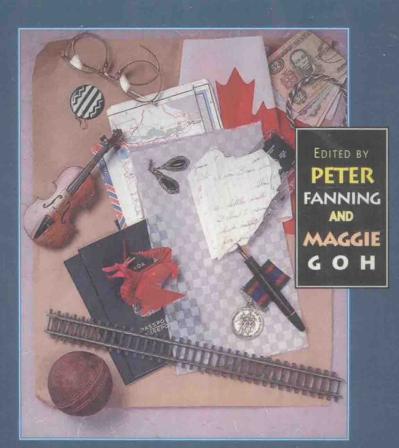
HOMELAND



THE CANADIAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE
FICTION - DODELLON - POETRY

HOMELAND

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INTRODUCTION

And from the cradle to the grave/we lean on one another.

Alexander McLachlan

What do we mean when we ask people, "Where are you from?" Here, the question is often followed by, "No, I mean where are you really from — originally?" Treated with suspicion, the question is sometimes answered with an aggrieved, "I'm Canadian just like you." Although the question occasionally implies the notion that "real" Canadians are descendants of nineteenth-century pioneers, far more often it is prompted by a desire to hear a story — one of the millions of immigration stories to which most Canadian families can contribute. Indeed, the story of the development of this country is a story of immigration.

"Home is where the heart is," we say (the aphorism is attributed to the Roman scholar, Pliny), and that place may not always be where we live and work and love. We can carry our notion of "home" around with us: we cannot choose our homelands, but our hearts tell us when (and where) we're "home." This anthology brings together a range of voices that express how it feels to leave the country of one's birth and move to another. The voices speak of uncertainty and longing — of what poet Robert Frost called "the ache of memory" — as much as they do of relief and contentment.

It would be easy to compile an anthology entirely composed of positive, upbeat selections that spoke of painless emigration, and of the joy of immigration to our country. Such an anthology would be little more than an advertisement for Canada, the promised land. Equally easy to compile would be a collection of horror stories telling of pining, disllusioned masses, existing in ethnic ghettoes, feeling the sting of racism and the anguish of rejection. As immigrants and as editors, we know that neither of these extreme possibilities would give a true impression of the Canadian immigration experience.

The immigrant writers represented here have experienced emotional struggles, as they attempted, and continue to attempt, to

reconcile ambition and nostalgia, hope and regret, their futures with their pasts. And it would appear that most immigrants, despite inevitable struggles, setbacks, and uncertainties, have managed to adapt and prosper with remarkable skill, courage, and resilience. As Canadian writer Audrey Thomas has aptly said, "Canada is not the promised land, although it is a land full of promise."

It is our hope that readers from long-established Canadian families will appreciate, as they read these selections, that our country has a rich history of immigration, that a great portion of our country's population has come from many diverse backgrounds, and that attitudes of settled Canadians towards immigrants and immigration have varied — and continue to vary — with time. We hope, too, that readers from immigrant families will appreciate that they are not alone, that many have had, and are having, the same doubts, concerns, hopes, and dreams as they are experiencing.

The voices represented here are arranged in three sections: the first talks of leavetaking and arrival; the second speaks of adaptation and taking stock; and the third offers reflections on how it feels to have weathered the initial storms — and to have found in Canada a home. Listening to these voices, we may re-examine and even adjust our sense of who we are — citizens of a country with a unique population, a country that welcomes newcomers without demanding that they renounce their cultures, traditions, and homelands. These voices hold up a mirror; looking in, we may see ourselves.

Peter Fanning and Maggie Goh

SWEAT HOPES AND DREAMS

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patrick

WHEN I THINK OF SAINT PATRICK'S DAY, IT'S not of wearing a green tie or green socks or slouching up to Covey's to see if they're serving green beer, corned beef and cabbage.

I think instead of a stark monument that stands in sight of the sea near the wind-swept entrance to Forillon National Park. This is the northeastern tip of the remote Gaspe Peninsula, Gespeg in Micmac — "where the land ends." It's also the last of the Appalachian Mountains before they plunge beneath the sea. To the west rise the highlands of the Gaspesie and the watersheds of the Cascapedia, the Matapedia, the Riviere Cap-Chat.

The land here rears out of a cold, unforgiving Atlantic. On the sunniest day, sullen swells heave under its steel grey surface. These cliffs are famous for their collection of strange plants. Crowded out elsewhere, survivors from the last ice age cling to a thin mantle of soil in weather too cruel for anything else to gain purchase.

All down the treacherous coast, beneath huge, tilted limestone blocks the height of a 60-storey skyscraper, the currents seethe across razor-edged reefs. From here, the blue Chic-Choc Range reaches back into the southern heart of the continent, all the way to Atlanta, Georgia.

Memory burns here. Not far down the coast is Mont-Louis, a harmless fishing village <u>razed</u> in 1759 by the Redcoats of General Wolfe, a brutal diversion on their way to the Plains of Abraham. For them, a casual victory. For the people, a motto: *Je me souviens*. "I remember."

The monument is near Cap-des-Rosiers, named by Champlain for the vivid banks of wild roses that carpet the steep coast, and it was here that Montcalm's lookouts first sighted Wolfe's fleet.

But the monument has nothing to do with generals and glory.

It's a memorial for nameless women and children, the illiterate castoffs of the glorious British Empire, fleeing penniless and desperate from the Great Hunger. In that famine, the economists' grim experiment in the laissez-faire market, villages and fields filled with a million corpses. The living ate grass, rats, dirt, sometimes the dead, while absentee English landlords exported grain and beef. You'll notice, if you listen to traditional Irish music, that all those lilting songs are laments. Any joy died with the harpers in the ditches of that green, once pleasant land.

Those who were able, left forever. In 1841, the population of Ireland was eight million. Today it lingers at fewer than four million. All across Quebec and the Maritimes, 1847 is still known as The Year The Irish Came. At Cap-des-Rosiers, the tribute is not to the deeds of great men, but to the dreams of unknown Irish refugees. In a way, it's a monument to a nation of refugees — for that's what Canada is, a country forged from the dispossessed of China, Russia, slaves escaped from Georgia plantations, from the industrial slums of England and the highlands of Scotland, Basques and Bretons from the margins of France, Jews, Huguenots, Doukhobors, Mennonites, Hutterites and all the other persecuted.

There were 167 of these dreams jammed into the stinking hold of the sailing vessel *Carrick* when she foundered in sight of Canada, not long after St. Patrick's Day in 1847. Uneducated,

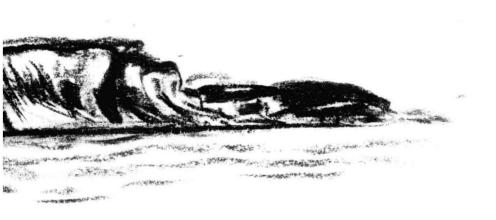


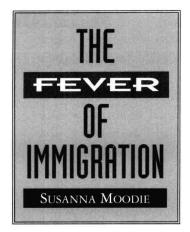
destitute survivors struggled ashore through the pounding surf. Many of them could speak neither French nor English, let alone read or write. They brought with them only their desire to build a better future for their children.

The fisherfolk of the Gaspe cared nothing for their difference. They were in need. They took them in, nourished them, eventually married their sons and daughters. Names like Kavanagh, Kelly, McGee, and Mulroney still stud the telephone books of villages with names like Petite Riviere-au-Renard and Paspebiac. "I've read somewhere that perhaps 10 percent of Quebecois today don't have Irish blood in them," laughs Maxime St.-Amour, chief park naturalist at Forillon.

And what did they contribute to Canada, those "famine Irish" who came with no skills, no education and no money? Historian Peter Toner says their energy, industry, and native intelligence drove the great economic expansion of the 1850s and 1860s. They laid the commercial foundations for Confederation in 1867.

On St. Patrick's Day, I think of that windblown memorial on an Atlantic headland and what grew from it. And I think of politicians who say that we should select our immigrants, that we want only people with money and skills and training — and no more, thank you very much, of the sort of people who built this country with nothing but sweat, hope, and dreams.





IN MOST INSTANCES, EMIGRATION IS A matter of necessity, not of choice; and this is more especially true of the emigration

of persons of respectable connections, or of any station or position in the world. Few educated persons, accustomed to the refinements and luxuries of European society, ever willingly relinquish those advantages, and place themselves beyond the protective influence of the wise and revered institutions of their native land, without the pressure of some urgent cause. Emigration may, indeed, generally be regarded as an act of severe duty, performed at the expense of personal enjoyment, and accompanied by the sacrifice of those local attachments which stamp the scenes amid which our childhood grew, in imperishable characters upon the heart. Nor is it until adversity has pressed sorely upon the proud and wounded spirit of the well-educated sons and daughters of old but impoverished families, that they gird up the loins of the mind, and arm themselves with fortitude to meet and dare the heart breaking conflict.

The ordinary motives for the emigration of such persons may be summed up in a few brief words — the emigrant's hope of bettering his condition, and of escaping from the vulgar sarcasms too often hurled at the less wealthy by the purse-proud, commonplace people of the world. But there is a higher motive still, which has its origin in that love of independence which springs up spontaneously in the breasts of the high-souled children of a glorious land. They cannot labour in a menial capacity in the country where they were born and educated to command. They can trace no difference between themselves and the more fortunate individuals of a race whose blood warms their veins, and whose name they bear. The want of wealth alone places an impassable barrier between them and the more favoured offspring of the same parent stock; and they go forth to make for themselves a new name and to find another country, to

forget the past and to live in the future, to exult in the prospect of their children being free and the land of their adoption great.

The choice of the country to which they devote their talents and energies depends less upon their pecuniary means than upon the fancy of the emigrant or the popularity of a name. From the year 1826 to 1829, Australia and the Swan River were all the rage. No other portions of the habitable globe were deemed worthy of notice. These were the El Dorados and lands of Goshen to which all respectable emigrants eagerly flocked. Disappointments, as a matter of course, followed their high-raised expectations. Many of the most sanguine of these adventurers returned to their native shores in a worse condition than when they left them. In 1830, the great tide of emigration flowed westward. Canada became the great landmark for the rich in hope and poor in purse. Public newspapers and private letters teemed with the unheard of advantages to be derived from a settlement in this highly favoured region.

Its salubrious climate, its fertile soil, commercial advantages, great water privileges, its proximity to the mother country, and last, but not least, its almost total exemption from taxation - that bugbear which keeps honest John Bull in a state of constant ferment — were the theme of every tongue, and lauded beyond all praise. The general interest, once excited, was industriously kept alive by pamphlets, published by interested parties, which prominently set forth all the good to be derived from a settlement in the Backwoods of Canada; while they carefully concealed the toil and hardship to be endured in order to secure these advantages. They told of lands yielding forty bushels to the acre, but they said nothing of the years when these lands, with the most careful cultivation, would barely return fifteen; when rust and smut, engendered by the vicinity of damp overhanging woods, would blast the fruits of the poor emigrant's labour, and almost deprive him of bread. They talked of log houses to be raised in a single day, by the generous exertions of friends and neighbours, but they never ventured upon a picture of the disgusting scenes of riot and low debauchery exhibited during the raising, or upon a description of the dwellings when raised — dens of dirt and misery, which would, in many instances, be shamed by an English pigsty. The necessaries of life were described as inestimably cheap; but they forgot to add that in remote bush settlements, often twenty miles from a market town, and some of them even that

distance from the nearest dwelling, the necessaries of life which would be deemed indispensable to the European, could not be procured at all, or, if obtained could only be so by sending a man and team through a blazed forest road — a process far too expensive for frequent repetition.

Oh, ye dealers in wild lands — ye speculators in the folly and credulity of your fellowmen — what a mass of misery, and of misrepresentation productive of that misery, have ye not to answer for! You had your acres to sell, and what to you were the worn-down



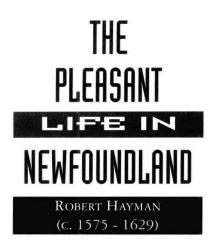
frames and broken hearts of the infatuated purchasers? The public believed the plausible statements you made with such earnestness, and men of all grades rushed to hear your hired orators declaim upon the blessings to be obtained by the clearers of the wilderness.

Men who had been hopeless of supporting their families in comfort and independence at home, thought that they had only to come out to Canada to make their fortunes; almost even to realize the story told in the nursery, of the sheep and oxen MOODIE that ran about the streets, ready roasted, and with knives and forks upon their backs. They were made to believe that if it did not actually rain gold, that precious metal could be obtained, as is now stated of California and Australia, by stooping to pick it up.

The infection became general. A Canada mania pervaded the middle ranks of British society; thousands and tens of thousands, for the space of three or four years, landed upon these shores. A large majority of the higher class were officers of the army and navy, with their families — a class perfectly unfitted by their previous habits and education for contending with the stern realities of emigrant life. The hand that has long held the sword, and been accustomed to receive implicit obedience from those under its control, is seldom adapted to wield the spade and guide the plough, or try its strength against the stubborn trees of the forest. Nor will such persons submit cheerfully to the saucy familiarity of servants, who, republicans in spirit, think themselves as good as their employers. Too many of these brave and honourable men were easy dupes to the designing land speculators. Not having counted the cost, but only looked upon the bright side of the picture held up to their admiring gaze, they fell easily into the snares of their artful seducers.

To prove their zeal as colonists, they were induced to purchase large tracts of wild land in remote and unfavourable situations. This, while it impoverished and often proved the ruin of the unfortunate immigrant, possessed a double advantage to the seller. He obtained an exorbitant price for the land which he actually sold, while the residence of a respectable settler upon the spot greatly enhanced the value and price of all other lands in the neighbourhood.

It is not by such instruments as those I have just mentioned, that Providence works when it would reclaim the waste places of the earth, and make them subservient to the wants and happiness of its creatures. The Great Father of the souls and bodies of men knows the arm which wholesome labour from infancy has made strong, the nerves which have become iron by patient endurance, by exposure to weather, coarse fare, and rude shelter; and He chooses such, to send forth into the forest to hew out the rough paths for the advance of civilization. These men become wealthy and prosperous, and form the bones and sinews of a great and rising country. Their labour is wealth, not exhaustion; it produces independence and content, not homesickness and despair.



To the Worshipful Captaine John Mason who did wisely and worthily governe there divers yeeres

The Aire in Newfoundland-land is wholesome, good; The Fire, as sweet as any made of wood; The Waters, very rich, both salt and fresh; The Earth more rich, you know it is no lesse. Where all are good, *Fire, Water, Earth, and Aire,* What man made of these foure would not live there?

To all those worthy Women, who have any desire to live in Newfound-Land, specially to the modest & discreet Gentlewoman, Mistris Mason, wife to Captaine Mason, who lived there divers yeeres.



Sweet Creatures, did you truely understand The pleasant life you'd live in Newfound-Land, You would with teares desire to be brought thither:

I wish you, when you goe, faire wind, faire weather: For if you with the passage can dispence, When you are there, I know you'll ne'r come thence.

To a worthy Friend, who often objects the coldnesse of the Winter in Newfound-Land, and may serve for all those who have the like conceit.

You say that you would live in Newfound-Land, Did not this one thing your conceit withstand; You feare the *Winters* cold, sharp, piercing ayre. They love it best, that have once wintered there. Winter is there, short, wholesome, constant, cleare, Not thicke, unwholesome, shuffling, as 'tis here.

A Skeltonicall continued ryme, in praise of my New-found-Land

Although in cloathes, company, buildings faire, With England, New-found-land cannot compare: Did some know what contentment I found there, Alwayes enough, most times somewhat to spare, With little paines, lesse toyle, and lesser care, Exempt from taxings, il newes, Lawing, feare, If cleane, and warme, no matter what you weare, Healthy, and wealthy, if men carefull are, With much — much more, then I will now declare, (I say) if some wise men knew what this were, (I doe beleeve) they'd live no other where.

1628



Let's away to *New Scotland*, where Plenty sits queen O'er as happy a country as ever was seen; And blesses her subjects, both little and great, With each a good house, and a pretty estate. *Derry down, down, down, derry down.*

There's wood, and there's water, there's wild fowl and tame; In the forest good ven'son, good fish in the stream, Good grass for our cattle, good land for our plough Good wheat to be reap'd, and good barley to mow. Derry down, down, down, derry down.

No landlords are there the poor tenants to teaze, No lawyers to bully, nor stewards to seize: But each honest fellow's a landlord; and dares To spend on himself the whole fruit of his cares. Derry down, down, down, derry down.

They've no duties on candles, no taxes on malt, Nor do they, as we do, pay sauce for their salt: But all is as free as in those times of old, When poets assure us the age was of gold. Derry down, down, down, derry down.