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CANADA AND THE MILLENNIUM—PROCEEDINGS OF
THE 2ND CANADIAN STUDIES CONFERENCE IN
CENTRAL EUROPE

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Reading the Anna Jakabfi edited *Canada and the Millennium—Proceedings of the 2nd Canadian Studies Conference in Central Europe* provides us with an invaluable selection of perspectives on some current trends in Canadian culture and literature in particular. The book commemorates the anniversary of Canadian Studies in Hungary and celebrates the teaching, research and cooperation of the higher education institutions as well as the Hungarian Canadian Friendship Society. Among the writers of the included essays there are prestigious literati from Central-European countries and Canada. These contributions offer a wide variety of exciting topics ranging from a comprehensive discussion of multiculturalism to specific analyses of trends in literature, such as drama and the problem of canonization, postmodern discourse criticism, or human rights in the context of children's literature. The focus of the book is certainly rather literary, a number of further essays elaborate new approaches to French and European poetry, female and the feminist novel or to specific texts by authors like Margaret Atwood and Timothy Findley.

Structurally the collection of essays is divided into two parts, the first incorporating writings of a rather general interest (“Past, Present, Future—Summing Up”) and the second including specific literary investigations of some individual writers' contribution to the Canadian

literary scenario (“Canadian Authors Speak”). David Mills’ introductory historical survey on Canada’s early history entitled “A Journey to Canada” is really an invitation for a broader reading public to focus on the particular Canadian context of studies done by European scholars. This essay starts a series of essays dealing with history and Canadian letters, followed later on by Peter Szaffko’s paper on Canadian drama and the problem of canonization, with special reference to history. Szaffko considers two features to characterize the particular Canadian pattern of historical plays, one is the period choice that presents a general interest in outstanding events and characters ranging from the early 19th century up to the 1960s, and the other is the less political than sociological approach dramatists in the three investigated ‘canonic’ anthologies seem to share. The third essay with a historical perspective is that of Anna Branach-Kallas. She focuses on postmodern historiographic metafiction and argues that in Canadian the prose texts she analyzed historical characters have equal status with the fictional ones.

The present collection of essays offers two interesting treaties in the broad sphere of culture studies. Lawrence L. Szigeti’s “Multiculturalism a l’americaine”, a highly critical paper on the comparison of the concept of multiculturalism in Canada, U.S. and Central Europe, and Wilfried von Bredow’s well-constructed essay on “Ironic Myths of Sovereignty”. The latter explores the controversies stemming from the effects of economic globalization challenging the concept of nation state, sovereignty and even political and national identity formulation processes. Referring to findings in the fields of public law as well as political science, Bredow offers us an update and thorough insight into the social context of the millennial Canadian intellectual public arena. The writer investigates two particular sets of myths of sovereignty, that of Quebec and the First Nations’ and makes interesting remarks on patterns of contradictory myth formulation. Similarly to Bredow’s focus on the global versus national axis, the prominent literary expert David Staines’s essay with the same title as that of the whole periodical, investigates the shift of paradigms in recent and contemporary Canadian literature, marked by the writers’ shifting interest in exploring not so much the traditional question of “Where is here?” rather “What is there?”. This essay is a valuable

addition to Staines's critical survey that appeared in his 1995 book entitled *Beyond the Provinces: Literary Canada at Century's End*.

The collection includes papers on two specific traditional Canadian research interests, reflecting a broad national intellectual excitement, too: landscape and nationalism in literature. Victor Kennedy's essay entitled "Metaphor and Metalandscape of Nationalism in Contemporary Canadian Writing" differentiates Canadians' critical understanding of Canadianness from that of the Europeans' and calls attention to the need to recognize patterns of romantic idealism, provincialism and colonialism in literature as well as in other public intellectual discourses. The writer argues that irony in literature proves to be a powerful means of challenging negative tendencies in national image and identity formulation.

Donn Kushner explores how "kidlit" advocates human rights, with special regards to patterns of victimization in Canadian children's literature and society. A different literary approach to human rights is Anna Olos's partly post-communist perspective of Findley's fiction. A further essay dealing with human rights focuses on a contemporary topic: Internet-related social and legal issues. András György Tóth's formally somewhat different paper that presents a case study of the 1998 Ice Storm disaster and its coverage on the "privileged tool," i.e. the internet. The writer argues that websites operating at the time of the natural disaster provided not only a technical facility as a medium of aid, consolidation and encouragement for the victims, but also supplied a precious opportunity for the collective exchange of ideas as well as it presented the power of individual initiative in time of need.

A rather popular current research interest in discourse analysis is reflected in the collection as well. Eva Kuser calls attention to monological and dialogical discourses in French and English poetry with a wide array of examples, while Éva Martonyi focuses on the literary phenomena of Quebec Francophone literary avant-garde and postmodernism. As for other literary genres, Szabolcs Szilágyi's paper compares the text and performance versions of a drama by Alun Hibbert, attempting to re-evaluate the artistic merits of the text in view of the actual performance participants of the Seregélyes Conference enjoyed. However, other significant thematic interests in contemporary literary criticism, like the discussion of the female discourse of writing, are also represented in the selection. Three

papers analyze Atwood's art. Monika Bottez provides a contextual analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*, while Edina Szalay's paper explores the process of getting rid of certain self-deceptions in the course of what she calls "the Gothic Mother-Daughter Plot." One of the most outstanding papers in the collection is Michelle Gadpaille's textual analysis of the complex metaphoric and metonymic language of *Alias Grace*. Another interesting essay is János Kenyeres's paper that reflects a great respect for the heritage of Northrop Frye in Canadian as well as in world literature. The writer analyzes Frye's notion of 'kerygma', a vision of truth revealed by a sense of interpenetration, present in his seminal books of criticism. A challenging notion sums up the distinct features of Frye's legacy arguing that in Frye's criticism "rhetoric is tied in with freedom".

Incorporating literature and culture studies, historical and current issues in a post-conference periodical or practically any collection of essays is always a challenge. In *Canada and the Millennium* an attempt was made to find a proper selection and ordering criteria. All in all, a tribute must go to the editor who provides the opportunity for European as well as Canadian contributors to explore various perspectives, a wide range of subject matter, style and depths of analysis, reflecting the variety of the critical horizon in Canadian letters.