

Raymond B. Blake. *Lions or Jellyfish: Newfoundland–Ottawa Relations Since 1957*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. isbn 978-1-4426-5025-1.

Raymond B. Blake. *Lions or Jellyfish: Newfoundland–Ottawa Relations Since 1957*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. isbn 978-1-4426-5025-1.

Douglas Brown

Volume 31, Number 1, Fall 2016

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds31_1br01

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1719-1726 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Brown, D. (2016). Review of [Raymond B. Blake. *Lions or Jellyfish: Newfoundland–Ottawa Relations Since 1957*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. isbn 978-1-4426-5025-1. / Raymond B. Blake. *Lions or Jellyfish: Newfoundland–Ottawa Relations Since 1957*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. isbn 978-1-4426-5025-1.] *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 31(1), 210–213.

BOOK REVIEWS

Raymond B. Blake. *Lions or Jellyfish: Newfoundland–Ottawa Relations Since 1957*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.
ISBN 978-1-4426-5025-1.

This is a fascinating and careful work of scholarship about one province's struggle in the federal union and the continuing significance of the role of premiers in Canadian politics. Raymond Blake examines key themes in Newfoundland–Canada relations through the interactions of a series of premiers with federal prime ministers, as well as other key players in the federal system. The first four chapters deal with the Smallwood government, the next four with those of Premiers Moores, Peckford, Wells, and Williams. The goal is to illuminate the nature of the relationship and the primary politics of provincial and federal leadership through key episodes and issues: financial terms, rural resettlement, interprovincial hydroelectric development, offshore oil and gas. The author, a historian at the University of Regina and a Newfoundlander, would be well known to readers of this journal.

The strengths of Blake's method are a sound grasp of the key federal–provincial issues affecting Newfoundland and Labrador since it entered Confederation and an important focus on the personal style and impact of its premiers. It is all carefully based in primary sources, although the availability of primary archival material is, of course, limited in the second half of the book and, as a result, the account is not as rich. The book's strength remains the historical long view, enabling the reader to compare the styles and substance of intergovernmental relations through all of the important political seasons of Newfoundland's nearly 70-year history in Canada. Several themes emerge.

First, and in this respect most like Quebec, Newfoundland's relationship in Canada is hugely informed by its own sense of nationality, of being its own country before joining the federal union. Like Quebec, the notion of being treated as a province like any other has never been an easy fit. Also like Quebec, Newfoundland's society has been profoundly different, requiring a willingness by federal authorities to adopt special measures to meet unique needs. As Blake ably demonstrates, that willingness has come grudgingly, if at all, and not without an enormous struggle.

Blake's work is also eloquent testimony to the continued significance of the politics of regional diversity being waged between and among governments, rather than through federal representation (which, as many scholars have noted, is hampered by the electoral system and the unreformed Senate, among other factors). In other words, intergovernmental relations remains a key task for Newfoundland governments, especially their premiers. The very specialness of Newfoundland's interests demands a professional, diverse, and intelligent capacity for diplomacy, advocacy, and negotiation. Still, despite Blake's argument that big issues were at stake, one cannot help but conclude that the Newfoundland and Labrador electorate want their politicians to be seen fighting vigorously for their interests with outside agents, even in the face of short-term loss and dysfunctional relations. One is struck by how often provincial elections were won by the adoption of a strident position against Ottawa as the foil.

Indeed, the very aggressiveness of Newfoundland politics towards and within Canada is a measure of its dependency and relative powerlessness. Newfoundland and Labrador has been a minuscule part of the Canadian political calculus at the best of times, and, with next to no population growth, the province is doomed to be even more outnumbered as time goes on. Even if Clyde Wells's quixotic quest for an equal Senate were to be successful, Newfoundland would still be only one-in-ten in that forum.

Blake emphasizes the centrality of the bilateral relationship with Ottawa, but Newfoundland's successes have as often been achieved

through the hard political and diplomatic effort of building alliances with other provinces and diverse political interests in the rest of Canada, not just with the federal government. Think of the extension of unemployment insurance to fishers in the 1950s, the creation of the Atlantic Adjustment Grants (which were the foundation of the later equalization program) in the 1960s, the coalition to stop Pierre Trudeau's unilateral constitutional patriation in 1980–81, and the ongoing development of the Muskrat Falls hydro site by accessing markets other than Quebec.

Finally, the book illustrates very well how much issues and outcomes affecting Newfoundland are shaped by the prevailing philosophy of federalism and style of leadership in the federal government at any point in time. The evidence here underscores the historical record of a chaotic and insensitive Diefenbaker administration, of a Pearson government spooked by rising Quebec nationalism, of a Trudeau government dumbfounded by the audacity of Peckford siding with Quebec and Alberta in the national unity struggle. Still, Blake is quick to note where even-handedness prevails, when the two governments were able to pursue strongly co-operative relations despite the high-profile disputes: one thinks of the Mulroney government's support of the Hibernia development, despite Wells's opposition to Meech Lake, and the Harper government's support for Muskrat Falls, despite Williams's ABC campaign.

At the heart of the debate about federalism for Newfoundland and Labrador is the ongoing tension between centralization and decentralization. Blake makes a bold assertion that "the success and stability of [the] Canadian federal arrangement is premised on the ability of the [Canadian] State to provide economic security for all provinces and all citizens regardless of place" (p. 7). The ability or willingness of the Canadian government to privilege the prosperity of individual communities over the prosperity of individual citizens has been in decline since the 1980s, and depends in large measure on centralized power. One does not doubt that an assumption about the federal role in ensuring economic equality is widely held in Newfoundland, but can one

really count on that in the contemporary Canadian political community — with its trends towards multiculturalism, neo-liberalism, globalization, and urbanization? For good or ill, the provinces matter less in national politics now than they have at any point since 1945.

In sum, this is an important book, not only for its historical analysis of Newfoundland's relations as a Canadian province and for documenting the prevalence of a signature style of Lion-like (not Jellyfish) leadership, but also for what it says about the nature of conflict and accommodation in the Canadian federation.

Douglas Brown
St. Francis Xavier University

María Jesús Hernández Lerena, ed. *Pathways of Creativity in Contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.
ISBN 978-1-4438-7745-9

Pathways of Creativity in Contemporary Newfoundland and Labrador is, as the title conveys, a collection of essays on recent creative activity in the province. Edited by Spanish scholar María Jesús Hernández Lerena, the book is a good reflection of the growing international interest in Newfoundland and Labrador and constitutes an essential addition to scholarship on the province for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it offers a detailed and expert view of the range of creative activity in Newfoundland and Labrador over the last few decades (most, though not all, of the contributors are associated in one way or another with Memorial University). The principal emphasis of the collection is on writing, with chapters devoted to poetry, fiction, drama, travel writing, autobiography, and memoir, but there are also chapters devoted to