

Quill & Quire

Passages: Welcome Home to Canada Rudyard Griffiths, ed. \$34.95 cloth 0-385658931, 288 pp., 6¹/₄ x 9¹/₄, Doubleday Canada, Oct. Reviewed from bound galleys

What binds Canada together as a country in the 21st century? In our post-modern age, shaping characteristics such as history, tradition, and the land seem to count for little. The principle trait that unites the 11 essayists in *Passages: Welcome Home to Canada* is "the experience of being immigrants."

How to construct a strong civic identity in a world of rapid change remains the unanswered question for Canadians, who welcome 300,000 immigrants each year. Several of the writers presented here concern themselves – however obliquely – with this central question. M.G. Vassanji touches on it when he writes, "Canadian readers expect something from me, and they have a right to." He is attracted to the "in-betweenness" his Indian-Tanzanian Canadian identity brings him, feeling it feeds his creativity."

For Moses Znaimer, being stateless as a boy in the Montreal of the 1950s gave him a sense of "the richness of the world and the joys to be had from being open to all kinds of people and cultures." Ken Wiwa finds himself "[floating] between two worlds," though he has a purpose here: to find his voice. "You get a generous baggage allowance when you move to Canada," he writes in his excellent essay. "Canada, as it promised, has given me the space to reinvent or at least discover myself."

British-born Brian Johnson is the only one who sees the English ancestral traits of modesty, politeness, and suspicion of excess as the central fabric of the Canadian sensibility. Yet, paradoxically, drawing on our indigenous roots, he sees Canada as a "shapeshifting country, a trickster nation that keeps forcing us to look inward to understand who we are." His arguments are compelling.

All these writers want the good aspects of their past to be present in their future endings – in Canada – and struggle in words to bring that vision to the page. This desire represents the new mosaic of Canada and it is a challenge to all of us to synthesize these dissimilar histories while remaining true to the founding characteristics of this country.

– Doug Beardsley, a writer and poet who teaches English at the University of Victoria.