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OF MAN
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FOLK CULTURE STUDIES

PAPER No. 51

CENTRE CANADIEN D'ÉTUDES SUR
LA CULTURE TRADITIONNELLE

DOSSIER No. 51

NOTHING BUT STARS:

LEAVES FROM THE IMMIGRANT SAGA

COMPILED BY

MAGNÚS EINARSSON



National Museums
of Canada

Musées nationaux
du Canada

OTTAWA 1984

Canada

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The Mercury Series is publication of the National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, designed to permit the rapid dissemination of information pertaining to those disciplines for which the National Museum of Man is responsible.

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Pour assurer la prompte distribution de ces textes, on a abrégé les étapes de l'édition. En conséquence, certaines erreurs de rédaction peuvent subsister. Si cela se présentait dans les pages qui suivent, les rédacteurs réclament votre indulgence étant donné les objectifs de la collection.

ABSTRACT

The legends, anecdotes, poems and songs presented in this book were selected from the CCFCS collections. The originated from twenty-two ethno-cultural groups and deal with the various experiences of immigrating and settling in Canada.

RESUME

Ce dossier présente des légendes, anecdotes, chansons et poèmes tirés des collections du CCECT. Ces textes proviennent de vingt-deux groupes ethnoculturels et traitent des diverses expériences liées à l'immigration et à l'installation au Canada.

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Arrival in Montreal

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Since the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies of the National Museum of Man began collecting oral literature on a multicultural basis in the mid nineteenth sixties, more than two hundred field reports, representing some forty Canadian cultural groups, have accumulated in its research archive. This book is the result of a conviction shared in recent years with many similar institutions, that relevant and appropriate portions of such material ought to be returned to the general public whence it was originally collected. This, of course, in addition to academic treatments of this topic in learned journals where it is analyzed more in accordance with established folkloristic methodology.

The legends, anecdotes, songs and poems included in this collection deal with the experiences of emigrating and settling in Canada. They have been selected from twenty-two cultural groups and arranged to show some of the stages of adjustment to a new way of life. They tell of the painful decision to leave home, the often humorous difficulties of learning a new language, meeting strange people, learning new ways of doing things, dealing with recurring bouts of homesickness, and, finally, acceptance of their lot. They are first-hand records and testimonies of people who have been both observers and subjects of historical change.

The title Nothing But Stars is a phrase found from time to time in Ukrainian-Canadian oral narratives, and was chosen because it conjures up the kind of emptiness that settlers faced when they first arrived on the western prairies or, in earlier times, in the forests of the East. The native people had lived here for thousands of years, of course, but for the newly arriving groups it was by and large a landscape untouched by culture or history which still had to be cultivated not only with the plow, but with the storytelling imagination.

In the Old World where people are more or less guaranteed that they will spend their whole life with their own kind, they can take each others' life experiences for granted as being more or less the same as their own. In multicultural Canada, as likely as not, one's neighbor will be a cultural stranger, whose outlook on life may be considerably different than one's own. So it is especially important that we be aware of what we do have in common: in this case, being either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. Somewhere along the line we have all changed over from one homeland to another. No matter what our background we all share this characteristic of having metamorphosed into "something rich and strange", as Shakespeare said, or perhaps more appropriately, "we ain't what we used to be." Of course

for the descendants of the very early settlers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the immigrant adventure is now very remote, but perhaps not to the degree that awareness of it does not in some way remain a part of ancestral memory.

The stories and reminiscences in this volume which plot the immigrants' progress are personal experience stories; about supposedly real people and events. As such they are uniquely interesting, but what makes them doubly so, especially for the student of traditional literature, is that in spite of their veneer of reportage and seeming lack of artifice, many of them employ, along with imagination and assemblage of facts, traditional formulas, motifs and rhetorical devices that are common to folk literature all over the world.

Even when telling of purely personal experiences, the teller often reaches for formulas and phrases which instinct or practise tells him will have common appeal and the ability to mediate a unique experience to a trans-personal or universal level. By isolating recognizable motifs and studying how they relate to the unfolding pattern of the story, folklorists, who for some time now have been exploring and describing the experience story, will gradually understand more clearly the content and function of such stories in a "new" country, where the adventures and upheavals of people's own lives provide the most absorbing subject matter.

A final word about the texts and their translation. It should be borne in mind by the reader that these stories are not carefully written prose, but are rather the transcript of spoken words. Like an actor with a script or a musician with his score, the reader must imagine the original telling, in front of an audience. Faces and hands have to be brought to life as well as gestures, pauses, and laughter. Storytelling is theatre, and the reader must do his utmost to recreate a performance in his own mind. The narratives differ widely in accepted "literary" quality. Some people are born storytellers, have a better memory and know how to affect an audience. Others are undeniably halting, and only tell their stories when they feel it is important. Still others have a keen sense of themselves as the guardians of tradition and the past, and their performance is often highly objective, replete with facts but short on elaboration. No two storytellers are alike; each has his own style and manner which can be appreciated almost as much as the story itself. Their repertoire, as well as the cast they give to individual stories, is tailored to reflect their outlook on life, whether they be tragedians, humorists or melodramatists. But in this lies the particular gift of a storyteller. He is able to involve his audience as co-constructors of the story's separate reality. In having his story copied out as written prose, he is at a disadvantage unless his readers make a special offer to imagine the original performance. In reading the transcript of a ghost story, for example, one must bear in mind not

only the chilly sensation of the "presence" of the dead, but also the delicious sensation of security found in the embrace of the original audience.

As for the translation, every effort was made to be true to the original. But oblique humour, idiomatic expressions and obscure dialectisms will defeat even the best translator. Overall, however, the spontaneity and immediacy of the original comes through. Whatever the shortcomings, they are surely outweighed by the need to get this part of our heritage out of the proverbially dusty archive for everyone to read and enjoy.

Magnús Einarsson
National Museum of Man
Ottawa, 1983

LEAVING HOME

1. "I'M SITTING ON THE STILE, MARY"

1. I'm sitting on the stile, Mary, where we sat side by side
On a bright May morning long ago when first you were my bride,
When the corn was springing fresh and green and the lark sang loud and high,
And the red was on your lips, Mary, and the love-light in you eye.
2. 'Tis but a step down younder lane the little church stands near,
The place where we were wed, Mary, I see the spire from here,
And the grave-yard stands between us both where you took your final rest,
Where I laid you, darling, down to sleep with your babe all on your breast.
3. The place is little changed, Mary, the day's as bright as then,
The lark's loud song is in my ear and the corn is green again,
But I miss the softness of your hand and your warm breath on my cheek,
I still keep listening for those words you never more will speak.
4. I'm bidding you a long farewell, my Mary kind and true,
But I'll not forget you, darling, in that land I'm going to,
For they say there's bread and work for all and the sun shines always there,
And I'll not forget you, darling, if it's fifty times as fair.

Nicolas Keough
Parson's Pond, Newfoundland
1959

2. A CHILDHOOD PLAYGROUND

We lives at Hvol in Borgarfjörður East, and there was a small hill and it was the children's playground. And naturally, we only had a cow's leg, of course, to play with; as for example, sheep's legs and so on, and shells and so on. I went the evening before I was supposed to leave. I went along up the hill and laid down on the hill and kissed it and said goodbye and promised to return. And fifty-nine years passed until I returned and I made it up the hill, but now I found the legs were not as light for running about as before. But it meant much to me to be able to keep my promise to get back up the hill.

Emma von Renessee
Arborg, Manitoba
1973

3. NOT BY BREAD ALONE

Interviewer: Did you come to Canada finally in 1929 for good?

Mr. Durkó: Yes, we sold everything. Then again, the district administrator came and charged me that my dog hunted. I was fined eleven forints. The gendarme reported me to his office is Sàrospatak, because he caught my dog. The gendarme came to my gate, I raised my hat, greeting the gendarme and he stopped. And my dog shot out like the wind and grabbed him. Dogs were very angry with gendarmes. So I said, "I am innocent." He [the district administrator] said, "The word of the gendarme is sacrosanct to me." "You will not punish me anymore," I said. And so I left. "I won't reside in this country anymore. I'll leave the country in which my dog is not free to bark. What would happen if I wanted to bark? I'll go back to Canada." "What is the matter with you?" he said, "You threshed 150 quintals of wheat and rye last year, what else do you want?"

"I don't want anything. I don't care for anything anymore. I'll leave everything to you and take only as much as I can carry. But in this country where even my dog is not allowed to bark.... I already know the place where I want to go and I will go."

"Hey," he said, "then I'll go with you."

Frank Durkó*
Near Delhi, Ontario
1969

* All names followed by an asterisk are fictitious.

<u>Page/line</u>	Instead of:	--	please read:
iii/3	The originated from		They originated with
vi/31	PLUCK AND ENTERPRIZE		PLUCK AND ENTERPRISE
2/4	mid nineteenth sixties		mid nineteen sixties
2/28-29	lands-cape		land-scape
6/5	in you eye		in your eye
6/6	down younder lane		down yonder lane
6/8	the grave-yard		the graveyard
7/2	We lives at Hvol		We lived at Hvoll
17/13	we ow you		we owe you
20/9-10	not exggera-ting		not exagger-ating
24/9	[laughter]		[Laughter]
25/3	I an my		I and my
27/12	back-yard		backyard
28/35	the Unites States		the United States
29/5	winds blowed		winds blew
29/10-11	Let us use wood,/In forests near there's surely lots. wood./In forests near there's surely lots."	--	"Let us use
35/5-6	haarbender, That's what I learn in my school, ja, ja. That's what I learn in my school, ja, ja.	--	haarbender,/
45/24	it thrust itself		It thrust itself
47/1	IRISH GREE		IRISH GREEN
71/2	was arousing		was arising
71/11	got burning		got burned
56/18	method of		Method of
66/22	Yeh, but		Yeah, but
73/36	as if intended		as if it intended
74/9	harbours shoreline		harbour's shoreline
74/29	Hallgrimur		Hallgrímur
75/3	hair's breath		hair's breadth
76/29	his colleagues		his colleagues
79/7	From Findland		From Finland
79/32	Queens's Church		Queen's Church
83/1	PLUCK AND ENTERPRIZE		PLUCK AND ENTERPRISE
90/16	soon exhausted		soon exhausted
96/25	to dispair of		to despair of
97/19	was a term		was a tern

<u>Page/line</u>	Instead of:	--	please read:
98/11	"Diddldy diddly dum."		"Diddledy diddly dum."
104/32	They had...		They had....
105/6	this tongue		his tongue
105/8	they, a, then		they, ah, then
110/1,7,10, 13	Baldwin Anderson		Baldvin Anderson
111/22	Anonymous Male		Anonymous
112/10	Ja, well		Ya, well
114/2	[Kristjan Geiteyingur]		[Kristján Geiteyingur]
114/4	Says Geitevingur		Says Geiteyingur
119/4	Mame		Mama
119/5	mummy was		Mummy was
120/17	the Hell		the hell
121/11	All right		All right
123/25	W. E. Davis		W.E. Davies
136/8	shoud be		should be
136/16	and happyness		and happiness
136/22	in Heaven		in heaven
141/1	A PAGENT PLAY		A PAGEANT PLAY
147/20	on clearning		on clearing
149/2	(Settler on Stage)		(Settler on stage)
155/21,23 27	cheese-factory		cheese factory
184/7	"Nothing But stars: Leafs		"Nothing But Stars: Leaves
184/8	Magnus		Magnús
184/9	poens		poems
184/11	from twenty-two		with twenty-two
184/12	immigrating and settling		immigration and settlement

To the list of contributors on page iv please add the name of Dr. Robert B. Klymasz. Also, please note that M. Gilles Lacombe painted the picture reproduced on page ix.