

Anangokaa

Cameron Alam

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In Cameron Alam's lyrical historical novel *Anangokaa*, orphaned Scottish siblings struggle to survive in a harsh Canadian climate.

In 1804, the MacCallum family joins other Scottish people in emigrating to the planned Baldoon settlement in northern Canada. When they arrive, they find their promised land inundated by spring floods. Disease soon follows, along with hunger, harsh weather, and internecine disputes. Fourteen-year-old Flora is forever altered by her brush with mortal illness and the death of her parents; her eighteen-year-old brother, Hugh, becomes the head of their family—and the settlement's link to the nearby Ojibwe communities.

Flora narrates, questioning her changing body and emotions. She also observes other settlers' behaviors and disputes her culture's integrity when its violence is excused. She mourns for those whom she lost in silence. When Flora is assaulted by an acknowledged sexual predator in Baldoon, her silence deepens, setting her apart from the other women. Later, her friendship with an Ojibwe man who calls her "Anangokaa," meaning "many stars" in tribute to her disease-scarred face, sets her further beyond the settlement's pale.

The prose is often musical, making use of imagery as of a "night dusty with stars" to convey the magnificence of the Canadian wilderness. The community is fleshed out via conversations that cover personal conflicts: Hugh's curiosity about the Ojibwe people clashes with other settlers' bigotry against them, and the resultant arguments serve as a microcosm of the competing aims of surviving, which means accepting advice from the Ojibwe, and of colonizing, which means exterminating or supplanting the Ojibwe.

The historical novel *Anangokaa* embeds the experiences of Upper Canada's early Scottish immigrants in the story of an enigmatic girl who comes of age in a foreign wilderness.

MICHELE SHARPE (March / April 2023)

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