

# Corey Slumkoski. *Inventing Atlantic Canada: Regionalism and the Maritime Reaction to Newfoundland's Entry into Confederation*

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## REVIEWS

Corey Slumkoski. *Inventing Atlantic Canada: Regionalism and the Maritime Reaction to Newfoundland's Entry into Confederation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-44261-158-0

Corey Slumkoski's *Inventing Atlantic Canada* is a welcome addition to the historiography of post-war Atlantic Canada. He considers the reaction of the three Maritime provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island to the entry of Newfoundland and Labrador into Confederation in 1949. It is hardly surprising that there was no coherent Maritime response to the addition of Newfoundland as historians have long argued that the moments of regional cohesion and identity have been fleeting and rare. What Slumkoski finds is that each of the Maritime provinces had its own peculiar and selfish reasons to welcome Newfoundland to the Canadian fold. Nova Scotia saw Newfoundland as strengthening its case for a causeway linking Cape Breton to peninsular Nova Scotia. PEI hoped that Newfoundland joining Canada would increase agricultural trade with the other island community. New Brunswick believed that Newfoundland might strengthen its case in Ottawa for a federal subsidy to construct a canal across the Chignecto Isthmus linking the Bay of Fundy with Northumberland Strait. We are not told how Newfoundland felt about any of those projects or about its perspective on even being considered a part of the Atlantic region. It is clear, though, that the three Maritime provinces viewed Newfoundland's entry into Confederation from particular selfish motives.

Slumkoski's book is on less secure ground when it turns to how Newfoundland's entry led to the "invention" of Atlantic Canada. As a historical and sociological concept, invention has emerged as a major analytical tool for historians in recent years. Studies of how the state and hegemonic elites have played leading roles in the process of inventing abound, but none of that vast

literature is included in the analysis presented here. Rather, Slumkoski argues that it fell to Term 29, one of the 50 terms of union of the Newfoundland Act of 1949, "to bind the new region economically and politically" (12) and invent Atlantic Canada. As a historical concept, invention has come to signify the construction among a group of people of particular sets of beliefs or behaviours, but in the case of Atlantic Canada a handful of bureaucrats and politicians in Ottawa negotiated the terms of union during the summer of 1947 that invented Atlantic Canada. We learn very little about these individuals in the book. It would be 1955 before such institutions as the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council and the Atlantic Premier Conferences would be launched and the four provinces would "begin to act regionally in their efforts to alleviate underdevelopment" (18). Slumkoski does not show us how the four provinces worked in concert to address their economic disadvantages, or underdevelopment, within Canada. And, it should be pointed out, even the regional institutions that were created in the 1950s did not last.

For Slumkoski, Term 29 is critical to his analysis. It was Term 29 that "gradually prompted the re-emergence of regional cooperation." Yet, he tells us practically nothing about the origins of that particular clause. How did it come to be that Term 29 left in federal hands the appointment of a Royal Commission to consider Newfoundland's fiscal capacity eight years after union? When the clause was first discussed, it proposed a joint federal-provincial Royal Commission with a neutral chair. Why did that change? Who insisted that the Maritimes would be the benchmark for taxation levels and not all of Canada? Was this a particular insistence of Canadian negotiators to construct Atlantic Canada? The book does not consider these important questions. Moreover, Slumkoski takes considerable liberty with the meaning of Term 29. He claims that it created "the Maritime provincial average — not the Canadian one — that would be the new province's benchmark for economic and social development." Term 29 does nothing of the sort: it makes no mention of economic and social development. It doesn't even refer to a comparative "level of public services" throughout the Atlantic provinces; rather, it states that Newfoundland must be able to continue public services at the level and standard reached by 1957 without having to impose taxation rates more burdensome than those generally in the region compromising the Maritime provinces. Term 29 only mentions levels of taxation as a point of comparison, though the book suggests that with Term 29 "the political entity of Atlantic Canada was born." I am not convinced.

Slumkoski fails to show how the region was invented. Even when Term 29 emerged as a bitter dispute between Ottawa and St. John's, the Maritime

provinces remained on the sidelines. Even he admits that Term 29 “prepared the grounds for a splintering of regional cooperation as a political strategy” (131). Newfoundland Premier Joseph R. Smallwood, however, attempted to invent Term 29 as Ottawa’s promise to Newfoundland to inject more money into his province. That promise had never been made and when he appointed the Royal Commission required in Term 29, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent warned his cabinet that Smallwood would demand more than Ottawa could possibly deliver. The powerful federal bureaucracy had already become worried about Smallwood’s management of Newfoundland’s fiscal resources and it was those same officials who recommended to Prime Minister John Diefenbaker that he reject Smallwood’s demands over Term 29.

The book does not explore what Smallwood thought of the notion of an Atlantic Canada. He did not turn to the Maritimes premiers for help in his fight with Ottawa over Term 29, and he quit the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council and the Atlantic Premiers’ Conference in the 1950s over the licensing of regional air carriers and quarrel with them over a number of other interests. He wanted to deal with Ottawa on his own terms and not as part of a regional entity. Once the prospects of oil became apparent on the east coast, all of the provinces began a long and protracted quarrel over boundary demarcations. There were more items creating divisions among the provinces in Atlantic Canada than uniting them.

Slumkoski offers a useful and interesting overview of the reaction of the Maritime provinces towards Newfoundland’s entry into Canada, but his attempt to show how that event invented Atlantic Canada is less satisfactory.

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Mary Dalton. *Hooking: A Book of Centos*. Montreal: Véhicule, 2013.  
ISBN 978-1- 55065-351-9

The cento, a poem made up of quotations from other authors, is often relegated to the status of a learning exercise or polymathic crossword puzzle. Mary Dalton’s new book goes some way to rescuing its potential. Her title plays on