

Phillip McCann. *Island and Empire: Education, Religion, and Social Life in Newfoundland, 1800–1855*. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Boulder Publications, 2016. ISBN 978-1-927099-70-4

Phillip McCann. *Island and Empire: Education, Religion, and Social Life in Newfoundland, 1800–1855*. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Boulder Publications, 2016. ISBN 978-1-927099-70-4

Terry Murphy

Volume 31, numéro 2, fall 2016

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds31_2br05

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1719-1726 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Murphy, T. (2016). Compte rendu de [Phillip McCann. *Island and Empire: Education, Religion, and Social Life in Newfoundland, 1800–1855*. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Boulder Publications, 2016. ISBN 978-1-927099-70-4 / Phillip McCann. *Island and Empire: Education, Religion, and Social Life in Newfoundland, 1800–1855*. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Boulder Publications, 2016. ISBN 978-1-927099-70-4]. *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 31(2), 388–392.

Taming of the Shrew at the 1981 Stephenville Theatre Festival, she remarks that although “it was not perhaps the most polished or elaborate work in some respects,” the production “generated energy, excitement and spoke of future promise” (298). And she is always willing to single out newcomers in the cast for commendation. In her review of a 1981 production of Eugène Ionesco’s *The Lesson*, for example, she praises one up-and-comer for demonstrating an “understanding of her character, projecting clearly the initial cheery eagerness, the final weary bewilderment and the various stages between” (295). That talented tyro was a young woman named Lisa Moore. I wonder whatever became of her?

In Dalton’s introductory note, she calls *Edge* “an eclectic creature” (13). Its variegation in terms of subject matter and intended audiences means that it is not a book most people will read cover-to-cover with a constant level of interest. But such a diversity also means that *Edge* is liable to surprise as well as to delight, while its shifts in focus are counterbalanced by the constancy of Dalton’s intellect, erudition, and passion for words.

Robert McGill
University of Toronto

Phillip McCann. *Island and Empire: Education, Religion, and Social Life in Newfoundland, 1800–1855*. Portugal Cove-St. Philip’s, Newfoundland and Labrador: Boulder Publications, 2016.

ISBN 978-1-927099-70-4

As the author of this volume of 13 collected essays explains, they were written over a period of 25 years for different audiences. Previous publication details are given for four of the papers. As no such information is given for the others, the reader is left to assume that they

were delivered in person as lectures or conference presentations. Greater clarity on this point would have been helpful. The principal focus of the essays is the educational history of Newfoundland and Labrador, where Phillip McCann has especially distinguished himself, although the collection also includes papers on popular entertainment and communal festivities, such as the St. John's Regatta. All are concerned with developments in the early nineteenth century.

As none of the essays is entirely new, and some are as old as 25 years, the question arises as to whether they merit reproduction in a single volume. The answer is a qualified "yes." For those unfamiliar with McCann's work, it will be helpful to read in one place a number of his major contributions, often on closely related topics. For those who have followed his scholarship over the years, this volume provides a convenient way to revisit some of his key arguments. While McCann disavows, in the Preface, any pretense to offering a "connected narrative history" of Newfoundland in the early nineteenth century, the essays lay out a coherent and consistent interpretation of events. The fact that they are arranged more or less in the chronological order in which these events occurred — rather than the order in which the essays were written — gives the collection a sense of historical direction. This feature is strengthened by the fact that developments in education and popular culture are set within the context of the evolution of Newfoundland's society and economy and of the impact of British imperial policy.

That the essays are bound together by common themes is clear; but a puzzling feature of the volume is that the author promises at the outset to spell out these themes in an Afterword, yet no such entry bears this heading or fits this description. On the other hand, the concluding essay on "Sir John Harvey's Cultural Revolution, 1841–1846" — arguably the strongest piece in the collection — describes the culmination of many of the developments of the preceding decades and the transition to a new order, marked in McCann's account by institutionalized denominationalism and emergent Newfoundland nationalism.

An inevitable but unfortunate consequence of the overlapping material in many of the essays is repetition, especially of background explanations of the society and economy of Newfoundland in the early nineteenth century. The truck-credit system that characterized the relationship between merchants and fishers, already very familiar to many readers, is explained in several places, albeit briefly. Likewise, since several years have passed since many of the essays were written, some contain statements that are no longer true. Notably, the unrevised paper on “The ‘No Popery’ Crusade and the Newfoundland School System, 1836–1841,” first published in 1991, describes an ongoing debate about whether the denominational system should be abolished, revised, or retained. The only mention that the control of public education by the churches ended in 1998 is found in James Hiller’s Introduction to the volume.

Taken as a whole, this collection of essays amply supports Hiller’s description of Phillip McCann as the “pre-eminent historian” of education in Newfoundland and his recognition of McCann’s important contributions to the analysis of such issues as the twentieth-century Confederation debate, which are too recent for inclusion in this volume. McCann’s treatment over the years of the “vexed question” of denominational schools is a model of historical writing that is at once engaged and faithful to the requirements of rigorous scholarship. McCann declares truthfully that his treatment of the highly contentious issue was influenced neither by political partisanship nor by religious affiliation; yet his avowed opposition to imperialism and discrimination are evident at every important turn of events.

Terry Murphy
Saint Mary’s University

