

Book Reviews

María Jesús Hernández Lerena, ed. *Pathways of Creativity in Contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015. Pp. xiii, 341. £52.99.

Pathways of Creativity in Contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador is a significant contribution to scholarly criticism on the cultures of Canada's most easterly province. All of us working in cultural fields connected to Newfoundland and Labrador owe a debt of gratitude to María Jesús Hernández Lerena, the Spanish academic who compiled and edited twelve essays from eminent local scholars, artists, and commentators. In her introduction, Hernández Lerena wonders if as an outsider she can "find a safe observing position between, on the one hand, the romantic reverie [of Newfoundland and Labrador] and, on the other, the reluctance to believe in the existence of untroubled idylls" (1). Far from being an obstacle, her outsider perspective brings a refreshing curiosity and newness to the study, compelling the local contributors to reevaluate taken-for-granted assumptions about the cultures of the island and Labrador. The productive tension between "reverie" and "reluctance" that Hernández Lerena identifies runs through many of the book's chapters.

The collection is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, although the book is weighted toward literary scholarship, it also includes chapters on film, theatre, visual art, and oral storytelling traditions. Such transdisciplinarity in the context of scholarship on Newfoundland and Labrador is innovative and provides a breadth of reference that asks readers to link various creative endeavors. Of special note in this regard are essays by Jamie Skidmore and Noreen Golfman on Newfoundland theatre and film, respectively. Both Skidmore and Golfman offer an overview of creative works in the province and outline some of the central concerns for scholarly criticism. This is the basic pattern of many of the chapters, and so the collection offers a broad view of both the province's creative cultures and how these cultures are understood by critics.

Along with its transdisciplinary perspective, the collection is also unique in the way it prioritizes marginalized voices, including those of Indigenous, women, and Labradorian artists. The inclusion of writers and artists from Labrador is especially important, because in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador political, economic, and cultural discourses, Labrador is all too often an afterthought. Roberta Buchanan's essay, "The Aboriginal Writes Back," reverses the colonial gaze by examining autobiographical writing by Abraham Ulrikab, an Inuk, alongside Wayne Johnston's historical fiction *The Navigator of New York*. Robin McGrath's chapter, "The Diarist Tradition

among Labrador Aboriginal People,” is likewise an important contribution in the way it theorizes and interprets writing from Labrador Inuit, Innu, and Métis. Valerie Legge’s entry focuses on writing from women travelers to Newfoundland and Labrador and how such writing shapes discourses about the province. Legge, McGrath, and Buchanan (as well as others) have worked tirelessly to shed light on what I am calling marginalized perspectives from Labradorians, women, and Indigenous peoples.

Hernández Lereña’s inclusion of interviews with creative writers as the closing chapter of the book is something readers are sure to enjoy. The section includes discussions with Michael Crummey, John Steffler, Marjorie Doyle, and Kevin Major, among others, and presents them in a somewhat unconventional way. Instead of offering the interviews in full and as one piece, Hernández Lereña instead organizes them into thematized sections on creativity, place, identity, and other topics. I found Maura Hanrahan’s remarks to be particularly sharp—her comments on Indigeneity and cultural identity, for example, indicate some of the limitations and pitfalls of creative productions and scholarship from Newfoundland and Labrador. The interviews in the collection push the writers to self-reflexively examine their creative practices and rootedness in the Newfoundland and Labrador cultural milieu. Hernández Lereña’s outsider perspective once again proves valuable in her approach to and presentation of these interviews since she asks questions and prompts the artists to discuss aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador culture that are interesting and important but may seem self-evident to locals.

One shortcoming of the collection is an inability on the part of some contributors to move beyond questing after an “authentic” Newfoundland cultural identity. Identity and authenticity are preoccupations of some criticism of Newfoundland arts in which critics evaluate particular works with respect to how faithfully they represent a romanticized caricature of Newfoundland. Of course, a collection of scholarship on the province’s culture must necessarily grapple with questions of cultural identity, but whereas some chapters begin by engaging with cultural identity as a necessary springboard to discussions of additional concerns, others remain mired in issues of cultural identity that are limited or simplistic. Nevertheless, putting such potential shortcomings of scholarship on display is productive in its own way since it allows readers to engage with a fuller range of the debate, from criticism that attempts to work through or beyond monolithic notions of Newfoundland cultural identity to criticism that posits Newfoundland cultural identity in a potentially naïve manner. The strongest essays in the collection are those that, explicitly or implicitly, challenge simplistic notions of Newfoundland cultural identity.

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Overall, I recommend this collection not just for the way it positions various fields of creativity and scholarship of Newfoundland and Labrador cultures as they are today but also because it indicates possible avenues of where these fields are going. In this regard, *Pathways of Creativity in Contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador* is a text that will continue to be important as time goes by.

Jonathan Parsons