**Developmental Tendencies in Literature Written by Slovaks in Canada and their Reflection in Print and Visual Media**

(Vývinové tendencie umeleckej tvorby Slovákov v Kanade a ich odraz v printových a vizuálnych médiách

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*Slovak and Czech émigrées*

*in the USA*

*produced little of*

*the lasting literature*

*(Dawn B. Sova, 1996)*

**Introduction**

The experience of migration is a both personal and collective challenge: one changes his or her space filled with personal and collective history, often a place where one had gained intuitive perception of values, priorities and behavioral paradigms for a new place about which one usually has only secondary information and very modest or no personal experience. In the new land, he or she goes through intensive feelings of otherness, rootlessness and lack of belonging.

Few Slovak migrants have been able to translate their traumatic experience of immigration into artistic work and further proceed to the mass distribution of their writings **–** either for artistic, cultural, political or other reasons. Therefore, we would like to extend the existing academic discourse on Slovak literature written by immigrants in Canada and on literary and extraliterary conditions of their writings.

In the presented study, we would like to focus on the developmental tendencies of literature written by Slovaks in North America (mostly Canada and parts of the north of the USA) and the possibilities of sharing their artistic production in the media space of their new homeland. We based our research on previous research of the first Slovak professional historian, an expert in Canadian press, historian **Konštantín Čulen**, the first Vice-president of Slovak World Congress (1970) and of politician and national perpetuator **Jozef M. Kirschbaum.** We also followed the research of Slovak scholar **Elena Jakešová** focused on Slovak media (newspapers and journals) in Canada (*Noviny a časopisy Slovákov v Kanade*, 2001) and Slovak-origin historians **Mark M. Stolárik**, **Jozef Špetka** and **Jozef C. Trubinsky**. Finally, we looked into the most recent research of **Michael Cude** and **Ellen Pault** published in their monograph *East Central European Migrations During the Cold War* (2019).

In this study, we focus attention on the development of artistic writing (poetry and prose) of Slovak immigrants and via literary-historical analysis, we analyse those extraliterary features that affected themes, style and form of Slovak immigrant writing abroad. We would like to oppose the idea that “Slovak and Czech *émigrées* in the USA [and Canada, note by J. J.] produced little of the lasting literature” (Sova, 1996). Moreover, we will expand Jakešová’s research to new media, namely to internet TV channels in Canada. However, such an attempt is not possible without understanding developmental tendencies in Slovak waves of migration to North America.

**1 Slovak Immigration to Canada – Brief Historical Outline**

The Slovaks came to North America in six diverse migration patterns[[1]](#footnote-1). Among the barriers to objective historical research is the fact that at the beginning of Slovak immigration to North America, at the end of the 19th century, there was no need to quantitatively register or qualitatively analyse various individuals and groups entering the region[[2]](#footnote-2). In the 1920s, due to the more and more rigorous immigration laws in the USA (especially those passed in 1921 and 1924), immigration institutions gradually started to record newcomers systematically. Interestingly, in Slovakia the need to register migrants occurred almost a century later (after 1989). Nowadays, this activity falls under the competencies of the **Office for Slovaks Living Abroad** (Úrad pre Slovákov žijúcich v zahraničí, ÚSŽZ).

Thus, from the data obtained from a variety of often-incompatible documents, it is possible to generate developmental tendencies of the Slovak migration to North America[[3]](#footnote-3). Immigrants (also called *émigrées*) are usually divided into five or six migration waves:

* “Not a wave yet” **–** The first Slovak migration to North America and Canada at the end of the 19th century
* First wave **–** migration between two world wars (1914-1939)
* Second wave **–** migration after the Second World War and 1948[[4]](#footnote-4)
* Third wave **–** migration after the Russian Invasion in 1968
* Fourth wave **–** migration after the Velvet Revolution in 1989
* Fifth wave **–** migration of the Visa-free period after 2008.
	1. **“Not a Wave Yet**” − **First Slovak Immigration (1870s-1914)**

The author of the book entitled *Slovaks in Canada through their own Eyes* (2003) Ondrej Miháľ reports that the first Slovaks came to North America around 1880 (Miháľ, 2016, p. 1). Interestingly, the first known Slovak immigrant to Canada was Joseph Bellon, who landed in 1878 in Toronto and started a wireworks factory. The reasons for arrival of these immigrants were mostly **unfavorable social and economic conditions** in their motherland, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire**,** and they persisted until the First World War. It is not possible consider this phase of immigration a real immigration “wave”, because the arrival of the first Slovaks was often unorganized, isolated, unplanned and random.

Only few records remain of the Slovaks who came to Canada before the twentieth century, however, they represent a distinctive group. Social life of first Slovaks in Canada differs from those coming later economically, educationally and by their lifestyle. First immigrants, often after short stays in the USA (Jakešová, 2001, p. 6) settled at **farmlands in the West of Canada**. Those immigrants came for work such as building the Great Canadian National and Canadian Pacific railways. **Mining** was another way in which they could earn money but many of them died in numerous mining accidents. After earning some money, some of them stayed in Canada but most of them returned back to Slovakia to their families who waited for their return (Miháľ, 2003)[[5]](#footnote-5). Slovak immigrants in Canada established several unions, e.g. Slovenský Spolok v Kanade (Slovak Union in Canada, 1891, Ladysmith in British Columbia) and Prvá katolícka slovenská jednota (First Catholic Slovak Union, 1894).

**1.2 First “True**” **Wave of Slovak Immigration (1914-1939)**

The first wave, estimated at 30, 000, took place during the interwar years. Many newcomers were young **skilled** workers who emigrated to earn good wages in order to buy land in Slovakia. Others, however, sent for their families and went either to **farming** settlements in the West or to Ontario and Québec **mining** towns (Kirschbaum, 2008).

**Mass immigration of Slovaks** to Canada began after WWI, primarily after 1925 when the USA reduced the immigration quotas from Central Europe. Slovaks, in their desire for a better life, turned their attention to a new and little known country, Canada. Initially, there were few immigrants to Canada but in later years their number grew to about 1,500 immigrants a year (History of Canadian Slovak League, 2016).

* 1. **Second Wave of Slovak Immigration (Post-1945/1948-1968)**

Immigration after the Second World War and Nationalisation of private property by the Communist Party in 1948[[6]](#footnote-6) gave Slovak immigration to Canada very strong political undertones. Immediately after the war, some 20, 000 immigrants arrived; these included **war refugees** as well as those fleeing the Communist takeover of 1948 (Poláčková, 2016)[[7]](#footnote-7). In 1948, the Communists took power in Slovakia and started the infamous process of “**nationalisation**” of private property. In fact, Nationalisation in fact meant confiscation of “excessive private property” such as shops, houses or flats. Many people and especially businessmen and farmers accused of being “kulaks” (servant-exploiters) were imprisoned and their families often persecuted. This was the main reason many people fled the Communist regime in Slovakia and immigrated to different countries. Most popular destinations, due their liberty, democracy and focus on free enterprise were the USA, Canada and Australia; many were former government officials who gave new impetus to Slovak organizations. Most settled in the major urban centres (Lopičić, 2010).

Jews returning from concentration camps represented other special group of Slovak immigrants. In spite of their traumatic war past, in newly formed socialist Czechoslovakia, as a part of unofficial Socialist **antisemitism**, they became *personae non-grata* and were encouraged to legally immigrate out of country until 1951.

Finally, post-war **unfavourable social and economic conditions** in Slovakia remained among main reasons for immigration. The reasons for immigration in the post-war period were commented in the *Canadian Slovak*:

...Slovaks immigrated to Canada as anywhere else, mostly for economic and some political reasons as well. They came here with an attempt to earn money; pay back the travel costs, save a dollar or two and return back home, to Slovakia. However, fate intervened. When they settled down in Canada, they noticed life waseasier here than at home**,** and many of them waited no more and brought their families along. That also gave rise to a livelier social and institutional life of Slovaks in Canada[[8]](#footnote-8) (History of Canadian Slovak League, 2016, p. 1).

Quantitatively, as we state in Table 1, in this period (1961), there were 42,000 registered Slovak-ancestry subjects. Interestingly, some sources point out imprecision of this number, and claim that as many as 65,000 Slovak-ancestry subjects were registered in Canada in the same period. (History of Canadian Slovak League, 2016, p. 1). The nature of immigrants also changed; perhaps as a result of the new 1960s Canadian immigration policy; preference was given to **qualified and skilled professionals**, which made immigration difficult or impossible for immigrants with language barrier or lack of expertise in professional spheres.

* 1. **Third Wave of Slovak Immigration (1968-1989)**

The period shortly before 1968 known as the “Prague Spring” and a period of “socialism with a human face” gave the oppressed people of Czechoslovakia some hope (Poláčková, 2016). During this short period, the government opened the borders on both sides and allowed Slovaks to travel to Western Bloc countries. During that period, the immigration to Canada and the return of immigrants from Canada was so intensive that special flights were scheduled for them. According to Mark Stolárik, post-1968-1969 immigrants are estimated to 8, 000 to 20, 000 Czech and Slovak immigrants (the Canadian officials did not distinguish between Czechs and Slovaks and classified them as “Czechoslovak”) (Stolárik, 2001).

Poláčková (2016) further notes, the situation changed dramatically when the Warsaw Pact armies invaded Czechoslovakia and set up a military regime. Immigration to Canada that occurred after the Soviet invasion was very intensive and mostly politically motivated. These refugees (some 13,000) were among the **best educated** to leave their homeland. Settling in urban centres, they contributed to the growth of Slovak organizations and found their place in Canadian economic, political and cultural life (Lopičić, Otrísalová, 2010).

* 1. **Fourth Wave of Slovak Immigration (1989-2008)**

The “Velvet Revolution” of 1989 when thousands of Czechoslovak students, intellectuals and workers showed their dissatisfaction with the Communist regime opened the door for new travelling and professional opportunities. Since that time, travelling and living abroad has been **legal** in Slovakia. Therefore, Post-Velvet Revolution wave of immigration was very different from any of the previous waves. For the first time, immigrants were not escaping from political oppression or economic hardship but were freely choosing Canada because of its high social and economic standards. On the other hand, Canada welcomed skilled professionals in their fields with good command of English and open to cross-cultural experience.

Claude Baláž comments on the qualitative and quantitative nature of Post-1989 Slovak immigration: “After 1991 there is the predominance of Slovak immigrants with **completed secondary education**. On average 200 citizens from the Slovak Republic move to Canada every year, with approximately 150 work permits and 30 study permits granted. At present, the social structure of Slovaks and the economic conditions of their lives correspond to Canadian society” (Baláž, 2016).

**1.5 Fifth Wave of Slovak Immigration (2008-2019)**

Today’s Slovak immigration to Canada is different from immigration in the past. Slovak people do not live in the fear of war or political regime, which forces people to escape from their homeland.

Slovak immigration to Canada after the visa-free period established in 2008 deserves special attention, as it is very different from the previous waves of immigration, even from the one after 1989.

Simplifying changes in Canadian immigration laws in 2003 (including extension of applicant’s age limit from 44 to 49 years and shortening of the application processed from 1,000 to 45 days) and the Visa-free period after 2008 opened the possibility of life in Canada mainly to **skilled labour force**. Moreover, the Visa-free period allows multiple entry to Canada and thus perpetuates temporary stays and easier return back home to Slovakia or life in other part of the world.

There are no exact statistics on the number of Canadians of Slovak origin. As we state in Table 1, according to the 1981 census, the first census asking the question of ethnic origin, some 40,000 Canadians declared themselves to be Slovak. In the 2006 census, the number increased to 64,145 (with Slovaks living in all parts of Canada except for Nunavut), and the latest 2011 census registered 66,545 Slovaks (Kirschbaum, 2008).

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, the estimate of all Slovaks living in Canada revolves around 100,000 persons. Interestingly, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 80,000 persons claim their Czech ancestry and 33,545 still claim “Czechoslovak” ancestry.

Comparatively, Claude Baláž refers to 2006 census when 50,860 citizens of Canada claimed Slovak ancestry**,** and 17,545 of these stated Slovak that is their mother tongue, whereas 9,995 Canadian Slovaks use Slovak as a language of communication at home. Generally, estimates span from 40,000 to 120,000 persons living in Canada with Slovak ancestry (Baláž, 2016).

Table 1 – Quantitative Growth of the Number of Slovaks in Canada (Source: J. J., based on sources in footnotes)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Waves of Migration - Years** | **Approximate Number of** **Slovak Immigrants to Canada** | **Among main Reasons for Immigration** | **General Characteristics of Immigrants** |
| “Not a Wave Yet”1870s-1914 | * First unregistered systematically
* 1, 500 incoming Slovaks a year[[9]](#footnote-9)
* In 1902 – 5,000 registered Slovaks in Canada[[10]](#footnote-10)
 | * social
* economic
 | * unskilled
 |
| First Wave 1914-1939 | * 30, 000-35,000 registered Slovaks in Canada[[11]](#footnote-11)
* App. 1 500 incoming Slovaks a year[[12]](#footnote-12)
 | * social
* economic
* political
* antisemitism
 | * skilled farmers
* miners
 |
| Second Wave 1945/1948-1968 | * 42, 000 registered Slovaks in Canada (possibly 65 000)[[13]](#footnote-13)
 | * social
* economic
* political: rise of Communism
* antisemitism
 | * skilled factory workers
* educated professionals
 |
| Third Wave1968-1989 | * 1981 Canadian census: 40,000 Slovaks claimed ancestry[[14]](#footnote-14)
 | * political: rise of Communism
 | * educated professionals
* cultural *élites*
 |
| Fourth Wave1989-2008 | * 2006 Canadian census: 64,150 Slovaks claimed ancestry[[15]](#footnote-15) (potentially as many as 100.000[[16]](#footnote-16))
 | * economic
* professional
 | * educated and skilled professionals
 |
| Fifth Wave Visa-free period after 2008-2019 | * 2011 Canadian census: 66,545 Slovaks claimed ancestry[[17]](#footnote-17) (potentially as many as 100.000[[18]](#footnote-18))
 | * economic
* professional
* temporal experience: life in a different country
 | * educated and skilled professionals
* adventurers, artists, sportsmen
 |

Even though Slovak immigration to Canada in some ways copied the immigration patterns of other East-European immigrants, e.g. Bulgarians, Rumanians, Czechs, Poles and Ukrainians to the North-American territory, it has also been distinct from immigration to other countries, mostly due to the different nature of various waves various social, educational, and cultural backgrounds and allowed them to retain of what we might call “Slovak identity” (Lopičić, 2010b).

Poláčková (2016) states, present-day immigrants are also different in comparison with immigrants from previous waves not only in the way in which they think but they are better prepared for new world, foreign culture and most of them already speak English. The process of immigration is not such a cultural shock for them as it was perhaps for the first-wave English non-speaking immigrants. The younger generation, in comparison with their grand-grandparents, is, due to modern technology, internet and general globalisation of the world better prepared for the multicultural Canadian society and the process of assimilation.

**2 Literature Written by Slovaks in Canada and its Reflection in Print and Visual Media**

**2.1 “Not a Wave Yet” – No Literature Yet**

### Low quantity, small-group or individual arrivals to Canada, the unorganized manner of the immigrants, as well as the hard economic situation and almost complete lack of language competences (reading, writing in both English and Slovak) affected the nature of written material of this period. Immigrants mostly wrote personal letters, in this period there was practically no artistic literature − there were no conditions for its creation or dissemination in Canada. Moreover, many Slovak immigrants in Canada greatly relied on already existing newspapers *Amerikánsko-slovenské noviny (Amerikanszko-Szlovenszke Novini,* published by teachers Janko Slovenský and Július Wolf in 1886 in Pittsburgh, USA) and weekly *Slovák v Amerike* (published in Plymouth, Pennsylvania since 1889) distributed to Canada (Jakešová, 2001, p. 7). However, these newspapers mostly focused on practical information related to life in a new country.

### Perhaps as a result of predominance of USA-related information in *Amerikánsko-slovenské noviny and Slovák v Amerike,* Janko Slovenský issued *Bulletin* (1885), the first attempt of a Slovak-Canadian journal (Bielik, 1980, p. 212). Later, Andrej Lukča hired a professional Slovak printer, J. Kleskeň-Maloveský, and decided to issue first Slovak-Canadian twelve-page irregularly issued journal *Slovenské slovo* in Blairmore (Alberta) in May, 1910. It was the only journal published by an ethnic minority in the mining region of Blairmore (Alberta). The journal was short-lived – it ceased to exist in 1911 (Jakešová, 2001, p. 10).

**2.2 “Golden Age of Immigrant Journalism” between Two World Wars**

The reasons for immigration of Slovaks to North America before World War II were largely due to the effects of the First World War. These included financial and socio-economic reasons, loss of homes and political uncertainty. However, there were also religious reasons such as anti-Semitic policy and fear of repression. Many immigrants of this wave were “**birds of passage**” – they planned a short stay in North America to earn money and return home to Slovakia. As we have explained in Chapter 1, immigration between two world wars dramatically changed its nature. Because of limited immigrant quota from Central Europe to the USA, Slovaks massively immigrated to Canada after the First World War. Another difference lied in the abilities and skills of immigrants – now they were mostly **literate and skilled factory workers**[[19]](#footnote-19). That established an effective base for the readership of forthcoming journals and for general rise of Slovak journalism in Canada.

A pre-condition for the successful publication of journals turned outto be the rise of Slovak clubs and institutions. Between two world wars, as a necessary consequence of the lack of knowledge of the English language and the necessity of cooperation in the new country, perhaps the most Slovak clubs in the history of Slovaks coming to Canada were established. Gradually these spontaneous actions were institutionalized. In 1924, Československý podporný spolok (Czechoslovak Support Union) was established and later, in 1932, Slovenská liga (the **Slovak League)** was founded in Canada (Bielik, p. 213). The Slovak League and many of patriotic institutions supported or helped to publishjournals and magazines in Slovak.

During this period, literary activities focused mainly on journalistic activities; journalism, however, proliferated. More than twenty Slovak journals and parish journals have been published. The first journal[[20]](#footnote-20), a kind of continuation or follow-up of non-existent *Slovenské slovo* was monthly, *Kanadský čechoslovák* (1919-1921) which built on the idea of mutual ties between Czechs and Slovaks. In 1927, the *Kandská príloha* was issued as an attachment of *New Yorský denník* (first published in 1913), journal for both Czechs and Slovaks. As a result of the need for specific journal oriented on the Slovaks in Canada, weekly *Kanadské noviny – Poučný a Neodviský Časopis* was published by J. Přibyl in July 6, 1929; later in 1933 the journal was renamed and reformatted to *Slovák v Kanade* (*Slovak in Canada;* published in Montreal). Its primary focus was to perpetuate Slovak nationalism and patriotism (Jakešová, 2001, p. 18).

These included *Nová vlasť* (*The New Homeland*, Montreal, 1934) with Czechoslovak orientation, *Naše slovo* (Our Word, Toronto, 1931), *Robotnícke slov*o (The Worker’s Voice, 1932). Both gained a Left-wing orientation. In order to address even wider readership, *Robotnícke slovo* changed its title and format to *Hlas ľudu* (Voice of the People, 1936). Other journals followed, e.g. *Slovenské národné noviny* (Slovac National News, 1935, Kirkland, North Ontario), *Hlas národa – národný slovenský časopis* (The Nation’s Voice, 1934-1937) and *Naša mládež* (Our Youth, appeared as an attachment to The Nation’s Voice). *Slovák v Kanade* (Slovak in Canada) was renamed to *Slovenské bratstvo* (Slovak Brotherhood) in 1939 and later to *Slovenský priekopník* (Slovak Pioneer, 1942).

A significant milestone in Slovak press in Canada was issuing of *Kanadský Slovák* (Canadian Slovak) in March 5, 1942 in Montreal by Štefan Hreha. Left-wing oriented *Zvesti* (Rumors, 1941) were, in 1942, renamed to *Ľudové zvesti* (Folk Rumors). *Slovenské slovo* (Slovak Word) was the first bilingual journal that has disappeared over time.

**2.3 After the Second World War and Nationalisation in 1948**

After the Second Word War, many cultural élites, politically active people and professional politicians left pro-Communist Czechoslovakia. These included ex-Prime Minister Karol Sidor, journalist Konštantín Čulen, Ambassador Jozef M. Kirschbaum and a deputy of the President Jozef Tiso, Karol Murín.

The period after World War II is characterized by efforts to establish and renew expatriate institutions. For example, in 1960 the institution of **Matica Slovenská,** still active today, was established. After the death of J. C. Stanislav Mečiar in the Canadian city of Galt, it moved to Hamilton. The main contribution of Matica Slovenská abroad but also of individuals (e.g. Msgr. František Fuga) has been and still is the publication of publications, books, brochures and other materials related to the promotion of Slovakia and Slovak identity (Miháľ, 2003, p. 188).

There was still hunger for press written in national language among Slovaks in Canada. Except for *Nová vlasť*, *Kanadský Slovák* and *Ľudové zvesti*, some new journals were published. These included *Ekonómia* (Economics, 1948), English-written “revue” *The Slovakian* (Ottawa, 1949), *Slovak Voice* (Slovenský hlas, Windsor, 1949), *Our Life* (Náš život, Toronto, 1951), *Homeland* (Domovina, Toronto, 1952-54), *Militia* (Domobrana, Toronto, 1953-1957; moved to the USA until 1965), *Slovenská národná rada v zahraničí* (Slovak National Council Abroad, Windsor, 1956) and Catholic student journal *Rozvoj* (Development, 1949), Greek-Orthodox journal *Mária* (1950s) and *Naše Snahy* (Our Efforts, Toronto, 1965).

From the literary point of view, after the Second World War, the first purely literary acts were created and a generation of authors, especially poets, who reacted to the phenomenon of emigration, were set aside. These include **Peter Klas** (1904-1993, who emigrated in 1945; in Canada 1948-1993), author of the novel *Satan proti bohu* (Satan Against the God, 1983), **Jozef Dragoš-Alžbetínčan** (1909-1977, in Canada 1951-1970), author religiously tuned collections of poems *Nepoškvrnená víťazí* (Immaculate Victory, 1954) and *Slávme hviezdy jasné* (Glory the Stars, 1963), **Ľudo Bešeňovský** (b. 1910, emigrated in 1948-1994), author of the exile collection of poetry *V putách rodnej zeme* (In the Wanderings of the Country), 1983, **Ján L. Doránsky** (b. 1911, emigrated in 1945, in Canada 1949-1973), author of exile collections of poetry *Od splnu po zatmenie* (From Full Moon to Eclipse, 1972) and **Bystrík Mária Brázda** (b. 1948, emigrated after high school studies), author of prose *Všade je kúsok srdca* (Everywhere is a Piece of Heart, 1978).

Post-war authors understand immigration as unwanted, yet inevitable step resulting from the war-torn life in their homeland. They often described their homeland, Czechoslovakia, as a place of destruction, a physical and emotional wasteland without a future, a pointless place to stay. For example, **Peter Klas** in his novel *Satan against the God* set in the last days of the Slovak National Uprising against the Nazis (1944): “...for in this once-flouring country, its own people brought doom ~~to~~, only the Death was merciful[[21]](#footnote-21)” (Klas, 2008, p. 138).

The poet **Ľudo Bešeňovský** also viewed emigration as a traumatic experience. He remembers his homeland with nostalgia and sadness**,** and rather idealises the country. For example, in his poem *Slovensko* (Slovakia) he muses on emigration:

It is within us, no remedy at hand,

it just has to pass,

feel the pain to the full[[22]](#footnote-22)

(Bešeňovský, 2008, p. 26).

For Bešeňovský, exile to Canada is only a pragmatic choice. In his heart, he remains in Slovakia, in “the country of eternal beauty”[[23]](#footnote-23) (Bešeňovský, 2008, p. 26). **Ján L. Doránsky** in his poetry also reacts to leaving his mother country. To express his bonds with Slovakia, he uses a traditional folklore-style rhymed balladic verse:

...when a Slovak youth left for the world,

Sorrow in his heart, tear-drops in his eyes,

Tear-drops in his eyes, for leaving his land,

Good-bye my mother, bye to me-beggar guy...[[24]](#footnote-24)

(Doránsky, 2008, pp. 29-35).

 The post-war era is a very strong literary period, quantitatively and qualitatively. Writers and poets feel homesickness. In their artistic response, they either idealised Slovakia and its natural beauties or demonised their mother country as a spiritual vacuum. Emigration is for them both a painful experience but also a necessary act. Slovakia for them is a once and lost-for-good homeland; quite a realistic estimate**,** given the political situation.

**2.4 “True Exile Literature**” **after** **the Soviet Invasion in 1968:**

The period after The Prague Spring and migration after the entry of the Warsaw troops in 1968 were strongly politically motivated. A number of **dissidents, politically active people** and those who did not see the possibility of free life and self-realization in the Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia immigrated to Canada. This immigration consisted of skilled, educated and mostly English-speaking immigrants, in fact, many, such as Czech Josef Škvorecký and Slovak Jaroslava Blažková represented Czechoslovak *cultural élites*[[25]](#footnote-25).

**After 1968,** the reasons for immigration became **more political and homogenous**. In Czechoslovakia. There was very strict censorship of forbidden books from abroad**,** and censorship of texts written by Czechoslovak authors. At the same time, Canadian immigrants were “hungry” for literature from their homeland.

These immigrants criticised heterogeneous fractions of Slovak movements in Canada**,** and they demanded more homogenous institutions. In response, Svetový Kongres Slovákov (**Slovak World Congress**) was established in 1970 in Toronto with its representative journal entitled *Bulletin of Slovak World Congress* (Toronto 1971). Also, to address the needs of Slovak immigrants, on September 1, 1969 *Národné noviny* (National News, 1969-1971) were published in Toronto. Later, *Kotva* (Anchor, Toronto, 1972), changed to *Slobodné Slovenské Novinové listy* (1975) and later to *Slovenská kotva* (Slovak Anchor, 1976-1978) were published as well as a number of parish journals. In 1970, *Dobrá kniha* (Good Book) publishing house was established by the Jesuits with the aim to disseminate literature among immigrants. In 1989, the publishing house moved back to Slovakia.

Writers coming to Canada came mostly as a result of the political events of 1968. These writers included **Jaroslava Blažková** (b. 1933, immigrated in 1968), **Ilja Čičvák** (b. 1939, immigrated in 1968), **Peter Petro** (b. 1946, immigrated in 1968), **Mieroslava Tatranská** (immigrated in 1968, first to France, then to Canada). She authored collection of poems *Dotyky a rany* (Touches and Wounds*,* 1987).

Slovak immigration after 1968 was political**,** especially by the time when immigrants decided to leave Czechoslovakia. Perhaps the best-known author of the period, Jaroslava Blažková had entered Slovak literature already in the 1960s, but after her immigration to Canada in 1968, she became *persona non-grata* and her books disappeared from bookstores. It was only in the second half of the 1990s that it was re-introduced into the Slovak literary context – thanks to the Aspekt publishing house; first through the re-editions of older books and gradually also by new short stories and novels.

Blažková refers to her experience with immigration in her memoirs entitled *Listy z Kanady* (Letters from Canada). A literary critic writes,

...into her fragmentary narratives, [Blažková] inserted pieces of memories [...] of her beginnings in Canada. She recollected her children, husband as he used to be and friends. She remembered the past, the fate which “injured” her life and divided it to a “life before Canada” and a “life after transplantation”. Her book has a very strong aesthetic aspect, based on author’s internal life; however, the book is equally interesting as a documentary recording. Blažková unobtrusively brings up the Canadian life, lifestyle of its ethnically diverse inhabitants, holidays, up-to-date problems. [...] Each letter has the main topic, freely and easily developed in the flow of thinking and speech, in reflections, of events and impressions. Incentives for her thoughts might be journalese articles, an unplanned meeting in a shop, atrip to Nature. Genre-wise, the letters are structured in an epistolary fashion; they open with a greeting and finish with the writer’s signature. It is the signature, which Blažková uses as a means of self-characteristics, falling within the context of each letter [...] (Kršáková, 2006, p. 1)[[26]](#footnote-26).

**Peter Petro** writes about his life in Canada in his essays written for internet magazine *InZine*. He presents himself as a person open to otherness, a defender of humanity and world-citizenship. Even though his arrival to Canada (in turbulent year 1968, holding his little son in his arms) was not short of emotions, Petro is able to write about it in a light humorous manner.

To sum up the period of Slovak immigration after 1968 means to point out a more positive attitudes toward immigration prevalent among these political emigrants. The generation of Blažková and Petro is able to perceive immigration as a positive and potentially enriching experience, as a challenge and opportunity.

**2.5 “Crisis of the Print Media”[[27]](#footnote-27) after 1989**

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and so-called “The Velvet Revolution” opened the borders and made it possible to travel all over the world. For the first time, **immigrants did not flee from physical threats, economic scarcity or freedom.** Rather, they were looking for better job opportunities. In other words, they became modern economic migrants. A number of Slovak **intellectuals and top experts** took the opportunity to travel to Canada and work professionally there. At the same time, the Velvet Revolution put a stop to Slovak literary exile and many periodical lost their *raison d´*être*.* Either for linguistic or political reasons, the readership of many periodicals narrowed (Jakešová, 2001, p. 51) and many (e.g. *Pohľady –* Views and *Naše snahy –* Our Efforts) ceased to exist or moved their base to the USA (e.g. *Bulletin of Slovak World Congress* moved to Los Angeles in 1994). Some new journals occurred, e.g. *Naše Slovensko* (Our Slovakia, Toronto, 1997), English-written *Slovak World News* (1996-2000) and short-lived *Slovak Week* (2000).

The period after 1989 **fundamentally** **differs from previous periods** mainly by political and economic freedom as well as by efforts to preserve Slovak identity in an increasingly globalized world. In 1993, the Slovak Canadian Cultural and Heritage Center were established as a successor organization of the Slovak Cultural and Information Center with the support of Matica Slovenská as a non-profit organization for those interested in Slovak culture (Miháľ, 2003, pp. 205-206).

Literary situation in the period after 1989 differs from the previous periods mainly in political and economic terms. **Brigita Hamvašová** (b. 1942, living in Canada since 1994) and **Peter Breiner** (b. 1957, living in Canada in 1992-2007).

Peter Breiner represents a unique writer among others. A writer, actor, musician, journalist and popular humourist in Slovakia, he gave up all this and legally immigrated to Canada in the 1990s to seek better professional opportunities. In 1991-1993, he wrote several dozens of “letters” from Canada that were later published as an “epistolary” book or rather, book of memoirs. Breiner’s tone gradually changes from very subjective and celebratory towards his new homeland towards more objective and critical. In this, the novel is a unique document about one’s experience of immigration in the turbulent 1990s.

**2.6 Visa-free Period of Migration: Why not?**

A new type of “migration wave” can also be considered in connection with the movement of citizens within the Visa-free period after 2008. Immigration is no more seen as an “ordeal”; instead, it is seen as a voluntary and often temporary result of a personal choice. That affects the topics, tone and genres of a new type of immigrant literature; **Eva Sporinová** (in Canada since 2002), the author of *Kanada bez javorového sirupu* (Canada without Maple Syrup, 2010) is illustrative of this period. Sporinová decided to immigrate to Canada with her husband, a doctor and her two children. The tone of her memoirs is first puzzled and surprised, however, for Sporinová, immigration is a kind of “trip” that, upon unfavourable conditions can be terminated and there is still opportunity to travel back home open. At the same time, Sporinová’s memoirs are exquisitely intimate. They provide the reader with her most internal feelings and immigration-related worries**,** and enable them to share her fears.

The works of individual authors of this period suggest an important statement: In the period after 1989, and due to globalization, the diminishing of distances, virtually non-existent language barriers, the Internet, media coverage and information availability, immigration ceases to be a dramatic, traumatizing experience. The word *émigré* loses its negative and derogatory connotations; no longer does it represent~~s~~ a lower-class person, a rootless man without a home. Instead, it represents a temporary resident, a person who chose to leave his or her country for a specific reason. Emigrants were replaced by a generation of backpackers who are able to live in a new country (in case of Peter Breiner**,** even in several countries), self-actualised personally, socially and professionally.

Changes are also present in new**,** literary and extraliterary forms. From the perspective of media, new forms of media occur that reach many more people than before. For example, because of new globalised times and availability of information from the internet, the *Canadian Slovak* is one of the last journals that is still issued. However, in order to reach maximum readership, it is now also available online[[28]](#footnote-28).

New media include an online television channel entitled **Slovak Channel** **(TV Slovenský Svet, produced by Katarína Homolová), which presents thirty-minute Slovak TV programmes for multicultural TV net,** Omni TV. This programme can be viewed anywhere in Canada via satellite[[29]](#footnote-29). There is also a travel portal **Cestovateľský portál** (Traveller’s portal) [[30]](#footnote-30),which provides information about thehistorical sights and natural beauties of Canada.

Table 2 – Qualitative Characteristics of Slovak Artistic Production in Canada by Waves of Immigration

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Waves of Migration - Years** | **Main Reasons for Immigration** | **Genres/****Types of Writing** | **Media Established in the Period** | **Dominant Writers of the Period** |
| “Not a Wave Yet”1870s-1914 | * social
* economic
 | * personal letters
 | **Journals:** * *Slovenské slovo* (Slovak Word)*,* 1910
 | Ján Kleskeň |
| First Wave 1914-1939 | * social
* economic
* political
* antisemitism
 | * newspa-per articles
* poems
* prose
 | * **Journals and magazines:**
* *Kanadský čechoslovák* (Canadian Czechoslovak, 1919-1921)
* *Kandská príloha* an attachment of *New Yorský denník* (New York Diary, 1913)
* *Kanadské noviny – Poučný a Neodvislý Časopis* 1929; in 1933 renamed to *Slovák v Kanade* (Slovak in Canada)
* *Nová vlasť* (The New Homeland, Montreal, 1934)
* *Naše slovo* (Our Word, Toronto, 1931)
* *Robotnícke slov*o (The Worker’s Voice, 1932); changed to *Hlas ľudu* (Voice of the People, 1936)
* *Slovenské národné noviny* (Slovak National News, 1935, Kirkland, North Ontario)
* *Hlas národa – národný slovenský časopis* (The Nation’s Voice, 1934-1937)
* *Naša mládež* (Our Youth, an attachment to The Nation’s Voice)
* *Slovák v Kanade* (Slovak in Canada), renamed to *Slovenské bratstvo* (Slovak Brotherhood) in 1939 and later to *Slovenský priekopník* (Slovak Pioneer, 1942).
* *Kanadský Slovák* (The Canadian Slovak, March 5, 1942 in Montreal by Štefan Hreha)
* *Zvesti* (Rumors, 1941), in 1942 renamed to *Ľudové zvesti* (Folk Rumors)
* *Slovenské slovo* (Slovak Word)
 | Štefan Hreha |
| Second Wave 1945/1948-1968 | * social
* economic
* political: rise of Communism
* antisemitism
 | * poems
* novels
* stories
 | * **Journals and magazines:**
* *Ekonómia* (Economics, 1948)
* *The Slovakian* (Ottawa, 1949
* *Slovak Voice* (Slovenský hlas, Windsor, 1949)
* *Our Life* (Náš život, Toronto, 1951)
* *Homeland* (Domovina, Toronto, 1952-54)
* *Militia* (Domobrana, Toronto, 1953-1957; moved to the USA until 1965)
* *Slovenská národná rada v zahraničí* (Slovak National Council Abroad, Windsor, 1956)
* *Rozvoj* (Development, 1949)
* *Mária* (1950s)
* *Naše Snahy* (Our Efforts, Toronto, 1965)
 | Peter KlasJozef Dragoš-Alžbetínčan Ľudo Bešeňovský Ján L. Doránsky Bystrík Mária Brázda |
| Third Wave1968-1989 | * political: rise of Communism
 | * poems
* novels
* stories
 | **Journals and magazines:*** *Bulletin of Slovak World Congress* (Toronto 1971).
* *Národné noviny* (National News, 1969-1971)
* *Kotva* (Anchor, Toronto, 1972), changed to Slobodné Slovenské *Novinové listy* (1975), later to *Slovenská kot*va (Slovak Anchor, 1976-1978)
 | Peter PetroIlja ČičvákJaroslava Blažková |
| Fourth Wave1989-2008 | * economic
* professional
 | * poems
* novels
* stories
* In-Zines
 | **Journals and magazines:*** *Naše Slovensko* (Our Slovakia, Toronto, 1997)
* *Slovak World News* (1996-2000)
* *Slovak Week* (2000)
 | Peter BreinerBrigita Hamvašová |
| Fifth Wave Visa-free period after 2008-2019 | * economic
* professional
* temporal experience: life in a different country
 | * internet-supported texts
 | **Journals and magazines:** * *Kanadský Slovák* (The Canadian Slovak*,* now also available online)

**TV channels:*** Slovak Channel (satellite **TV Slovenský Svet, produced by Katarína Homolová) offering thirty-minute Slovak TV programmes for multicultural TV net** Omni TV.
* Travel portal *Cestovateľský port*ál (Traveller’s portal)
 | Eva Sporinová |

**Conclusion**

Slovak immigrant literature in Canada represents now almost one hundred years of literary writings, very specific by its political motivation (inspired by five diverse waves of immigration) and artistic inspiration (genres and themes). Perhaps now, one hundred years after the first written texts were produced by Slovak immigrants, the time has come to evaluate their work both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitatively, Slovak immigrant writings in Canada and also in the world dramatically lag behind other East-European nations. For example, whereas the Czechs in Canada produced a rich list of famous authors, such as Jaroslav Škvorecký, Josef Rudolf Čeněk Čermák, Jan Drábek, Jaroslav Havelka, Pavel Javor, Jiří Klobouk, Eva Klobouková, Vladimír Krajina, Jiří Krupička, Stanislav Remiš, Věra Rollerová, Zdena Salivarová, Josef Skála, Jiří Traxler and Ludmila Zeman, there exists much shorter list of Slovak authors, who wrote and published their works in Canada.

Qualitatively, the body of Slovak immigrant literature is diverse to the point it might bring up debate about its literary nature in the sense of *belles letters*. Mark Stolárik notes, “…although newspaper and almanacs have provided a medium for Slovak expression and have offered some insight into Slovak experience in North America, they scarcely qualify as literature” (Stolárik, p. 87). Thus, initially the Slovaks in Canada focused their literary efforts on non-literature, i.e. personal letters, calendars and almanacs. Only later, in between two world war period, they proceeded to political pamphlets and articles writing against the war, Fascism, ~~Communists~~ **Communism** and theSoviet invasion; perpetuating political ideas, e.g. those of *Czechoslovakism* (support of mutual co-existence of the Czechs and Slovaks in former Czechoslovakia).

We now can distinguish the **developmental shift** from non-literary text towards literature in the narrow sense. In the period after the Second World War, however, Slovaks in Canada have been actively artistically responding to the phenomenon of immigration and the related experience of leaving their homeland and coming to a new, unknown country. They verbalized the reasons for leaving and choosing Canada artistically.

The portrayal of the very act of immigration is also a subject to change. Before the Second World War, mostly due to difficult social and political conditions, immigration was portrayed as a definite and unchangeable act, even demonised as an “ordeal” of fate.

After the Soviet invasion in the 1968, emigration became a political act, a distinctive feature splitting immigrants from the lifestyle and political orientation of the Communist East Bloc. There were also fundamental differences in the portrayal ofimmigration after 1989 and 2008. Whereas the Velvet Revolution of 1989 brought to many new freedom, for economic reasons immigration was often a decision affecting the whole life of individuals and families. On the other hand, the Visa-free period after 2008 turned immigration to a temporary act of experience of a new country.

Immigrants**’** attitudes toward their mother country and their new homeland varied, from uncritical adoration and idealisation of Slovakia, a view often fossilised in the past, viewing Slovakia as a land of idyllic and romanticized meadows with peasants and sheep. Others shifted their attitudes ~~to~~ on Slovakia to denial and a total psychological bifurcation, a phenomenon that can be subject to the psychology of literature as elaborated by Pavol Štubňa (2017, p. 13).

In conclusion, “…ethnic press (and generally immigrant literature, note J. J.) is born with immigrants, lives their biological lives and dies with them. Its resurrection has to wait for the next wave of immigration” (Pigadas, 1991). However, this resurrection is not only a task for the next generation of immigrants. It is also a responsibility for the readership and literary critics and historians in the homeland, for it is important, if not inevitable, to understand the hurdles and incentives that made immigrant literature possible in its beginnings and those that brought it to its present state – the Internet and English language-mediated accessibility to the world readership.

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1. Some authors distinguish four waves of immigration; however, they do not take into consideration the development after 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Information gathered from various secondary documents, e.g. Canadian statistical reports. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. More in: *Slováci v Kanade: Národná a Osobná identita v exilovej a poexilovej literatúre* (Javorčíková – Badinská, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Some scholars (e.g. Mark Stolárik, Štefan Bielik) distinguish slightly different periodization of Slovak immigration, however, these waves of immigration are also recognized by Peter Cabadaj (2002, pp. 6-7) and Elena Jakešová (2000, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Some historical information presented in this study was co-researched with Eva Poláčková, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cabadaj (2002, pp. 7-8) further distinguished the Second Wave of Slovak Immigration into four sub-periods with their special characteristics: so called “Preparatory Period” of 1945-1950, when immigrants temporarily lived in neighbourhooding countries of Czechoslovakia before they finally decided to immigrate; “Post-February Period” of 1950-1960, “Period of Literary Stabilisation” of 1960-1967 and the “Period of 1968-1990”, when immigration become a demonstration of oneʹs distinction from the politics and lifestyle of so called East Bloc countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Interestingly, even notable historians, e.g. František Bielek do not state precise numbers of immigrants to Canada after the Second World War; perhaps for political reasons in 1980 when his book *Slováci vo svete* was published. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. „...ako všade inde, teda aj do Kanady, Slováci sa sťahovali najviac z hospodárskych príčin, ale nechýbali ani príčiny politické. Prišli sem najviac s úmyslom zarobiť a vrátiť cestovné, našporiť nejaký ten groš a potom sa vrátiť domov na Slovensko. Osud skrižoval ich plány. Keď sa v Kanade udomácnili a vybadali, že tu sa dá lepšie žiť ako doma, mnohí z nich ani dlho nečakali, ale stiahli za sebou svoje rodiny, čo zavzdalo (*sic.*) príčiny k čulejšiemu spoločenskému a organizačnému životu Slovákov v Kanade“ (História KSL, p. 1). (translated by J. J.). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Source: Jakešová, 2001, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Source: Jakešová, 2001, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Source: Kirschbaum, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Source: History of Canadian Slovak League, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Source: History of Slovak Canadian League, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Source: Kirschbaum, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Source: Kirschbaum, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Source: Kirschbaum, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Na rozdiel od emigrácie z obdobia pred prvou svetovou vojnou, ako uvádza C. Baláž, v medzivojnovom období do Kanady prichádzali najmä o **kvalifikovaní a gramotní robotníci**, ktorí sa „...v 20. a 30. rokoch 20. storočia zamestnávali v priemyselných podnikoch vo východnej časti Kanady“ (Baláž, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bielik recognizes Úvahy (Musings) as one of the first journals; however, it was short-lived and only three issues were published (Bielik, 1980, p. 214). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. „...lebo v tejto dakedy kvitnúcej zemi, do ktorej vlastní ľudia privolali nešťastie, bola milosrdná jedine smrť“ (Klas, 2008, p. 138) (translated by J. J.). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. „Je to v nás a nieto na to lieku, to preniesť musí sa, prebolieť do ostatku...“ (Bešeňovský, 2008, p. 26) (translated by J. J.). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. ...v „krajine večných krás“ (Bešeňovský, 2008, p. 26) (translated by J. J.). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. „Keď sa Slovák... preč do sveta uberal, v srdci smútok, v oku horkú slzu mal, v oku slzu, že odchádza pred časom, zbohom mati, opustený bedár som...“ (translated by J. J.). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Claude Baláž states, “…after the Second World War, Slovak immigrants in Canada were joined by representatives of Slovak “intelligentsia”. Most immigrants who came to Canada after 1968 were high-school and university educated”. (Baláž, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Do svojho fragmentárneho rozprávania vkladá [Blažková] útržky spomienok na [...] začiatky v Kanade, pripomína si deti, manžela v jeho voľakedajšej podobe, priateľov. Spomína na minulosť, na nepriazeň osudu, ktorý „zmrzačil“ jej život a rozdelil ho na „život pred Kanadou“ a „život po transplantácii“. Jej kniha má silnú estetickú stránku, založenú na odhaľovaní vnútorného života autorky, no zaujímavá je aj vo svojej dokumentárnej línii. Blažková nevtieravo približuje kanadskú realitu, spôsob života jej etnicky rôznorodých obyvateľov, sviatky, aktuálne problémy. [...] Každý list má určitú hlavnú tému, voľne a zľahka rozvíjanú v plynutí myslenia a reči, v reflexiách udalostí a dojmov. Podnetom pre zamyslenia sú trebárs novinová správa, náhodné stretnutie v obchode, kontakt s prírodou. Listy sú žánrovo formalizované, začínajú oslovením a končia podpisom, ktorý Blažková vníma výrazne autoštylizačne: ako spôsob aktuálnej sebacharakteristiky, kontextovo zodpovedajúcej obsahu toho ktorého listu (Kršáková, 2006, p. 1) (Translated by J. J.). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Borrowed from the chapter title in Elena Jakešová (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Kanadský Slovák – online https://www.kanadskyslovak.ca/index.php/sk/toronto-2/slovensk%C3%A1-komunita-v-toronte. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Katarína Homolová, email: slovenskysvet@gmail.com  web: [**www.omnitv.ca/ontario/tv/en\_prog\_slov.shtml**](http://www.omnitv.ca/ontario/tv/en_prog_slov.shtml) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Cestovateľský portál: <http://www.infoglobe.sk/cestovatelsky-pruvodce/kanada-toronto-kralovsky-pohlad-i/> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)