadians whose works are set in Canada that have been translated into Czech. The focus will be on works translated from English, though where appropriate brief mention will also be made of books that originally appeared in other languages. When numbers of entries and statistics are mentioned, these come from the database created by the CEACS Translation Research Project. The subject will be treated chronologically, in four parts: 1) the period down to 1918, which culminated in the creation of independent Czechoslovakia; 2) the interwar period and the duration of World War II; 3) 1945 to 1989, comprising the brief interlude of democracy following the war (1945-1948) and the long period of Communist rule (1948-1989); and 4) the period from 1990 to the present (2011).

Beginnings to 1918

The small number of entries from this period – only 28 – comes as no surprise. Nor is it unexpected that about a quarter of them concern works by non-Canadian authors, including the two earliest publications – *Osadníci kanadští* (*The Settlers in Canada* – 1875), a popular novel for children by the British author Frederick Marryat (who had happened to be in North America at the time of the Rebellions of 1837, and actually served for a time in the government forces used to crush them),and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's hugely admired narrative poem about the expulsion of the Acadians, *Evangelina* (*Evangeline* – 1877). The first work by a Canadian to appear in Czech, however, was *Anglický roman* (original title unidentified – 1900), a novel by May Agnes Fleming, soon followed by *Tragédie ženy* (*A Wife's Tragedy* – 1904), *Magdina Přísaha* (*Magdalene's Vow* – 1905) and *Dítě Venušino* (*The Actress's Daughter* –1908). Though largely forgotten nowadays, Fleming embodied what was in some ways an archetypal Canadian literary career. Born in 1840, she published her first novel in 1863 – in the United States (in this case, New York), as was so often the case in the nineteenth and even well into the twentieth century. Two years later she moved there – again, for a successful Canadian writer to move south (or to Great Britain) was a commonplace – and by the time she died at the age of 39 in 1880, she had published around forty novels and was one of the most successful, and best-paid, novelists of her day. The novels themselves were what best-sellers so often are–highly charged, sensational romantic fiction. However, though set in the United States or England, Fleming often tried, sometimes in ingenious ways, to introduce at least some link to Canada – subsidiary action, for example, or one of the characters being a Canadian or having some connection with Canada.

This period also witnessed the appearance in Czech of the first translations of works by Ernest Thompson Seton – in fact these represent almost half the entries in this period, a harbinger of things to come. The early appearance of so many titles by Seton is linked to his Wood-

craft Indians Movement – a precursor of the Boy Scouts – and its discovery by the Czech high school teacher Miloš Seifert who, like Seton, rejected what he considered the over-regimented, paramilitary nature of the Boy Scouts (uniforms, saluting, roll-calls) in favour of a more democratic, and pacific, movement focused on the natural world. Seifert was in direct communication with Seton, translated his works, and before the First World War started up a small group based on Seton's principles. With their first summer camp in 1913, they were apparently the first offspring of the Woodcraft movement in Europe; remarkably, the movement continues to exist in the Czech Republic to this day.

The attraction felt by Czechs towards the wilds of Canada – often subsumed under the hazy and flexible term *Amerika*, which in Czech can mean not only the United States of America but also North America (and even the Americas as a whole) – is also reflected in another Canadian author translated in this first period: Ralph Connor. The physical setting of his books is what was then termed the Canadian Northwest – that is, the Prairies and the mountains at their western extremity. This is reflected in the original title of the first book to be translated, *Black Rock, A Tale of the Selkirks* (1907), though the Czech version of the title – *Černá Skála: Obraz ze života v pralese amerického severu* (*Black Rock: A Picture from Life in the Virgin Forest of the American North*) – obscures the setting and bears out the truth of the point just made about *Amerika*. What is particularly intriguing in the case of this translation, however, is its genesis: it was published in New York by the American Tract Society, a Protestant organization established for the purpose of disseminating Christian literature. Connor – in real life Charles William Gordon – was a Presbyterian minister, and many of his works feature, in addition to their action-packed plots, protagonists whose strong Christian principles enable them to triumph over their adversaries. It is perhaps not beside the point to speculate as to whether, though appealing to the Czechs' love of the wilds, the ATC might have had as its primary goal the spreading of God's (Protestant) word in the overwhelmingly Catholic Czech homeland.

To round out the account of this inaugural period, it should be mentioned that it also saw the appearance of the first work by a Franco-Canadian, Adolphe Basile Routhier's *Setník* (*Le Centurion: roman des temps messianiques)*, a deeply Catholic piece of historical fiction by the man who was the author of the original words to "O Canada", and the first piece of non-fiction by a Canadian author – George Monro Grant's *Náboženství světová* (*The Religions of the World*).

Summing up these early years, then, one could say that it was "representative" in a double sense: three of the most popular contemporary Canadian writers of fiction – authors with a major international presence – were translated (Fleming, Connor and Seton), and the overall image of Canada presented was that of a country dominated by the natural world.

1918-1944

Quantitatively, this period marks a great leap forward – 190 entries. But well over a third of these (70 entries) represent works by non-Canadian authors, the majority of them (41 entries) by one individual: James Oliver Curwood. Curwood was an interwar phenomenon. An American, his life was utterly changed by a visit he made to Canada's Rocky Mountains in

1909; thereafter he returned annually to "the North" (predominantly the Yukon and Alaska) to gain inspiration for the series of novels that led to his being one of the top-ten American best-sellers in the early 1920s. The title of one of his works – ***Na oné straně: Romance divočiny*** (***The Country Beyond: A Romance of the Wilderness*** – 1923) – suggests the typical setting of his fast-paced novels: that of another – ***Filip Steele od královské jízdní policie*** (***Steele of the Royal Mounted*** – 1927) – the kind of archetypal Canadian figure he was so fond of featuring. As the paramount author in the sub-genre of "the Mountie novel" – most of whose authors were in fact Americans – and celebrant of "the North", he was undoubtedly a major contributor to the creation of what was for a long time the dominant image of Canada among Czechs. (In fact Curwood was actually employed at one point by the Canadian government to write about the Canadian North; see Berton, 27). In this he was seconded by other non-Canadians, most notably Jack London. London's animal novels ***Bílý tesák*** (***White Fang)*** and ***Volání divočiny*** (***The Call of the Wild***) had first appeared in Czech earlier (in 1913 and 1918 respectively), but flourished notably in the interwar years, being retranslated and re-issued by various publishing houses every year or two. In lesser numbers, other works by other foreign authors, both living and dead – Robert Michael Ballantyne (who had actually spent six years in Canada as an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company), H. Mortimer Batten, Ridgwell Cullum, Laurie York Erskine – did their bit to reinforce this specific image of the country.

However, the leading figure in this respect was undoubtedly Seton. With 76 entries – an astounding 40 percent of the interwar total – he is in a class by himself, ***the*** Canadian author in this period, even though he was most probably regarded by Czechs as an American (as was indeed true from 1931, when he took out American citizenship). The reasons for Seton's popularity are complex, bound up with specific Czech cultural, social and historical factors. One essential precondition was the Czechs' closeness to the countryside – among European countries even today the Czech Republic has one of the largest proportions of its population living in small towns and villages – and their active enjoyment of it: nowhere on the continent is there such a dense network of hiking trails, and the country is among the top two or three in terms of second homes (cabins and cottages) situated in the countryside. On the other hand, the country the Czechs inhabit is small, landlocked, highly civilized and even bureaucratized: from that perspective, Seton's works represent an attractive "other", resonating with what is perceived of as the openness and freedom of the vast empty "natural" spaces of "America". A third factor stems from the development of young people's groups in the interwar period. Mention has already been made of the Woodcraft movement, which continued to thrive between the wars and looked to Seton for inspiration. Even more important was the Scouting movement, which developed in parallel with the Woodcraft movement (the Scouts' first camp was held in 1912) and had a very strong presence in the interwar years, enjoying particular prestige because of the widespread Anglophilia that marked the country at this time. Finally there was a third group, the product of the unique Czech phenomenon of "tramping", whose roots go back to the early 1920s. This movement sprang up quite spontaneously within the fledgling Scout movement among young people who disliked its hierarchical structure and what they felt was its obsession with discipline; for some there was also a social element, in that Scout uniforms were costly and beyond the resources of many working-class young people. These individuals chose a different path for satisfying their love of the natural world:

coming together in groups of friends, they would go out into the countryside on weekends or during the summer, gathering round campfires in the evening to sing their American-inspired "Czech country" songs and sleeping out under the stars. Calling themselves "tramps" – the Czech translation of "hobo" in Jack London's autobiographical memoir ***The Road*** (***Cesta*** – 1922) – they formed a powerful third strand in the Czech tradition of fascination with and love of "the wild". For all three groups of young people, Seton's works became canonical. Miloš Seifert translated no fewer than eleven of Seton's books, some of which were issued by the Scouting Federation's publishing house; from the memoirs of "tramps" it is clear that they, too, were avid readers of Seton. In addition to the animal stories, his ***Two Little Savages*** (***Dva divoši***) was a favourite text, serving as it did as a practical handbook for life in the woods and appealing to the general Central Europe obsession with "the Red Man" as well as the particular Czech penchant for theatre and play-acting (the sub-title of the book is ***Being the Adventures of Two Boys who Lived as Indians and What They Learned***). First appearing in 1925, it went through three re-editions before the end of the 1930s (with five to follow in the post-war Communist era, and two more after the collapse of Communism, the most recent in 2005).

The wide open spaces of Canada also form the setting (and the local fauna often the theme) of the works of a small number of other Canadian authors translated during this period: again, Ralph Connor; Sir Charles G.D. Roberts (along with Seton the creator of the modern animal story); and Grey Owl (a transplanted Englishman posing successfully as a Native Canadian, famous for his campaign to save the beaver, at that time – the 1930s – severely over-trapped). Other perspectives on Canada are presented by two very disparate Canadian authors. In her romantic "Jalna" series, Mazo de la Roche depicts a Canada characterized by a kind of rural aristocracy that is in fact an imaginary colonial imitation of an imagined English original. Yet the works depicting this fantastic world were international best-sellers, which helps explain why de la Roche was second only to Seton among Canadian authors when it came to translations into Czech between the wars, with the Jalna series accounting for 12 entries in the database. At the opposite extreme from the literary point of view is Marta Ostenso, one of the more distinguished Canadian realist authors, with three titles: ***Vášnivé touhy*** (***The Passionate Flight*** – 1929), ***Májový nov*** (***The Young May Moon*** – 1931) and ***Divoké husy: Román z americké farmy*** (***Wild Geese*** – 1939). Again, the sub-title added to the last-mentioned work – ***A Novel from an American Farm*** – once more elides Canada (in this case the prairie province of Manitoba) into the wider "America".

And finally – rather unexpectedly, perhaps, though in line with the long tradition of Canadian writers "going international" – there are seven entries by Frank Packard, the Canadian author of the then well-known "Jimmie Dale" series of mystery novels dealing with the underworld in – New York.

At the close of this period come the years 1940-1944, when Czechoslovakia had ceased to exist and the rump territory of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was incorporated into the Third Reich. Perhaps surprisingly, there are eleven entries for these years, representing six titles. Of these, only one is by a Canadian – Seton. The notable publication in these years was by the Norwegian explorer Helge Ingstad. His ***Lovci kožeši: Jejich osudy a dobrodružství v severní Kanadě*** (translated from the original Norwegian), a highly attractive account of his three years as a trapper in Canada's Northwest Territories at the end of the 1920s that was

first printed in 1940 and subsequently went through four reprints, must have been perfect escape literature for Czechs at that time. Interestingly, this is the same Helge Ingstad who, twenty years later and teamed with his wife, discovered and excavated the Anse aux Meadows site at the northern tip of Newfoundland, bringing to light for the first time conclusive evidence of Norse settlement in North America.

Summing up this period, one can say that it marked the publication of a significant number of books depicting Canada, but that it was massively dominated by an image of Canada heavily skewed to the natural world and the North, to wild animals roaming in their natural habitat and to adventure and the frontier. Approximately 93 percent of the entries fall into this category, with a mere two authors – Seton and Curwood – accounting for two-thirds of these. Rather ironically, it was at precisely this period, in the course of the 1920s, that Canada crossed the threshold to becoming an urban nation, with the majority of its population living in cities.

1945 – 1989

The renewal of publication after the end of WW II was reflected in a surge of Canada-related books. Most were by popular authors – Mazo de la Roche, Curwood, Seton, London. And most of the titles in the first few years had already appeared in the pre-war period – a sign, perhaps, of a return to "normalcy". There are, however, two interesting exceptions. The first is the appearance in 1948, only three years after its first publication in Canada, of Hugh MacLennan's novel ***Two Solitudes*** (***Dvě samoty***), one of the key symbolic texts for the study of Canadian literature and indeed Canadian society. More ominous was ***Tajná zbraň SSSR*** (***Russia's Secret Weapon*** – 1947). The author, Dyson Carter, was a political activist and prominent member of the Communist Party of Canada. The "secret weapon" in question was, according to Carter, the "love and heroism" of the Soviet scientific spirit, fostered by the inspiring figure of Stalin.

The 1950s – in Czechoslovakia very thin in foreign publications generally, and in particular those from the West – continued in this vein. 1951 saw the publication of ***Kanada: Politický a hospodářský obraz země*** (***Canada: A Political and Economic Portrait of the Country***) by the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Canada, Tim Buck. The original English title of the book was more straightforward: ***Canada: The Communist Viewpoint***. Another link to Canada's Communist Party came in 1956 with the publication of Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon's ***Skalpel a meč: Životopis Dr Normana Bethuna*** (***The Scalpel, the Sword: The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune***), a biography of the innovative Canadian doctor who served alongside the Chinese Communists in the Second Sino-Japanese War and, following his death in 1939, was immortalized by Mao Zedong in his essay ***In Memory of Norman Bethune***. This work also appeared around the same time in both Hungarian and Romanian translations, but it is perhaps indicative of the political situation in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s that in this country it underwent and second (1958) and even a third (1959) edition. But the 1950s ended on a happier note, with the publication in 1959of the first work by Stephen Leacock translated into Czech. What is somewhat surprising, perhaps, is that it took the Czechs so long to discover Leacock: in the decade from 1915 to 1925 he had been the most popular humorist in the English-speaking

world. What is perhaps not so surprising is that the first title chosen for translation was ***Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*** (***Arkadská dobrodružství horních desetitisíc***), a fine work, but (surely not by chance) the only book by Leacock that could be said to have a critical social message.

Even in the nineteen-sixties, at the time of the political thaw that prepared the way for the "Prague Spring" in 1968, there were few breakthroughs by more serious contemporary Canadian writers. Farley Mowat was one, with ***Stopy ve sněhu*** (***Lost in the Barrens***) appearing in 1961, to be followed in the next quarter of a century by a further seven titles, all but one of them set in the North. It is not till 1969, however, with Brian Moore's ***Osamělá vášeň slečny Hearnové*** (***The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne***), that one comes across an individual work that might be termed canonical. But this was a false dawn. In the seventies and eighties it was mostly the same old story of Seton and Curwood and London, supplemented by the first of many works by Arthur Hailey, a few additional titles by Leacock and Mowat, and individual works by Moore, Malcolm Lowry (***Pod sopkou*** [***Under the Volcano***] – 1980), Lucy Maud Montgomery (***Anna ze Zeleného domu*** [***Anne of Green Gables***] – 1982) and so on. If one looks for the leading figures in contemporary Anglo-Canadian literature at that time, they are essentially absent. It is only as late as 1989 that one of the unquestionable "stars" of Canadian literature appears: Margaret Atwood, with a translation of ***Bodily Harm*** (***Ublížení na těle***).

Evaluating those years from the end of WW II to the end of Communism, one cannot help but remark how feeble the Canadian presence was on the literary scene in Czechoslovakia. The forty-five years account for only 163 entries, and the percentage of books by non-Canadian authors remains high – around 30 percent. Compared to the interwar years, when the database shows an annual average of 7.6 entries, this long period reveals a sharp decline, to 3.6 – less than half. It should be stressed, of course, that a similar drop could undoubtedly be observed in the case of books from all or virtually all Western countries: the Communist regime did not look favourably on literature from the West, and editors and publishers had to provide arguments to the censors for each title they proposed to publish. The present author, for example, was involved with two attempts to publish Canadian literature during this period, the first as a featured part of the country's leading literary review ***Host do domu*** in 1969, and the second in the form of a special issue of ***Světová literatura*** (***World Literature***, a monthly devoted to translations of literature from around the world) in the mid-eighties; the first came to an abrupt end when the journal was closed down, and the second foundered on a general unwillingness to put concerted effort into justifying the need to publish "unknown" authors.

There was, however, one small Czech enclave where translations of texts by Canadian authors could appear freely. In the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact in 1968, the prominent Czech author Josef Škvorecký and his wife Zdena Salivarová fled the country and emigrated to Canada. Soon after settling in Toronto, they established Sixty-Eight Publishers, devoted to the publication of books in Czech by Czech authors who were on the index in Czechoslovakia itself. In a very few cases, however, they also published translations of books into Czech. In 1975 there appeared ***Aritmetika lasky*** (***The Arithmetic of Love***), a radio feature by the author, composer and radio producer John Reeves, a prominent Canadian Czechophile with many close links to Czechs and Czechoslovakia. That same year they also published ***A co Václav?***, a murder mystery originally published in English

as ***Whatever Happened to Wenceslas?*** by the Czech-Canadian Jan Drábek, followed in 1977 by his ***Zpráva o smrti Růžového Kavalíra*** (***Report on the Death of Rosenkavalier***). Finally, in 1988, there was ***Listy z Prahy*** (***Letters from Prague***), a memoir by Gordon Skilling, another notable Canadian Czechophile whose scholarship as a historian at the University of Toronto focused on Czechoslovakia and whose devotion to the Czechoslovak cause was rewarded after 1989 when President Havel bestowed on him the country's highest honour, the Order of the White Lion.

1990-2011

Things changed dramatically in the period following the collapse of Communism at the end of 1989. Most obvious has been the quantitative leap. The 621 entries in the database for the 22 years down to 2011 represent roughly seven-and-a-half times as many per year, on average, compared with the output during the 45 years from the end of WW II to 1989. But there has also been a radical change in a less immediately obvious respect, the authors' nationality, with non-Canadian authors writing about Canada becoming marginal, dropping to only about 5 percent. Finally, and most interestingly, a much wider range of books is now being translated.

To begin with literature, it appears that the full range of Canadian literary production is now appearing in Czech. At one end are the country's "canonical" authors, both old and new – not all of them, by any means, but a very respectable selection, and often with a number of titles translated. These include Margaret Atwood (13 titles), Leonard Cohen (8 titles), Matt Cohen, Douglas Coupland, Robertson Davies (2 titles), Timothy Findley, Brad Fraser, William Gibson (10 titles), Barbara Gowdy, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Thomson Highway, George Jonas, Thomas King (2 titles), Margaret Laurence, Stephen Leacock (13 titles), Ann-Marie MacDonald, Daniel MacIvor, Yann Martel (3 titles), Anne Michaels (2 titles), Lucy Maud Montgomery (5 titles), Farley Mowat (3 titles), Susanna Moodie, Daniel David Moses, Alice Munro (3 titles), Michael Ondaatje (5 titles), Mordecai Richler (3 titles), Ernest Thompson Seton (14 titles), Carol Shields (2 titles), Drew Hayden Taylor and Catherine Parr Trail. Significantly, these cover all the main literary genres – the novel, the short story, poetry and drama.

These authors, however, represent only a fraction of those in the "literature" category. What is perhaps most surprising is the very large number of Canadian authors that have been translated and the very, very large numbers of titles and editions. This reflects the kinds of fiction they produce, popular genres of various kinds. Joy Fielding, for example – 19 titles (46 entries) in the area of thrillers and mystery novels. David Morrell – 30 titles (39 entries) for books whose nature can be guessed from a knowledge that his breakthrough book was ***First Blood***, the basis for the Rambo film series. Arthur Hailey 11 titles (33 entries), with his dramatic and suspenseful novels set in a variety of milieus. Alfred Van Vogt, one of the fathers of science fiction (20 titles). Eric Wright, with his wry detective stories set in Toronto (12 titles). Guy Gavriel Kay, a contemporary master in the fantasy genre (9 titles). Many, many romantic fiction writers, headed by Mary Balogh (10 titles), with even a sub-genre: erotic romantic fiction (Opal Carew – 1 title). A number of writers of fiction for children and young people, including

such a specialized author as Angela Dorsey, whose 18 novels, written for young girls, are all about horses. And the list could continue: it would seem that works by Canadians translated into Czech reflect virtually every category of contemporary popular fiction.

But other genres are also present. Two key texts by the great literary critic Northrop Frye have been translated – ***The Great Code*** (***Velký kód*** – 2000) and ***Anatomy of Criticism*** (***Anatomie kritiky*** – 2003) – while Marshall McLuhan has seen two translations of his works appear in Czech: ***Understanding Media*** (***Jak rozumět médiím*** – 1991) and ***Essential McLuhan*** (***Člověk, média a elektronická kultura*** – 2000). Works by several Canadian historians are now available in Czech, and perhaps unexpectedly, a respectable number of books in the area of spirituality, most notably by the Dutch-born Catholic priest Henri Nouwen (16 titles) and by a man who was his close friend, the profoundly original Catholic humanitarian and thinker Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche (5 titles). Nor should one overlook the renowned political philosopher Charles Taylor (2 titles) or one of the most widely-read publicists in the field of the social sciences in the English-speaking world today, Malcolm Gladwell (3 titles).

Canadian authors have also been coming to the Czech Republic in person in considerable numbers, both to give readings at literary festivals and to attend launches of translations of their books. Over the years the Prague Writers' Festival has invited a number of Canadians to take part in the event as featured authors. Anglophone Canada has been represented by Margaret Atwood (2000, 2008), Graeme Gibson (2008), Irving Layton (2000), Yann Martel (2003) and Anne Michaels (1999, 2000, 2009), Francophone Canada by three Acadian writers: Gérald Leblanc, Antonine Maillet and Serge Patrice Thibodeau (all in 2000). The 2007 book launch of a collection of six plays by Canadian Native authors – ***Čekání na Kojota: současné drama kanadských Indiánů*** (***Waiting for Coyote: Contemporary Drama of Canadian Indians***) – was an occasion for hosting four of the playwrights: Thompson Highway, Daniel David Moses, Ian Ross and Drew Hayden Taylor. Without any doubt, however, the most spectacular presence of Canadian authors in the Czech Republic came in 2008 as part of the annual Month of Authors' Readings in Brno, the Czech Republic's "second city". Taking place in July every year, this event, organized by the local publishing house Větrné mlyny, presents a different Czech author reading from his or her work every evening as well as a different author from a country chosen as that year's "guest of honour". In 2008 this was Canada: altogether thirty- two Canadian authors (one evening included a pair of authors) read excerpts from their works, all of which had been translated in advance into Czech and were screened simultaneously with the actual reading as an aid to understanding. Both Anglophone and Francophone authors (in roughly equal numbers) were present; the former included such well-known figures as George Eliot Clarke, Jason Sherman, Eden Robinson, Lee Maracle, Aritha van Herk, Robert Bringhurst, Lynn Coady, Sharon Butala and Michael Crummey. The readings themselves were carried on line live, and the whole series was widely publicized in the Czech media. The texts read by the authors, as well as additional translations of passages from their work, were posted on line on a number of sites, where they are still available.

What is distinctive and important about the kinds of events listed above – the Prague Writers' Festival, book launches, the Month of Authors' Readings in Brno in particular – is that the writers in question are clearly identified – even promoted – as being Canadian. This is not always the case, and in particular where popular authors are concerned, it may be doubted

whether many of their readers are even aware of their nationality: this is seldom mentioned, for example, in book reviews. Though Canadians – including the ones translated into Czech – have made important contributions to such genres as science fiction, fantasy and cyberpunk, the very nature of these genres more or less precludes any close identification with a particular place. Romance fiction, too, is situated in a peculiar non-realistic world of its own, while many thrillers and detective stories written by Canadians run their course in generic North American cities; the insights into Canadian society found in the detective fiction of Eric Wright, for example, are exceptional in this regard. But this only reflects a wider shift in literary texts generally, one marked on the one hand by a movement away from the prevalence of classic realistic fiction and on the other by a pronounced globalization: more and more authors nowadays write within a transnational context, their work inspired by foreign settings or their old homelands. Canadian literary texts in particular are marked by this phenomenon, one that has serious consequences for the concept of a "national literature".

This being the case, the "image" of Canada created by the works being translated into Czech is one of great complexity. There has been a dramatic decrease in the mediation of Canada through the eyes of non-Canadians, and a significant increase in the variety and range of texts dealing with Canada or written by Canadians – in many cases, arguably, from a unique or distinctively Canadian perspective. Canada as the quintessential embodiment of a world of unspoiled nature is no longer dominant (though that is of course still a strong theme). Instead, the literature produced by Canadian authors (whether native-born or immigrants) depicts a society that is cosmopolitan, shaped by a richly layered local culture and at the same time open to all the currents transforming the world today. In addition, the variety of genres produced by Canadian writers creates not so much a picture of Canada as of Canadians as pioneers and leading spirits in new literary directions and new ways of interpreting knowledge.

It is possible that this image is bolstered by the increased presence of Canadian culture generally in the Czech Republic: in both the fine and the performing arts, visiting (and even some resident) Canadian artists and performers have become a regular part of the Czech scene. Indeed, some of the Canadian authors mentioned above are probably better known in the Czech Republic as performers. Thompson Highway, for example, has returned on several occasions in recent years with his Kisageetin Cabaret; similarly, Leonard Cohen came twice to Prague (2008, 2009), both times playing to sold-out houses. From this point of view, they are simply part of a Canadian cultural "offensive" that includes large numbers of singers, musicians, actors, theatre people, filmmakers, painters, sculptors and dancers, all of whom collectively have contributed to the creation of an image of Canada and Canadian culture as exciting and dynamic, an image that is peculiarly attractive to the Czech public.

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