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# Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic and Central Europe – A Personal History

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This article surveys the development of Canadian Studies in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic from 1985 (the year the first such course was offered at a Czech university) down to the present. It also deals with the wider context of the development of Canadian Studies in Central Europe under the aegis of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies, established in 2003 with its Secretariat located at Masaryk University, Brno. In both the Czech Republic and the wider region, the late 1990s saw a steady growth in Canadian Studies, fostered by financial support from the Canadian government and outreach activities by Western European Canadian Studies associations. The first decade of the twenty-first century saw an explosion of activities - many new courses and degree programmes, conferences and specialized seminars, international projects, publications, the launching of the *Central European Journal for Canadian Studies*. The century's second decade, however, has witnessed retrenchment, the result of systemic changes in higher education systems and the Canadian government's cancellation of all support for Canadian Studies activities in 2012. Nevertheless, in both the Czech Republic and Central Europe, Canadian Studies continues to enjoy a significant and respected presence in the higher education sphere.

**Key words:** Canadian Studies; Czech Republic; Czechoslovakia; Central European Association for Canadian Studies (CEACS)

## Introduction

The birth of Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic can be pinpointed exactly: spring semester in 1985, when the first university course devoted to a Canadian topic was offered to students in the Department of English and American Studies at what is now Masaryk University, Brno (then still in its Communist-era guise as Jan Evangelista Purkyně University). This event is recent enough that the "institutional memory" of the development of the discipline in the country can still be compassed in the mind of a single Canadianist. But any full treatment of Canadian Studies in the Czech

Republic must take into account both its national history and its development at the regional level within the broader framework of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies (CEACS). To be sure, this holds true for Canadian Studies in virtually all the countries in the region, but as the Canadian Studies Centre in Brno played a key role in the creation of the CEACS, and has always hosted its Secretariat, “institutional memory” demands that this article should also trace the growth of Canadian Studies in the Central European region as a whole since the mid-1990s.

Though university curricula during the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia were in theory centrally designed and controlled, in practice there was considerable diversity, both in curricula structures and, more particularly, in what courses were actually taught as well as their content. Compared to other Czech universities, the university in Brno (and particularly its Faculty of Arts) was relatively liberal, less rigid in the control it exerted and leaving much decision-making up to individual departments. In retrospect, the freedom given to individual teachers strikes one as remarkable. As a result, the genesis of the pioneering Canadian literature course mentioned above was simple: in the fall of 1984, as a member of the Department (my main subject at the time was American literature), I simply dropped into the office of the acting Head, Josef Hladký, and asked him if I could offer a Canadian literature course as an elective the following semester. He agreed – no questions were asked about content – and that was that.

In subsequent years I created additional courses, but only one could be offered per year. Students were enthusiastic about the courses – for many reasons, Canada has always been a source of great fascination for Czechs<sup>1</sup> – but there were major problems in finding materials on which to base the teaching. Most of the books came from my personal library, which I was able to build up through purchases made on visits to Canada (my home country). However, the inaccessibility of photocopying facilities in Czechoslovakia at the time (the tiny number of photocopiers that did exist were reserved for official use in order to prevent their being employed for “subversive” ends) meant that virtually all material intended for distribution to students had to be typed. As a result, poetry played a large role in the courses, and to a limited extent short stories (preferably short short stories) as well. When it came to longer fiction, individual students would be asked to read specific novels and report on them to class. Cassettes, too, proved useful. Given the resources available, the courses were of necessity very lean.

It might be thought that all these problems would vanish following the end of the Communist regime in December 1989. Some did – Xerox machines suddenly appeared on the scene, for example, and the days of quasi-samizdat preparation of course materials ended – but the situation was still difficult. In particular, the Canadian government had no official mechanisms in place in Czechoslovakia, or in any of the other former Communist countries in Central Europe, that would enable it to promote and support Canadian Studies in the region. In this situation, it was up to the individual embassies to take the initiative. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the Canadian Embassy in Prague acted quickly and boldly. In the spring of 1990 it awarded grants of 10,000 CAD each to Charles University in Prague and Komenský

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<sup>1</sup> See my treatment of this subject in “‘Canada’ in the Czech Lands”, in Kürtösi, Katalin and Don Sparling (eds.), *Canada in Eight Tongues*, Brno, Masaryk University, 2012, pp. 39-48.

University in Bratislava for the express purpose of introducing Canadian Studies at these institutions. The funding had two components: the first enabled a teacher to travel to Canada for a month so as to meet local Canadianists, establish contacts for possible cooperation, and research material for future Canadian Studies courses; the second was earmarked for the purchase of Canadian books. A similar grant to Masaryk University specified that it was to be used exclusively for book purchases in order to expand the collection already there, the ultimate aim being to create a significant regional Canadian Studies library collection.

For roughly the first half of the 1990s, the only individuals pursuing Canadian Studies systematically in the (since 1993) Czech Republic were myself at Masaryk University and Miroslav Jindra at Charles University. Well-known as an Americanist, Jindra was instrumental in establishing Canadian Studies on a sound footing at the Prague English Department and training younger colleagues in the field. Here in Brno, I was able to increase the number of courses devoted to Canada; greater resources, including class sets of specific novels and short story anthologies, introduced greater variety and brought more flexibility. Particularly useful was a collection of video cassettes with National Film Board productions that had been donated to the Department by the Canadian Embassy in Prague when it closed down its lending service. Films on specific authors could be used to enrich the literature courses, while others provided material for courses on Canadian film as well as on various aspects of Canadian culture and society. However, the development of Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic as a whole only began to take off in the second half of the 1990s, and to understand this we have to look at the situation of Canadian Studies internationally in this period and its specific impact on Canadian Studies in the Central European region.

## The wider world of Canadian Studies

The creation/development of Canadian Studies as a discipline outside Canada dates from around 1970. The first Canadian Studies Centres were established at Johns Hopkins University in 1969 and the University of Bordeaux in 1970, while the first Canadian Studies association, the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States, dates from 1971 (Jaumain 17). Gradually, further associations began to emerge elsewhere in the world. In 1981, the International Council for Canadian Studies was established as an umbrella organization bringing together the nine then-existing national and regional Canadian Studies associations; its founding members represented Canadianists in Australia and New Zealand, Canada, France, the German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Japan, and the United States. In the course of the following decade, seven more members were added, from China, Israel, India, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), Spain, and the USSR, as well as two associate members, the Canadian Studies Centre at the Université Libre in Brussels and the American Council for Québec Studies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It currently groups 23 member associations and 5 associate members representing Canadianists in a total of 42 countries.

This rise in institutional activity reflected the increasing importance of public diplomacy in Canada's foreign policy and the role played in it by the promotion of Canadian Studies.<sup>3</sup> What was interesting was the broad definition of the discipline adopted by the then Department of External Affairs, which "in contrast to the humanities-based approach of American Studies . . . subscribed to an inclusive Canadian tradition of 'history, politics, literature, sociology, economics' as the prime disciplines of Canadian Studies."<sup>4</sup> To promote the study of Canada, in 1976 DEA began to provide grants to both individuals and institutions, a programme that was to continue and expand for over thirty-five years. Canadian embassies sought out potential Canadianists and encouraged them to become engaged in the field. Financial support was offered in the form of what came to be called Faculty Enrichment and Faculty Research Grants, which covered the cost of travel to Canada and accommodation there for a month for academics engaged, or wishing to become engaged, in Canadian Studies. The purpose of the former was to gather material for the introduction of a new Canada-focused course (or courses) at the home university, of the latter to carry out research for an article or part of a book dealing with Canada. As increasing numbers of academics became active in the field, they were encouraged to found national/regional Canadian Studies associations, and these too could apply for funds to carry out core activities such as holding conferences and publishing journals.

In 1990, the eight Canadian Studies associations in Europe came together to organize the first European Canadian Studies Conference in The Hague. Its success led to the formal establishment of the European Network for Canadian Studies (ENCS), which served as a forum for the organization of further pan-European events, in particular subsequent European conferences and an annual European Student Seminar on Graduate Work in Canadian Studies, which moved from venue to venue each year. But perhaps the ENCS activity with the most long-lasting impact was the initiative to extend Canadian Studies to the former Communist countries of Central Europe. In 1995, the ENCS organized a meeting at Budmerice, Slovakia, to which it had asked the Canadian embassies in the Central European region to send academics who were already involved in Canadian Studies in their countries or others they felt might be encouraged to take up the discipline. Virtually all the Central Europeans present were meeting the other (potential) Canadianist colleagues for the first time; the ENCS was, as it were, playing the role of matchmaker. The ENCS representatives at the meeting, headed by the network's Convenor, Cor Remie of the Netherlands, explained the possibilities open to those interested in pursuing Canadian Studies, and encouraged them to work together to build up the discipline in the region.

But the Budmerice meeting was not intended as a one-off event. The ENCS followed it up by inviting me to join the ENCS as a link to Canadianists in Central Europe, and with support from Ottawa, it initiated an intensive outreach programme to the region. Responsibility for this was entrusted to the Association for Canadian Studies in the German-speaking Countries (GKS),<sup>5</sup> and it took two main forms. First,

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<sup>3</sup> See Polachová, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Hoerder 296, quoting Cowley et al.

<sup>5</sup> The Nordic Association for Canadian Studies played a similar outreach role for the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania).

German academics were funded to travel to universities in Central Europe, where they delivered lectures on Canadian topics and taught intensive courses focused on Canada. And second, funding was provided to enable Central Europeans to attend the annual conference of the GKS at Grainau in Bavaria. The numbers involved in the latter initiative were not small. For three years (2000-2002) twenty Central European academics attended each year; in 2003 this was reduced to ten participants. In subsequent years places were left open for Central Canadianists, but they had to cover the costs themselves or find funding elsewhere. Attending the Grainau conference meant experiencing a crash course in Canadian Studies: papers given there covered the whole wide range of Canadian Studies, and every year one or more distinguished Canadian guests provided insight into some issue of current concern. The venue also offered an unrivalled opportunity to meet colleagues in one's discipline – not only German and Austrian and Swiss members of the GKS, but Canadianists from many other countries in Europe as well as from Canada itself: the conference had established an enviable reputation as one of the most attractive events in the Canadian Studies calendar internationally.

The Grainau conference also served a crucial third purpose: it was here that Central European Canadianists first began to cooperate on regional projects. In 1997, a small informal group comprising representatives from all the Central European countries met in Grainau and agreed that a regional conference would be the best way of highlighting the emergence of Canadian Studies in the region. This led, in October 1998, to the organization of the 1st International Conference of Central European Canadianists, held in Brno in October 1998. Following the success of this event, which attracted around 100 participants from across the region, the decision was taken (in 1999) to formally establish a Central European Steering Committee for Canadian Studies, which was to guide Canadian Studies in the Central European region for the next few years. Its initial project was the creation of a scholarly journal, the first issue of which appeared in 2001 as the *Central European Journal for Canadian Studies*. That same year saw the second CEACS international conference, in Bucharest. From its Secretariat at Masaryk University in Brno, the Steering Committee sent out regular information on Canadian Studies activities in the region and beyond, and communicated to Ottawa the special needs of Canadianists in the region. Its audience was a growing number of academics, and their students, who had been attracted to Canadian Studies through the efforts of members of the Steering Committee as well as of local embassies throughout the region. Of great importance in this connection was the decision by the Canadian government in 1995 to make Central European Canadianists eligible for FRP and FEP grants, which they applied for, and received, in significant numbers: in the years leading up to 2000, 10 to 12 were successful each year; in the new millennium, this rose to around 15 annually. These grants were instrumental in creating a steadily growing pool of increasingly qualified Canadian Studies experts throughout the region.

From the beginning, one of the Steering Committee's main goals was to form an official association. This came to fruition in 2003 with the creation of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies, registered with its headquarters at Masaryk University. For a number of good reasons, the Polish Canadianists, though remaining on the Steering Committee, had decided in 2001 to form their own association. Now, with the creation of the CEACS, this formalized cooperation came to an

end, though of course many informal links between the two associations and their individual members have remained down to the present day. The new association comprised eight countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.<sup>6</sup> In 2004, it became an associate member of the ICCS, and in 2007 a full member. At the time it joined the ICCS it had 210 members, making it one of the Council's larger medium-sized associations.

From the Secretariat in Brno, the CEACS has coordinated a wide range of activities. Its triennial international conferences continue, the most recent (the 8th) having taken place in Prague in September 2018. Volume 14 of the *Central European Journal for Canadian Studies* appeared in the fall of 2019. The association has carried out three research projects involving its members. The first dealt with the Central European diaspora in Canada and resulted in *Migrating Memories: Central Europe in Canada*, which was published in two volumes in December 2010. The first (Vesna Lopičić, ed.) was a literary anthology, the second (Rodica Albu, ed.) a collection of oral histories dealing with Central Europeans' accounts of their experience as immigrants to Canada. The second project explored literary works, literary criticism, and scholarly works in the areas of the humanities and social sciences that were written by Canadians (or, in the case of those written by non-Canadians, that dealt with or were set in Canada) that had been translated into the languages of the CEACS member countries. This project had three outcomes: a conference in the fall of 2011, a collection of essays entitled *Canada in Eight Tongues* (2012; Katalin Kürtösi, ed.), and a comprehensive on-line database of all the works that had been translated.<sup>7</sup> The most recent project looked at the reception, in the broadest sense of the term, of Canadian texts in the countries of the region since the end of Communism. *Canada Consumed: The Impact of Canadian Writing in Central Europe (1990-2017)* saw the light of day in September 2019 (Don Sparling and Katalin Kürtösi, eds.)

The association has also played an important role in the wider European Canadian Studies community. It took on responsibility for publishing the selected proceedings of the European Student Seminar on Graduate Work in Canadian Studies—eleven volumes in all—while two of the seminars were hosted by Canadian Studies Centres in the region, at Brno in 2000 and Szeged in 2004. Undoubtedly, the association's most ambitious undertaking so far was a four-year project (2010-2013) entitled "Thinking Canada", a month-long study tour that took to Canada over 125 students from all EU member states, many of whom also stayed on for two-month internships at leading Canadian bodies of all kinds, both public and private.

<sup>6</sup> With the split of Serbia in 2006, Montenegro became its ninth member country. (The association also opens membership to Canadianists from other countries on an individual basis.) This slightly unwieldy bundle of countries has led some to claim that the term "Central Europe" is a misnomer. At some point previous to 2006, this topic came up during a late evening discussion among Canadianists at the Grainau conference. One of them pointed out that if Bulgaria were ejected from the association, then, given that some regions, or all, of the remaining countries had once been part of Austria-Hungary, the group could be correctly renamed "The Association for Canadian Studies in the Former Lands of the House of Habsburg." The immediate response of a leading Austrian Canadianist who was present: "You do that, and we're in!"

<sup>7</sup> Accessible at <http://korel.savana-hosting.cz/cecanstud/www/sign/in?backlink=87hth>. Login and Password: guest. The database is updated annually.

The CEACS was the lead institution and grant recipient for the project, which was largely funded by the European Commission, with additional financial input from European Canadian Studies associations and the students themselves, and fully administered it. Roughly 25 percent of the participants were from Central Europe.

In addition to the coordination and administrative work directed from the CEACS Secretariat in Brno, Canadianists in the individual member countries have of course also been very active, not only in teaching, research, and publication, but also in holding conferences and seminars. Three examples will suffice. For many years Serbian Canadianists have been organizing a biennial conference; the 9th took place in Belgrade in April 2019. In Hungary, the Károlyi Gáspár University of the Reformed Church and Eötvös Loránd University hold a conference on some Canadian theme every November in Budapest. And for over a decade Baia Mare was well-known in the region for its unique International Unconventional Conferences of Young Canadianists, the last of which took place in 2013. In other countries, individual universities/Canadian Studies Centres hold occasional conferences on a wide variety of themes. These and many other activities and projects have enabled Canadianists from across Central Europe and elsewhere to meet and promote their mutual interests.<sup>8</sup>

However, the conditions under which Canadian Studies have been pursued changed dramatically in 2012. In May of that year, the Canadian government suddenly announced, with no warning, that it was cutting all financial support worldwide for Canadian Studies, a move that put an abrupt end to more than three decades of its engagement in the field. This decision had a profoundly negative effect on the discipline everywhere. Without the funding that had underwritten many activities (journals, conferences, and so on), Canadian Studies associations were forced to scale down their pursuits and, in most cases, raise their membership fees. This made them less attractive to their members, something that was compounded by the disappearance of the FRP and FRP grants. In the case of the CEACS, within a year it had lost about one-third of its members, dropping from 294 in 2012 to 191 in 2013. Currently its membership stands at 180.<sup>9</sup>

It should be stressed, however, that this drop in numbers was due only in part to the funding cuts. Other factors also played a major role, reflecting a series of changes not only in Central Europe but in the higher education scene across the continent and even further abroad. In the first place, cuts in university funding everywhere have resulted in the elimination of "fringe" areas such as Canadian Studies. Second, the current neo-liberal ethos calls into question higher education for its own sake: universities are called upon to show that their programmes are "relevant" and that they "make sense" economically. The big losers, of course, have been the humanities, and this strikes at the heart of Canadian Studies. Linked to this, even students have changed: increasingly they want (or feel they are forced) to undertake a degree that will be "practical," that will (they think) get them a job. The argument that university studies should help students to think and express themselves more clearly, that

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<sup>8</sup> See the CEACS's bilingual English-French website, [www.cecansstud.cz](http://www.cecansstud.cz), for extensive information on the work of the association and the activities of its members.

<sup>9</sup> In fact the CEACS survived this crisis comparatively well: several associations lost up to half their members, while others virtually ceased to function.

a university education should provide a basis for their future lives as informed and engaged citizens, has come to be regarded by many – and especially politicians – as naive, outdated, and irrelevant. Finally, depending on the country, and university, curricular changes leading to a modular-based model have also been very damaging, since few universities have the resources to create significant numbers of Canadian Studies modules, as opposed to separate, individual courses. In this situation, teachers of Canadian Studies are particularly vulnerable, as their expertise in the field has always been something “extra.” Very few were ever hired because of their interest in and commitment to Canadian Studies, and indeed most pursue the discipline at some expense to their careers, since in their teaching and research they cannot devote themselves totally to the discipline that actually takes up the major part of their time, for which they were hired and for which they are regularly evaluated.

## Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic

To return now to Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic proper, as was the case elsewhere in Central Europe the ranks of Canadianists began to swell in the second half of the 1990s. Here two important factors in this trend were the newly accessible FRP and FEP grants and the pro-active stance of the Canadian Embassy in Prague. At the time of the creation of the CEACS in 2003, it had 19 Czech members. Czech membership peaked in 2012, at 56; in 2013, the number of Czech members fell by about a quarter, to 41. Current Czech membership stands at 32.

The decade and a half from the late 1990s until 2012 can be considered the hey-day of Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic (in this it was hardly unique). By the latter date, Canadianists were active at no fewer than nine universities. Masaryk University accounted for 24 members, Charles University for 12, Palacký University in Olomouc for 6, the University of Hradec Kralové for 4, Tomáš Baťa University in Zlín for 3, and the University of Western Bohemia in Plzeň for 2. Three additional universities had one member each. Their research and teaching covered both Anglophone and Francophone Canada and drew on a very broad spectrum of areas in the humanities and social sciences. The great majority of Czech Canadianists were located at university Faculties of Arts (or their equivalent) in English and French Departments – a pattern common throughout Central Europe – while much smaller numbers worked out of Faculties of Social Sciences, Faculties of Science (geography), and other types of higher education institutions. No institution inaugurated a Canadian Studies programme or a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in Canadian Studies (in this period or later). An official Canadian Studies Centre was established at Masaryk University in 1990.

The years since 2012 have been less favourable to Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic. In addition to the general reasons for universities’ retrenchment listed above, some others more specific to the Czech situation might be mentioned. One is a demographic drop. University intake was unusually high in the decade beginning in the mid-nineties, reflecting a shift in the post-secondary model in favour of mass tertiary education and a relaxation of governmental restrictions on admission numbers. Post-2012, however, changing funding policies made it less rewarding to take in large numbers of students, and in any case the admission cohort shrank markedly

as a consequence of the dramatic deferral in marriage age of young Czechs following 1989: the potential entry pool was simply much smaller. As a result, student numbers plummeted.<sup>10</sup> This played into another important factor, a general lack of institutional support for non-core areas like Canadian Studies as a result of a widespread shift in university policy in the direction of specialization in areas of excellence (and with this potential funding) rather than the provision of a broad range of offerings. Finally, a number of the teachers who had introduced Canadian Studies in the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium had been at mid to late career; twenty years later they had retired, or died, without anyone being hired to replace them.

As a result of all these factors, then, Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic looks very different than it did only a decade ago. The most striking feature at the present time is its concentration at two universities, Masaryk University in Brno and Charles University in Prague: 13 of the Czech CEACS members teach at the former, 11 at the latter. Two members are found at the University of Hradec Kralové; three other universities have only a single member. What had been promising Canadian Studies nuclei at other universities have been reduced to single individuals or have vanished completely.

Masaryk University, with the Czech Republic's sole Canadian Studies Centre, can boast the country's longest and richest Canadian Studies history. At its peak ten years ago, it was home to teachers involved in an extremely broad range of fields: Anglophone and Francophone literature and Anglophone children's literature; Canadian culture and cultural studies; Canadian English; music; film; gay studies; sociolinguistics; political history; political science; philosophy; multiculturalism; the First Nations; environmentalism; geography. The decade from 2000 to 2010 was marked by a number of collective research projects that led to monographs devoted to Canadian topics. Most ambitious was *Us-Them-Me. The Search for Identity in Canadian Literature and Film / Nous-Eux-Moi. La quête de l'identité dans la littérature et le cinéma canadiens* (2009), the work of six authors: Petr Horák, Klára Kolinská, Petr Kyloušek, Tomáš Pospíšil, Kateřina Prajznerová, and Eva Voldřichová Beránková. It also appeared simultaneously in a Czech version, as *MY ONI JÁ. Hledání identity v kanadské literatuře a filmu*. That same year also saw the appearance of *Identity through Art, Thought and the Imaginary in the Canadian Space / Art, pensée et imaginaire identitaire de l'espace canadien* (Petr Kyloušek, Kateřina Prajznerová, Jeff Vanderziel, and Petr Vurm, eds.). A collaboration with Polish colleagues resulted in *Imaginaire du roman québécois contemporain* (2007), edited by Petr Kyloušek, Max Roy, and Józef Kwaterko. In the field of political science, Roman Chytilék, Nikola Hynek, and Maximilian Strmiska's *Federalism and Multi-level Polity: The Canadian Case* (2007) offered a fresh look at its subject. An innovative approach to teaching led to the publication in 2003 of *Vinnetou tady nebydlí: antologie současných povídek severoamerických indiánů* [Winnetou doesn't live here: an anthology of contemporary short stories by North American Indians], Jeffrey A. Vanderziel and Jiří Rambousek eds. The translations of these thirty-two short stories, half of them by Canadian First Nations authors, were the work of students in the Department of English and American Studies, who had developed them in a semester-long translation course.

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<sup>10</sup> Masaryk University, for example, dropped from around 45,000 students in 2010 to its current 30,000.

Other publications were the work of individuals. Most notable was Petr Kylvoušek's monumental (534 pages) *Dějiny francouzsko-kanadské a quebecké literatury* [The history of French-Canadian and Québec literature, 2005]. Maxmilián Strmiska's *Kanadská stranicko-politická soustava* [The political and party system in Canada] appeared as early as 1997. The same author's *Smrtonosné vlastenectví: etnicko-politický terorismus v Baskicku* [Deadly patriotism: ethno-political terrorism in the Basque country and Québec] followed four years later, in 2001. Alois Hynek's course reader *Geografie Kanady* [The Geography of Canada, 2003] filled an important gap.

Over the years, however, some teachers moved on to other fields, or other universities, in many cases leaving behind Canadian Studies in the process; others retired or died. In response to this, and also as a reflection of a wider phenomenon in Canadian Studies, there was a shift at Masaryk University in the direction of North American Studies. From 2010 to 2013, the Department of English and American Studies and the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures were partners in an ambitious EU-financed project that had four main components: the creation of forty new courses in North American subjects; the provision of grants to students and teachers to enable them to carry out research abroad; funding for visiting lecturers in North American subjects; and the purchase of books relating to North America for the collections of the Faculty of Arts library. Building on the success of this initiative, the two Departments moved on to create a new Master's programme in North American Culture Studies, which was accredited in 2015 and admitted its first students in 2016. The programme is distinctive in three ways. First, unlike virtually all other North American Studies programmes in Europe, which are typically USA Studies programmes in disguise, this is a genuinely North American programme, dealing as it does with the USA, Anglophone and Francophone Canada, and Mexico. Second, students must have English as well as either French or Spanish to be accepted. And third, the majority of courses are intercultural and comparative – that is, they might involve two languages, or the topic they deal with, for example immigrant literature, is treated in relation to more than one country. More than half the courses on offer in the Master's programme relate wholly or partly to Canada.

Canadian Studies played an important role in this shift to North American Studies, in fact being the link that first brought together the two Departments involved in the initiative. Most of the current Canadianists in the two Departments were involved in the collective projects mentioned earlier, and they have of course published, and continue to publish, scholarly articles in their fields and to edit collections, for example a special issue of *Brno Studies in English* devoted entirely to Canadian film (*The Five Senses of Canadian Cinema*, 2014). They also organize conferences wholly or partly devoted to Canada, most recently "The Americas in Canada / Les Amériques du Canada," held in October 2017 to commemorate Canada's sesquicentennial. Canadian papers are also a regular part of the largest conference in English-language studies in the Czech Republic, the Brno International Conference of British, American, and Canadian Studies, organized every five years by the Department of English and American Studies, most recently in February 2020.

Needless to say, in addition to the courses they teach, Canadianists at Masaryk University also supervise theses at the Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral levels. At their peak, these amounted to an average of five, six and perhaps one, respectively, a year. With the decline in student numbers, the numbers of Canadian theses have

also declined (proportionally). However, the very extensive Canadian Studies collection in Brno—now approaching 6,000 volumes (by far the largest in Central Europe), along with well over 300 feature films and National Film Board documentaries and various other resources—also serves as a research collection for the region. The CEACS awards grants to students and teachers for week-long research stays in Brno; even in the age of the Internet, this continues to be an attractive option for CEACS members.

The development of Canadian Studies in Prague followed a different trajectory than that in Brno. For most of the period, Canadian Studies there grew more slowly, the number of Canadianists have been smaller, and the tendency has been for them to work independently of each other in their own faculties and departments. Strongest has been the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures (as it is now called) at the Faculty of Arts, which has been offering courses for thirty years. The Department of Romance Studies at that same faculty also has a Francophone Canada component. Canadian history is taught at the Faculty's Institute of Global History. At the Faculty of Social Sciences, the focus is on history and political economy. Finally, the Faculty of Science has several teachers working in areas linked to the environment. Their lectures and field trips made a notable contribution to an international Canadian Studies student summer school organized by the CEACS in 2012 in the region of southern Bohemia known officially as "Czech Canada." In addition to their many articles in scholarly journals and collections, Canadianists at Charles University have also been responsible for publications directed towards a broader, non-academic public. Magdalena Firtová's *Kanada* [Canada, 2014], published as part of a series entitled "Brief History of States," lays much emphasis on Canada's more recent history as well as on economic issues and the country's English-French relationship. Lenka Rovná's *Dějiny Kanada* [A history of Canada, 2000] offered a broad introduction to its topic; the work went into a 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 2012. An important part of Rovná's work was an extensive section by Miroslav Jindra on Canadian culture, the first survey of this type in Czech. Such cross-faculty cooperation has not been the rule at Charles University, but in 2018 all the Canadianists at the university came together to organize the CEACS's 8th Triennial International Conference on the theme of "Transnational Challenges to Canadian Culture, Society, and the Environment," the theme itself reflecting the three faculties involved. This proved to be highly productive, and one can hope that such cooperation will continue and deepen in the coming years.

As far as the other Czech universities are concerned, aside from teaching and research resulting in individual articles, there has been little activity. One exception was a very interesting project at the University of Hradec Kralové led by Květa Kunešová, which tackled the topic of Czechs who had emigrated to Canada in the Communist years but returned after 1989. Both teachers and students were involved in the project, which had a large oral history component and resulted in both a conference and a publication, *Kanadská zkušenost: Češi v Kanadě – Emigrace a návrat* [The Canadian experience: Czechs in Canada – Emigration and return, 2018]. At Palacký University in Olomouc, work on Canada formed part of three publications, the most substantial being *Considering Identity: Views on Canadian Literature and History* (2015), edited by Jiří Flajšar and Pavlína Flajšarová. But here, too, Canadian Studies has largely fallen by the wayside in recent years.

Two further aspects of Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic should also be mentioned: outreach of various kinds, and the role of the Canadian Embassy in Prague in promoting the discipline. A significant part of many Czech Canadianists' activities relates to efforts to speak to the broader public outside the academic community. This takes many forms, one of the most important being translations. Here Prague has led the way. The "father" of Canadian Studies at Charles University, Miroslav Jindra, was—and still is, at the age of 90—one of the country's most distinguished translators, and his oeuvre includes a number of translations of Canadian literature. In addition to several shorter works by Margaret Atwood, Jindra has produced what are generally regarded as the best translations of Leonard Cohen's poetry; when he was awarded the State Prize for Translation in 2009, the citation recognized his lifetime achievement as a translator and mentioned specifically his translation of *Book of Longing*. He is currently engaged in the translation of Cohen's posthumous work *The Flame*. In addition, he has encouraged many colleagues, and students, to work in this field.

His former student Klara Kolinská has translated four Canadian novels and no fewer than eleven Canadian plays, half of them by Native Canadian authors, the latter reflecting a particular focus of her research and teaching. She has also been responsible for bringing many of their authors to the Czech Republic for both book launches and public readings and, in the case of Tomson Highway, his cabaret-type evenings. Translations of Canadian literary texts by Canadianists have also appeared in three issues of the translation journal *Plav*. Other teachers, too, have sparked an interest in Canadian literature among students who have gone on to become translators; this is the case, for example, of Petr Palenský from Brno, who first introduced Mordecai Richler to the Czech reading public, and has so far translated three of his novels.

Canadianists have also contributed to various magazines dealing with social and cultural issues that cater to the more demanding reading public, the most notable instance being a special double issue of *Revue Prostor* (73/74, 2007) devoted solely to Canada. On-line sites, too, can open up Canadian literature to new readers: Klara Kolinská has been especially active in this area, in particular through her work for the most widely read and influential such site, *iLiteratura.cz*, where she has published numerous reviews of translations of Canadian literary texts into Czech as well as interviews with their translators and other Canadianists. To a limited extent, Czech Canadianists have also made presentations on Canada at higher education institutions that lack their own Canadianists. Nor should their links to secondary schools be overlooked: it is never too early to get young people hooked on Canada.

Outside the universities, the most important player in the development of Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic has been the Canadian Embassy in Prague. As was mentioned above, it stepped in immediately after the end of the Communist regime, and it has continued to be a strong source of support ever since. This was particularly prominent in the first decade of the millennium, when the promotion of cultural diplomacy as the "third pillar" of Canadian foreign policy was at its peak.<sup>11</sup> At that time, the Prague embassy became part of a select group of twenty-odd Canadian embassies that received extra funding earmarked for cultural diplomacy

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<sup>11</sup> Polachová, *passim*.

(a rubric that included Canadian Studies). During this period the local employee at the embassy in charge of this programme, Magdalena Firtová, made systematic efforts to visit all the relevant universities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (for which the embassy was also responsible) and seek out possible future Canadianists.<sup>12</sup> In addition, she inaugurated annual meetings of Czech and Slovak Canadianists that moved from university to university as a means of highlighting the discipline at as many locations as possible. The cancellation of Canadian government support for Canadian Studies in 2012 did not change the embassy's commitment to Canadian Studies. Rather, under a succession of ambassadors, and thanks to the current local employee responsible, Michal Vlček, consistent efforts have been made to find ways of using still-existing programmes to help Canadianists wherever this is possible. In addition, even after the transfer of responsibilities for Slovakia to the Canadian Embassy in Vienna in 2013, the tradition of regular gatherings of Czech and Slovak Canadianists has been maintained, now in the form of annual meetings hosted at the Canadian Embassy in Prague. These take the form of a general informative session on developments in the field as well as a mini-seminar, and have proved of great benefit to Canadian Studies in both countries, not least by strengthening inter-university links and deepening personal and collegial ties, both of which have become a distinctive feature of Canadian Studies throughout the world. This annual get-together has proved to be of immense importance for the "Czechoslovak" Canadianists in these difficult times.

## Conclusion

Despite their having always been somewhat on the margins of the university departments they worked at, Canadianists everywhere were also in a very privileged position: no other state in the world gave such generous support, financial and otherwise, to academics interested in studying so many aspects of a country's culture, politics, economics, and society in general. What was even more unusual was that, at least in my own personal experience over a period of twenty years, this support was given with no strings attached, no hidden agenda: there was a genuine interest in learning how those outside the country viewed Canada, and the sole criterion for approving FRP and FEP grant applications was academic excellence. Understandably, then, the cancellation of what by that point was termed the "Understanding Canada" programme dealt a heavy blow to Canadian Studies, not least here in Central Europe and, within it, the Czech Republic: as a "niche" discipline it is particularly vulnerable to changing education models and academic fashions. However, Czech Canadianists have continued to be very active in the years since the loss of Canadian government support. The "country reports" on the CEACS website<sup>13</sup> bear this out. To take the last five years for which full statistics are available (2013-2017), one sees that on average Czech Canadianists gave papers at conferences at

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly enough, it was her experience in this position that led Ms Firtová to return to university for further studies that eventually led to her becoming a teacher at Charles University with a specialization in Canadian Studies.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cecanstud.cz/index.php/en/documents/country-reports>.

a rate of 15-16 per year. In addition to CEACS member countries, these conferences took place elsewhere in Europe (Austria, France, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, the UK) as well as in Turkey and Canada. Publication, too has been extensive—in addition to the monographs and collections mentioned specifically above, there have been other similar works as well as many articles, averaging around 13 per year, which have been published in scholarly journals in a similarly wide range of countries. The topics discussed in papers and articles cover a very wide range: to name only the main ones, literature of all kinds (for children, adolescents, and adults, in all genres, and both Anglophone and Francophone); English and French in Canada; the First Nations; political history; multiculturalism; immigration; religion; geography; environmentalism; cultural diplomacy; cultural semiotics; music; film. Teachers continue to introduce new courses, and students to undertake Canada-related theses at all three levels of the higher education system. True, “thriving” is undoubtedly too strong a word to characterize the contemporary state of Canadian Studies as a discipline in the Czech Republic; “surviving” is probably more accurate. But there has certainly been a steady increase in quality: the kinds of conferences where Czech Canadianists deliver papers and the range of places they represent, as well as the publications where their articles appear, all bear witness to this. Nor should it be forgotten just how far Canadian Studies in the Czech Republic has travelled in such a relatively short time. So though the current situation may give rise to feelings of pessimism, a more appropriate view might perhaps be that of long-term optimism.

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