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**Review of *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters: The Contribution of Icelandic-Canadian Writers to Canadian Literature*  
By Daisy L. Neijmann**

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*The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters: The Contribution of Icelandic-Canadian Writers to Canadian Literature.* By Daisy L. Neijmann. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1997. Selected bibliography, references, index. xvi + 436 pp. \$28.95 paper.

Daisy Neijmann's *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters* is the first comprehensive study of the impressive literary output, in Icelandic and English, of the Icelandic diaspora in Canada. Briefly outlining the relevant historical and literary background, Neijmann explains that in the ninth and tenth centuries Iceland was settled "mostly, but not exclusively," by "Norwegians who came either directly from Norway or from other Viking settlements in the British Isles and elsewhere." She then proceeds with an overview of the Northern European heritage of literature and lore that the settlers of Iceland originally brought with them, its blossoming in Medieval Iceland due to attempts to maintain cultural continuity, and its development until the emigration continued west—one thousand years later—to North America.

Neijmann demonstrates how the recordings of the settlement history of Iceland in the Sagas provided a model for the first generations of West Icelanders in North America, encouraging literary activities, and enabling assimilation to the new environment without severing ethnic roots. Bringing home her point in an extended analysis, she examines how contemporary Icelandic Canadians draw upon the myths, themes, stylistic devices, and other distinctive aspects of their Saga heritage of poetry and storytelling in their exploration, documentation, and reinvention of Canada's past and present. She posits her analysis against the backdrop of the contemporary scene in Canadian literature, noting that although informed by the Icelandic tradition, the writings of the Icelandic diaspora have from the outset been firmly grounded and engaged in Canadian reality. Icelandic immigrant literature, mostly in Icelandic, is represented by Kainn (Kristjan Niels Julius Jonsson: K. N.),

Stephan G. Stephansson, Guttormur J. Guttormsson, Johann Magnus Bjarnason, Gudrun Finnsdottir, and Laura Goodman Salverson. Neijmann briefly surveys the numerous contributors to Icelandic Canadian literature but selects W. D. Valgardson, David Arnason, and Kristjana Gunnars for her most detailed analysis.

Although presented as the underpinnings of a rather condemning criticism of the actual effects of Canada's multicultural policy, the broad historical scope of Neijmann's book makes it an excellent introduction to the Icelandic literary heritage, from its medieval beginnings through its continuity in contemporary Icelandic-Canadian writing. *The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters* is rigorously documented and gives an extensive overview of relevant research which readers can pursue further to gain deeper insight into the subject. But its main value lies in the way it makes this wealth of material accessible: it is a lively, insightful, and readable analytical survey of Canada's living roots in an ancient Northern European literary heritage.

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